

2014 Special Edition

Review

Blind Veterans UK | World War One Centenary Edition

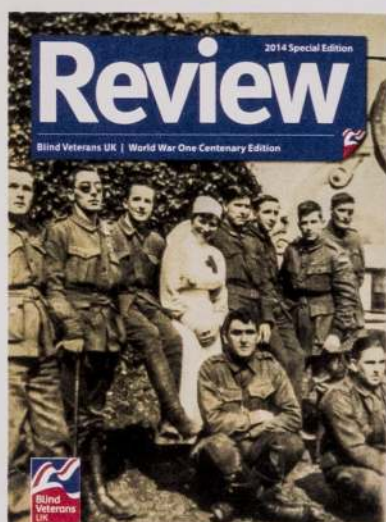


On the cover: First World War members of Blind Veterans UK with a member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (V.A.D) in the grounds of our WWI Regent's Park centre.

The back page features a soldier on The Somme by Derek O'Rourke.

Review

2014 Special Edition|No 1043



Contact: Review Editor, Catherine Goodier 020 7616 8367
Email: revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk



Patron: Her Majesty the Queen

Blind Veterans UK Review is published monthly by Blind Veterans UK, 12-14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD www.blindveterans.org.uk A company limited by guarantee No. 189648, registered in England. Registered Charity No. 216227 (England & Wales) and SCO39411 (Scotland). ISSN 2050-1404. Unless otherwise stated all content © copyright Blind Veterans UK. All rights reserved. Printed by Newnorth.

Timeline of World War I.

1914.

- 28th June. Archduke Francis Ferdinand assassinated in Sarajevo.
- 5th July. Kaiser William II promises German support for Austria against Serbia.
- 28th July. Austria declares war on Serbia.
- 1st August. Germany declares war on Russia.
- 3rd August. Germany declares war on France and invades Belgium on the 4th.
- 4th August. Britain declares war on Germany to defend neutral Belgium. This is the day Britain enters the war.
- 7th August. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) lands in France.

- 23rd August. The BEF starts its retreat from Mons as Germany invades France.
- 26th August. Russian army is defeated at Tanneburg.
- 28th August. Royal Navy wins first battle at Heligoland Bight North sea.
- 6th September. Battle of the Marne starts.
- 19th October. First Battle of Ypres ends the race for the sea and Trench warfare starts to dominate the Western Front.
- 29th October. Turkey enters the war on Germany's side.

1915.

- 19th January. The first Zeppelin raid on Britain takes place.
- 29th January. The first meeting of Blind Veterans UK (as the Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee).
- 10th February. The first two blinded soldiers come to Bayswater Hill, London.
- 19th February. Britain bombards Turkish forts in the Dardanelles.
- 26th March. Blind Veterans UK moves to Regent's Park.
- 22nd April. Second Battle of Ypres - Germans use poison gas.
- 25th April. Allied troops land on Gallipoli.
- 7th May. The Lusitania is sunk by a German U-boat.
- 23rd May. Italy declares war on Austria.
- 5th August. The Germans capture Warsaw from the Russians.
- 25th September. Start of the Battle of Loos.
- 19th December. The Allies start the evacuation of Gallipoli.
- 19th December. Sir Douglas Haig replaces Sir John France as Commander in Chief of the BEF.

1916.

- 27th January. Conscription is introduced in Britain.
- 21st February. Start of the Battle of Verdun.
- 29th April. British forces surrender to Turkish forces at Kut in Mesopotamia.

- 31st May. Battle of Jutland.
- 4th June. Start of the Brusilov Offensive on the Eastern Front.
- 1st July. Start of the Battle of the Somme.
- 5th September. First use en masse of tanks at the Somme.
- 25th November. Admiral David Beatty replaces Admiral John Jellicoe as First Sea Lord.
- 7th December. Lloyd George becomes British Prime Minister as he succeeds Henry Asquith.

1917.

- 23rd February. Germany withdraws to the Hindenburg Line.
- 6th April. USA declares war on Germany.
- 9th April. Britain launch second Battle of Arras.
- 9th April. Canadian victory at the Battle of Vimy Ridge.
- 16th April. France launch an unsuccessful offensive on the Western Front.
- 7th June. France launch second Battle of Messines Ridge.
- 31st July. Start of the Third Battle at Ypres — Battle of Pilckem Ridge.
- 24th October. Battle of Caporetto — the Italian Army is heavily defeated.
- 10th November. End of Third Battle of Ypres at Passchendale.
- 20th November. Mass use of tanks at the Battle of Cambrai.
- 23rd December. Armistice between Germany and Russia is signed.

1918.

- 3rd March. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk is signed between Russia and Germany.
- 21st March. Germany launches the spring offensive Operation Michael and breaks through on the Somme.
- 29th March. Marshall Foch is appointed Allied Commander on the Western Front.

- 1st April. RAF is founded from the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service.
- 9th April. Germany starts an offensive in Flanders.
- 15th July. Second Battle of the Marne starts. The last German offensive that fails in August.
- 8th August. Battles of Amiens. The start of the Allies 100 day offensive.
- 26th September. The British enter Damascus.
- 4th October. Germany ask the Allies for an armistice.
- 29th October. Germany's navy mutinied.
- 30th October. Turkey makes peace.
- 3rd November. Austria makes peace.
- 9th November. Kaiser William II abdicates.

11th November. Fighting ends at 11. Germany signs an Armistice with the Allies — the official date of the end of World War One.

November:

We've trained over 600 blind veterans with another 700 in training and 200 still in recovery and rehabilitation. We've set up facilities around the country including in Torquay, Ilkley, Blackheath, Hastings and Brighton. Some are open for just a few years, but our West House centre in Brighton is an important part of the organisation for decades to come.

Post war - 1919.

- 4th January. Peace conference meets at Paris.
- 21st June. The surrendered German naval fleet at Scapa Flow is scuttled.
- 28th June. The Treaty of Versailles is signed by the Germans.

Tribute to the First World War veterans, by President Ray Hazan OBE.

Those who were blinded as a result of the First World War were the real pioneers of Blind Veterans UK, then St Dunstan's. They were the clay, which Sir Arthur Pearson moulded from what were regarded as 'objects of pity' into people who could resume a working and useful life. He restored their dignity and self-respect. Not for them, the benefits of a Welfare state or the use of technology as we know it today.

I first met Lord Fraser some four weeks after I was injured, when he came to visit me in the Millbank military hospital in London. He had been blinded by a sniper's bullet on the Somme in 1916. He had been Chairman of the charity for some 53 years at that time.

I sat on the edge of my bed, whilst he sat in a chair opposite me. At one stage, he lent forward and tapped me on the knee to emphasise a point. I remember thinking what a wonderfully natural gesture for a blind person to make. How did he know where my knee was? That simple gesture remains with me today. I was to meet Lord Fraser just once more; during one of his regular visits to Pearson House in Brighton, where I was training, he asked to see me. "What do you think you might pursue for employment?" he asked.

"I would like to follow in my father's footsteps and become a simultaneous conference interpreter," I replied. "Oh, you will never make that", he responded.

Of course I was upset at this remark and being a stubborn and determined novice, I ploughed on with my studies. He, of course, proved to be right, but I can never really forgive him!

There were several First World War residents at Pearson House in 1974, when I was going through my rehabilitation and training. Blodwyn Simon had been a munitions factory worker. She told me she had never physically seen an aircraft, before she was blinded.

Tommy Milligan had been a salesman. He navigated himself around using a rolled up newspaper as a protective 'cane'. The white cane was not introduced before 1930! He would pay a youngster who might be hanging around a station a penny to guide him to his appointment.

I interviewed Henry Perrett for the Review. He had been blinded in Ypres. He also witnessed the first wave go over the top at the Somme, knowing he was to follow — scary! He explained that on arriving in Regent's Park for training, he was interviewed by Pearson. "What did you do before you joined the army?" "I was a butcher", Henry replied. "Oh, so you are good with your hands," said Pearson. "I think we shall train you as a boot repairer".

Nothing like a bit of autocracy to get things done!

Some 1,500 men and women went through Regent's Park during the First World War and a similar number between the wars. The kindness and concern shown by the public towards these newly blinded Service people was impressive; rowing, walking, dances, making music were components of a new life. Their wounds and recovery must have been horrific yet the tone of the articles in the Review of those times was one of cheeriness, brave faces, determination and achievement.

As you will read in the following pages, they are still an inspiration to us today. We salute the memory of these pioneers, the example they set showing how adversity can be overcome and the pride and loyalty they bore for our great organisation.



Picture: Henry Perrett, left, is interviewed by Ray Hazan in 1995.

WWI Commemorations.

Her Majesty The Queen will lead the nation in commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War at a service where she will be joined by other heads of state.

The Queen will attend the event at Glasgow Cathedral on 4th August 2014. The city has been chosen as a focal point for activities to mark the start of the war, as it is hosting the Commonwealth Games which end the day before.

Across the country on 4th August, flags on public buildings will fly at half mast on the anniversary of the outbreak of World War One, while in Belgium, another service will be held at St Symphorien Military Cemetery near Mons, where similar numbers of British and German war dead are buried, including the first and last Commonwealth soldiers killed in the war.

The day will end with a vigil at Westminster Abbey where a single candle will be extinguished at 11pm, a century on from the moment when, in the words of Sir Edward Grey, Britain's foreign secretary at the time, "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime". The Government is working with various churches, faiths and other organisations to see if the Vigil could be replicated around the country.

Nearly 10 million soldiers were killed before the guns finally fell silent on Armistice Day, 11th November 1918.

Culture Secretary Maria Miller announced that the four year nationwide cultural programme will be directed by Jenny Waldman, Creative Producer for the highly successful London 2012 Festival. She will report to a Centenary Cultural Programme Board, chaired by Vikki Heywood CBE, Chairman of the RSA and former Executive Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Tony Hall, Director General of the BBC.

Maria Miller said: "We have produced a fitting programme of events to remember and mark the actions of men and women from Britain, the Commonwealth and all the nations involved in the First World War. On 4th August 1914 we entered the war - a war like no other the world had seen. It is right we remember and mark the centenary of this momentous day in the world's history, bringing its importance alive for younger generations and remembering the price that was paid by all involved."

The Department for Education and the Department for Communities and Local Government are also jointly funding a project which will provide the opportunity for two pupils and one teacher from every state funded secondary school in England to participate in battlefield tours of the western front from spring 2014 to March 2019. This will be a high quality educational project which will strengthen participants' knowledge and understanding of the First World War as well as giving them the opportunity to develop related projects in their communities.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles said: "Remembering the huge losses of people and sacrifices made across the Commonwealth during the First World War is something that will unite the whole country in 2014. It is vitally important that we talk to all communities about this period in history as we mark the centenary. We have a duty to educate future generations about the First World War to ensure that the role our Armed Forces played, and continue to play, in defending the liberties we take for granted today are remembered."

Education Secretary Michael Gove said: "The First World War touched every village and town in Britain. Millions Served and almost 900,000 United Kingdom subjects died in action. The loss to this country and to countless families was unimaginable and must not be forgotten. That is why it is important that a new generation should be encouraged to remember the sacrifice of so many. I am proud that we are giving pupils from every state funded secondary school the chance to visit battlefields like the Somme and Passchendaele. I hope their experiences will live long in their own memories and they will share what they have seen."

The programme of cultural events will be focused on three main periods: August 2014, July 2016 and autumn 2018. The Centenary Cultural Programme team will work alongside IWM (Imperial War Museums) and will be hosted at their flagship museum, IWM London.

The government is launching a new website at: www.gov.uk/ww1centenary dedicated to the centenary. This will feature all the latest news about the government's plans for marking the centenary, and will act as a gateway to what others are doing.

Dr Andrew Murrison MP, the Prime Minister's Special Representative for the Centenary Commemoration of the First World War, said: "The Centenary of the First World War invites exploration of its causes, conduct and consequences."

The country went to war believing its cause was just and the service of its citizens shapes our world today. A hundred years on, it is our duty to reflect on and learn from their lives and times."

Across the four years of the centenary, the government will lead the nation in acts of commemoration. In addition to 4th August, other key dates will be marked including: the centenaries of the Gallipoli landings, the Battle of Jutland, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the first day of Passchendaele and, finally, Armistice Day.

Planning for these events is currently underway. More than £50 million has been committed to marking the centenary. Grants towards the new First World War Galleries at the Imperial War Museum, and £1 million from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) to save HMS Caroline, the last surviving warship from the Battle of Jutland, based in Belfast, have already been announced. The IWM continues to fundraise for the First World War Galleries which will open in summer 2014. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has so far awarded £12 million to support a range of First World War projects, both large and small. An additional £6 million is now available through HLF's small grants programme, First World War: Then and Now to help communities mark the Centenary of the First World War.

Not for profit cultural and educational organisations are encouraged to join the First World War Centenary Partnership, led by the IWM. The Partnership is a growing network of over 1,000 local, regional, national and international not-for-profit groups and organisations with plans to commemorate the centenary. Becoming a member of the Partnership at www.1914.org is free and provides access to a wealth of First World War expertise, resources and the logo.

A joint UK/Belgian initiative, to create a Centenary Memorial Garden at Wellington Barracks at Birdcage Walk in London, is receiving help from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. A Flanders Field Memorial Garden will be opened officially following the London Cenotaph ceremony on 9th November 2014. The garden is being specially created to mark the centenary. Designed by Belgian architect Piet Blanckaert, it is intended to be a quiet place of reflection and contemplation.

The central circular bed of the garden will hold the 'sacred soil' that carries the memories of the millions who died, and will have the words of John McCrae's famous poem 'In Flanders Fields' inscribed upon it.

The Commission's Peter Francis explained, "Engaging a new generation, including schoolchildren from Belgium and the UK, in the sacrifices made during the First World War is a vital part of ensuring that remembrance of the war dead is ongoing. This project will further those close links that already exist between Belgium and the UK, will provide a tangible reminder in the UK of the sacrifices made by Commonwealth Servicemen and women on Belgium soil during the Great War, and a focal point for remembrance.

"With the help of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, schoolchildren from Belgium and Britain have gathered soil from the 70 battlefields where Guardsmen fought and died. During a special and poignant visit to the cemeteries, the children have also been provided with a symbolic sample of soil from the adjacent cemeteries. The soil will be used in the garden at Wellington Barracks in London."

In a ceremony on Armistice Day 2013, under the arch of the Menin Gate (which commemorates all those British and Commonwealth soldiers killed in the First World War with no known grave), the soil was loaded onto a First World War era gun carriage to begin a journey those who died on Flanders Fields were never able to make. The soil arrived in London on the Belgian Navy frigate Louise-Marie in December 2013. The sandbags were carried on a gun carriage of the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery and escorted by the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment through central London. The solemn procession arrived at the memorial garden at Wellington Barracks where there was a special service following the procession where the 'sacred soil' was placed with the other soil which will make up the base of the garden, which is located by the Guards Chapel.

As part of 2014 World War I centenary events, special paving stones will be laid in the home towns of every UK soldier awarded the Victoria Cross. The specially-commissioned stones will be given to councils in the areas where the VC recipients were born. A total of 28 will be unveiled next year to commemorate medals awarded in 1914 and others will be laid in every year up to 2018.

Plans to restore war memorials around the country have also been announced.

We will bring you regular updates of events in the Review. Websites are located at: www.gov.uk/ww1centenary and www.1914.org

Memories from the April 1995 Review, as Henry Perrett speaks with Ray Hazan OBE.

In 1995 WWI veteran Henry Perrett celebrated 75 years as a member of Blind Veterans UK. Here we have reproduced an interview by Ray Hazan when Henry spoke of those early days. Henry Perrett, formerly of Devizes, was born in November 1897 and in 1995 he was the longest serving member of our charity. He died in 1996.

He remembers Regent's Park days and was one of the first to stay at West House in Brighton after it was presented to Blind Veterans UK in 1918.

Henry Perrett left his job on the land to join the 8th Battalion, The Wiltshire Regiment on April 6th 1915. He was amongst one of the first units to use Bovington Camp, Dorset. On September 9th, he found himself on the way to France. "We left Bovington at midday on the Wednesday, and we were in the front line on the Friday evening." The Battle of Loos commenced on September 25th. "You knew you were there when the bullets and shells started flying. But you just had to knuckle down."

For two years, Henry Perrett went through the routine of time spent alternately on the front line, and then withdrawing back to the rest area. He arrived on the Somme on July 1st 1916. How can we imagine his feelings on Sunday July 2nd when the first line of troops 'went over the top' to be mown down, and knowing he was to follow in their footsteps the next day?

From the Somme, he went to the Ypres sector in 1917. "We went forward just for two nights to get the lie of the land, but on the first night, I copped it. A German trench mortar pitched into our bay and all seven of us were knocked out. I was blinded and seriously injured by shrapnel."

To this day, he carries a piece of shrapnel in his left arm. "I did not have much idea of what was happening. I was stretchered back to the Advance Dressing Station. I do remember hearing a lovely lady's voice - that was the nurse talking me round. I remember my first words: "Oh what have they done with my eyes?" "It's alright," she replied. "They've just taken the dirt out."

A few days later, Henry Perrett was on his way back to England. He spent from April to October in the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth, where he underwent 20 operations.

Henry Perrett arrived at his new home, the accommodation bungalow in the grounds of Blind Veterans UK, Regent's Park, without really knowing what the organisation was all about. There were several wards of 40 beds. "Sir Arthur was a wonderful man. Everyone liked him. We had a long interview, when he asked all sorts of questions. It was he who decided what would be the best job for us. He suggested I became a boot repairer. That was it, I was a boot repairer!"

Boot repairing was a pioneer profession for blind people in those days. "I was amazed at what they could teach us to do. They gave us special tools, which I still have to this day. Training included Braille, typing and occupational activities. There was no mobility training - we were issued with a strong walking stick; white canes did not exist then. There were indoor tournaments, we had theatre visits or concerts; some of the most famous stars came to entertain us. We were invited out to lots of parties. I rowed on the lake and took part in running and walking races later on in my training. I was also a member of the tug of war team and still have the gold cup we won."

By December 1918 that training was complete. Henry was one of the very first blind veterans to visit West House in Brighton, as it was known then. It had only just been presented to the organisation by the Federation of Grocers' Association. "Someone came round to ask us if we wanted to go to Brighton for the weekend. About six of us West Country lads volunteered. I remember a Mrs George, an Italian lady, who was both a visitor and friend of Blind Veterans UK, came to see us. Once everything had settled down there, I went back again for a fortnight's holiday. It was a lovely place. We went walking, on trips to the theatre and to concerts. There were many sick men convalescing at West House."

Back home in the market town of Devizes at Christmas, luck was on Henry Perrett's side, so to speak. The person charged with helping him find a business premises in Devizes happened to bump into the Chairman of the local Board of Guardians. As a result, a job was found repairing boots at the local psychiatric hospital.

"I earned 29 shillings a week over and above my war pension of about 40 shillings. I was lucky to be in work. There were some nasty feelings of jealousy around locally because they thought I had my bread buttered on both sides."

But Henry Perrett more than amply repaid the civilian blind through his example. Until that time, local blind people had been considered as 'poor

simple mortals'. When people saw just what Henry Perrett was achieving, local residents started treating the blind differently. Henry Perrett worked at the hospital for 20 years, and during WWII carried out war work locally. Henry's war work consisted of making camouflage netting at home in his workshop. He married Edith in 1921 and subsequently had two children.

1921 was the year Sir Arthur Pearson died. "We couldn't believe it, it was so sad, it couldn't be true. Looking back, I feel I owe Blind Veterans UK a great debt. I shall never forget people like Sir Arthur Pearson and Lord Fraser. They are very fresh in my mind. I was asked to speak at the Bristol reunion on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Chairmanship of Lord Fraser. Sir Neville Pearson was chairing the reunion. It was a great moment for me."

At the time of Ray Hazan's interview Henry Perrett was still very active. He had his gold watch chain, awarded for being the best Brailist in his class in Regent's Park. He continued to read the Braille Review. He attended two local clubs weekly, and had lived on his own since his wife Edith died in 1986. He had the close support of his son and daughter, John and Joyce, who lived nearby.

His great pleasure had always been his garden and he said that Edith and he felt particularly close in the garden. On fine days he delighted in getting outside among the flowers.



Picture: On the facing page, the Class of 1917. Henry and his contemporaries at Blind Veterans UK in Regent's Park. Rowing was a popular sport amongst trainees of the time.

Picture: Above, Henry holds a framed portrait of himself as a young soldier in uniform.

Sports Club Notes - Races for One Armed Oarsmen.

"Some very interesting and evenly contested races were held on Regent's Park Lake on the morning of Wednesday, the 23rd October 1918. The competitors, in addition to having been blinded, were all one-armed men. These optimistic sportsmen showed remarkable form, and could give a good race to any average oarsman in possession of his sight and both arms. Any rowing novice who feels disheartened at his attempts should get to know one of these men at once."

The above extract was taken from the Sports Club Notes section of the November 1918 edition of the Review. It relates to Blind Veterans UK's oarsmen who had also lost an arm. We realise that Henry, although blinded at Ypres, had not lost his arm. The article shows the tenacity of those First World War men who triumphed over their loss. Something that our members have continued to do for almost 100 years.

Jim Hodgkinson speaks of his father, Private JW Hodgkinson MM, 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers, by Catherine Goodier.

For this special edition of the Review I interviewed members of Blind Veterans UK whose family were involved in the First World War. Jim Hodgkinson from Manchester joined Blind Veterans UK in 2008 and I spent an afternoon with him and his wife Ruby, as Jim told me about his father and his father's time in WWI when he Served with the 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers.

Although his father never spoke of his experiences during World War One Jim knows of his father's bravery from the War Diary of Lieut Hawkins, 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers. We have reproduced Lieut Hawkins's war diary from October 12th 1916 below.

October 12th 1916 was the day that Private Jim (Ginger) Hodgkinson 4088, 2nd Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers saved the life of Lieut Hawkins during the Battle of the Somme. For that outstanding act of bravery he was awarded the Military Medal. We begin Lieut Hawkins's account:

At 2.30am I started off to the assembly position with my Co. H.Q. which consisted of C.S.M. Laverick of D.C.M., my runner Ginger Hodgkinson, my servant Hargreaves and the Co. Signallers and Orderlies.

At about 6am the preliminary bombardment began and lasted all day until Zero Hour. It was very slow and very regular. A few shots fell short into 'D' Co., but nothing very exciting happened at first. (The rest of the diary is written by hour and minutes as the events of the day become somewhat crowded).

12.15pm: Several Huns running and crawling in No Man's Land carrying a machine gun. Had a few shots at them.

12.30pm: Twelve Huns came into our line and surrendered. Some excitement. Things assume a rosy aspect and point to a fairly easy show.

1.0pm: Watches sent to Bn. H.Q. for synchronising.

1:30pm: Watch sent back and following additional orders received from Brain, Zero hour 2.5pm. The Duke to attack the length of trench occupied by the Hun between A Co. and then at 2.25pm the rest of the Division to attack.

Accordingly we sat down and waited for Zero hour.

2pm: Bombardment increased. Bayonets fixed.

2.3pm: Hun plane flew straight down own line about 300 feet up, may have seen trenches crowded with men. None of our planes in sight.

2.5pm: Fiendish Row. Zero hour. Heavy enemy barrage on 10th Brigade Machine Gun Barrage. Dukes attacking on our right but can't see much.

2.10pm: Shrapnel shell on top of us. Laverick hit on steel helmet and stunned. Several casualties.

2.15pm: Awful noise impossible to make oneself heard. Several men got excited and went over the top on their own. Keen as hell to go.

2.20pm: Shell landed on CO. H.Q. all Co. signallers and runners knocked out except Ginger. Hargreaves badly knocked.

2.25pm: Johnny Greaves and 5 Platoon off followed by the rest of the Co. Johnny shot through the lung five yards in front of our parapet. Enemy machine gun barrage pretty unhealthy. Our own barrage which should have waited for us has gone on with the Dukes and 25 mins. in front of us.

Ginger and I follow the Co. over. Run like hares and find ourselves well away in front of the Co.

2.50pm: Fifty percent of Co. already down. Whole Bde appears to be held up. L/Cpl. Fenton one of my Lewis Gunners has got his gun going in a shell hole on my left. Awful din can hardly hear it yelled at Sgt. Manin to take the 1st wave on. He's lying just behind me. Ginger says he's dead. Sgt. Mann on my right of 7 platoon also dead. Most of the men appear to be dead. Shout at the rest and get up to take them on. Find myself sitting on the ground facing our own line with a bally great hole in my thigh, doesn't hurt much but bleeding like hell. Ginger also hit in the wrist. Awful din still. Most of the Co. now out. Ginger ties my leg up and I put my tie round my leg as a tourniquet. Fortesque on my right about five yards still alive. He had a bullet through his steel hat and another had broken the skin on his nose. Funny how one noticed these things.

Yell at him to come over to me. Show him my leg and tell him to carry on. He

gets into a shell hole to listen while I tell him what to do. Shot through the heart while I'm talking to him, Addison also wounded and crawling back to our lines. That all the Officers and most of the N.C.O.'s can't see anything of Bolton and S Pl. Start crawling on back, back to our own lines. Bump. "What's that Ginger?" "Dead man Sir." Dam. Turns over and drag along on my stomach. Ginger helps me along. About 75 yards to go, leg still bleeding fast, and my trousers have been cut off me. Feel rather naked. Beastly uncomfortable also rather faint. Bloody row still. Make another effort and roll over our parapet on to Laverick who has recovered and is just coming up. Ginger dives off for stretcher bearers. Awful shindy still. Feeling rotten. Stretcher bearer arrives. Takes my Field Dressing off. Hole in my thigh. I can put my fist into it. Full of mud too. They tie me up and cart me off to a small hole somewhere near in original assembly trench. Laverick goes off to collect the Co. Only 12 men left out of a hundred.

2.40pm: Johnny Greaves carried along and put in another small hole. Badly hit in lung. Can't get away till dark.

3pm: Got an awful pain. Laverick has collected the remnants of the Co. in the front line. Himself Sgt. Bolton and a dozen men. Attack an absolute failure.

5pm: Feeling rotten. Keep losing consciousness. Beard a Subaltern in the Dukes passes. Asks how they did. He says he is the only Officer left. Nine Officers killed, six wounded. Ask him if he is going to Bn. H.Q. He is. Will he tell Brain how things are, and that Johnny and I are here. He will. Must have fainted again.

6pm: Still in this beastly hole. Johnny very quiet. 10% reserves come up.

11pm: Stretcher Bearers come up and Johnny carried off.

Another stretcher party come along and take me away. Beastly journey down. Essex and King's Own all coming up. Stretcher bearers have to get into the open. After a long time we get to the road. John Carr and L/Cpl Owen meet us with a stretcher. Take me over and send S.B's back for someone else. John and Owen start off with me, to Bn. H.Q. Drop me off stretcher twice, John keeps patting my head and telling me I am O.K. Reach Bn. H.Q. Brain and Blencs come out and give me a drink. Willis sends me a message to say, I'll soon be in town. Cheers me up a bit. Brain tells me our casualties.

Poor Old Daddy Mansell killed. Robin, Greaves, Kirkland, Addison and others wounded. Bolton missing. Watkins and Sammy Howarth only two to get

through. Whole show dud. The doctor decides to send me on at once. I am lying on a stretcher in a trench near Battalion H.Q. Damned shell bursts near, and covers me with mud. Don't seem to mind a bit. Seem apathetic since getting hit. Am sent off to a Dressing Station near Givenchy and thus sever connection with the Bn. again after 'months' spell.

Although Lieut Hawkins wrote that he severed all connections with the Bn. he did not sever connections with Ginger. The two would stay in touch for the remainder of their lives. Here Jim Hodgkinson junior speaks of his father.

Jim said: "My father was a very quiet man. He was a good father and after the war he joined the railway where he worked hard to look after his family. He would occasionally go to the music hall and I would go with him and to the pub too as he liked a pint and game of cards, but never to excess. We'd talk, but he never talked about himself, he always wanted to talk about me, or anyone else but him. I wish I'd asked him more questions about his time in WWI, but I doubt he'd have answered them.

"I know that he was wounded twice. As Lieut Hawkins writes he was shot in the wrist during the Battle of the Somme. That was when he was awarded the Military Medal for saving the life of Lieut Hawkins. I know my father was gassed in France as I have a photograph of him in his blues when he was convalescing in the South of England. Again I only know about that because once a year he would go into hospital for treatment. As the railway only gave him one week of leave a year he would go in for treatment during his holiday. He never complained. He just got on with it.

"My father was a Foreman/Timekeeper at Central station in Manchester. Each day he would pin his ribbons on the lapel of his railway jacket before he walked the two miles from our home in Monsall to Central station. His colleagues nicknamed him Rainbow, but my father didn't take any notice of them and he wore his ribbons as they told the story of his time during WWI and he was proud to have fought for his country in the Great War for Civilisation. During the Second World War he joined the Home Guard as so many of the First World War men did. He would wear his ribbons on his uniform and on Remembrance Sunday he would proudly wear his medals to the Service of Remembrance.

"Although my father didn't speak of the war he told me one thing: that on one day in 1916 three telegrams landed on my grandmother's doormat. One told her that her youngest son John, who was only 16, had been lost at sea,

presumed drowned. He was Serving onboard HMS Hampshire that carried Field Marshal Lord Kitchener on a diplomatic mission from Scapa Flow. Their voyage should have finished in Russia, but it is believed HMS Hampshire struck a mine laid by a German submarine. Another telegraph told her that my father had been wounded, there was no further information, just that he had been wounded. The third telegram was to inform her that her eldest son Alec had been captured and made a POW. Like my father Alec did return home at the end of the war, although unlike my father he was never the same as he suffered from what would be recognised today as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Sadly my uncle John did not return home, his final resting place is at sea.

"My father's association with Lieut Hawkins lasted for the rest of his life as they kept in touch and he would send my father money and gifts. My father didn't expect these gifts, although they were of course welcome. My father was happy that they remained friends throughout their lives, but Lieut Hawkins never forgot what my father had done on that day of October 12th 1916. When I was a young boy a box was delivered for my father. It was from Egypt where Hawkins, was posted. I opened it up and it was full of hay and I fished around inside until I found a large £5 note, which was equivalent to two weeks wages. There was also a bronze plate that Ruby and I still have today, it's engraved with hieroglyphics that show the story of Egypt from the birth of the Nile.

"The young Lieut Hawkins with whom my father had Served rose to become Brigadier V F S Hawkins, DSO, MC.

"Today my father's Military Medal, his ribbons, papers and photographs are with my son Jim. On 12th December 2013 Jim and I decided that when it is the appropriate time we will give them to the Lancashire Fusiliers, their rightful home."

You can read the War Diary of 2Lt Hawkins, 2nd Bn Lancashire Fusiliers, The Somme at: www.lancs-fusiliers.co.uk The full link is: www.lancs-fusiliers.co.uk/gallerynew/2LFWW1/2lww1somme/2lww1somme.htm We would like to thank Captain Eastwood BEM, CQSW of the Lancashire Fusiliers website.

I asked Jim how he heard of Blind Veterans UK, and I don't know why I was surprised by his response, as the person who first told him about us is responsible for bringing in many new members.

Jim began: "Ruby and I were on holiday in Scotland in 2008 when we took a bus. During that bus ride we spoke with a charming woman from Lancashire who was on a walking holiday. She asked about my failing eyesight and if I had Served in the Armed Forces. I told her I had and she gave us her phone number and told me to phone her when we got home and she'd tell me about Blind Veterans UK. I did and that was the first step to getting my life back, as that charming woman was Maria Pikulski, and she helped me to join Blind Veterans UK. Until then I thought things were over for me and I'd sunk into depression. Now I once again have a full life thanks to Maria Pikulski, Blind Veterans UK and my Welfare Officer Sharon Gradwell. I can never repay them for all they have done.

"The first thing Sharon did was to arrange my training. She has since arranged for a stair lift to be put into our home and for a workshop to be built in the garden as I go in there to do the mosaic work I enjoy. I learnt mosaic work at the Brighton centre. I also did computer training and that is another lifeline. I use a telephone with large buttons and a very basic mobile phone that the ROVIs taught me to use. The level of training is incredible and from that first meeting with Maria Pikulski, the first meeting with Sharon Gradwell and the first time I entered a Blind Veterans UK centre for training my life was put back on track."



Picture: Private Jim 'Ginger' Hodgkinson is shown kneeling in the front row second from the left. The photograph was taken when he was in hospital in England recovering from his wounds.

Escape. An account by Leo Neasham, a blind veteran who fought at the Battle of the Somme, from the November 1986 Review on the 70th Anniversary.

It was way back in 1916, a long while ago you may say. There is no calendar of the experiences in a man's life, as there is a calendar of his years. The Battle of the Somme had been raging for over three months during which time I had seen action in Month Bon, July 1st, and Delville Wood on July 12th. The terrible slaughter by the gods of war of those days had reduced the battalion to a mere trickle of its normal strength. Seventy five percent of the lads had not returned with us. For a few weeks various activities were a part of life's militarism, and drafts of young men were sent to join us to rebuild those broken ranks and bring the battalion up to its full strength. It was then that we marched some 100 miles or so.

Each battalion boasted a band to precede the column and lead the en avant in maintaining step. It consisted of about 50 lads, who were non-combatant and remained at battalion headquarters, wherever that may be, when we were holding the line. During an attack they became stretcher bearers. On marches they played popular tunes, and the lads would try to cheer up their miserable existence by singing.

About this time, an ecclesiastical dignitary — we were told it was the Archbishop of Canterbury — decided that these bands should play hymn tunes that could be measured in correct time to marching feet, and thus enable the high morale of the troops to be maintained. Such hymns 'Onward Christian Soldiers', 'Oh Jesus I have promised', and others, too numerous to mention. Certainly, the marching feet seemed firmer and the heavy equipment lighter. The lads gave voice to these familiar honours; they composed their own words, and each repeated tune encouraged another verse of castigation and vituperation on the enemy. Such interpretation of the beautiful poetry, those lovely hymns, must, surely, have shamed the cassock.

And now for the business of war, for that was our real business. On September 26th we moved into the line for the attack on Thipeval. History, more than I ever could, recorded this terrible event. And with the vast proportion of the lads never to join us again to share this Armageddon. We were informed that during the first few days of October, the Germans had been frantically digging, or repairing, redoute, a semi-circular earth-work without flanking its defences, thus bringing their front line too dangerously near to ours. I was included in

the two bayonets teams of 10 men each, led as all attacks I had known on the Somme, by a Lance Corporal, often given a second stripe making him Acting Corporal, just because it may prove necessary to send in replacements for casualties, or maybe, as carriers of hand grenades. This ridiculousness, because the Officer's little red book clearly states that 10 men can be commanded by a Lance Corporal, or Senior Private, but more than 10, it must be a Corporal.

Instructions were to go through the night in battle order. Any personal goods we may possess (you would know that was very little) were to be placed in the packs — a bag like monstrosity, carrying anything you may own, and strapped to your back. These packs were to be marked with your identity name and number and handed in at a dug-out on route until you returned.

It was interesting to find the Regimental Sergeant Major standing at the entrance to this hell hole, as the packs were being handed in. I had not seen him close at hand before, although I could recognise him from the one who performed in front of the parade and gave us our movement orders. In the half light of early dawn, he seemed a very good looking man, of about 45 years, and greeted me with a warm smile. He did not speak and so I could not speak to him, but I can always see him now — a kindly, sympathetic expression on his warm countenance. He must have been realising that we lads were moving away from him to the unknown, as he said very calmly, 'Good luck lads.' I never saw him again in person, but I've seen visions of that moment many times in the years that have passed.

And so we trudge on for the business on hand, which was to break into separate teams, one moving to the left, the other to the right. To approach this Swobbern redoute, as it was called, as full dawn breaks, and jump into this so described trench from each end, clear out the few German occupants, and hold on until the lads occupying our own front lines could move over and relieve us. Now this excursion was undoubtedly the brainchild of the Sam Brown gang, who would think it out from the comfort of the spacious lounges in their delightful chateau way back 10 miles or so. Maybe our Colonel would be there, if we had a Colonel, I'd not heard of him and certainly never seen him.

When battalion orders appeared posted on a board in the trenches they end with an indecipherable signature followed by rank Lieutenant-Colonel, Commanding. But of course, it was all to be so unlike that design exercise. Dawn was now fast approaching. Having crawled some distance in the sea of mud, it seemed wise to find some cover, for a most advanced shell-hole possible, large enough to give hiding to the team.

We parted from the other team and followed Ginger, our Corporal into the shell hole he had selected. It was always full of water, but we could lie on the side and recover our energy sufficiently at least to think. We were about three feet from the periphery of the redoute. We could hear voices of the enemy, a guttural sort of sound, rumbling noise, all around us. We could discern the bodies of the lads lost in the last attack, their pink faces looking upwards. Strange how men fall on their backs, seldom otherwise. They'd not been lying there very long, which was evident from the pinkness of their faces. In about two weeks they would turn green, and after five or six weeks would be black. It was possible to tell how long ago it was that they had died. Many, I noticed were Lancashire Fusiliers.

And so it became necessary to make a dash for our objective. There were no trenches as such, just an enormous bog or morass of deep sticky mud, churned into wet heaps by shelling, and affording little or no protection. However we were there. But it was impossible to follow our intended assault. Ginger took up a position in the centre of the team. The bombers passed their Mills hand grenades to we first two. The Germans seemed to be buzzing about, at odd moments blue uniforms could be seen, an occasional helmet, and several times the round pillar box cap they wore. It was an eerie sort of silence just then, no shelling or even rifle fire. The Huns had left the flanks of this position and congregated in the centre. We moved along a yard or two and I hoped to get a little nearer to them. We thought better and we first two crawled up behind them and showed the bayonets. Ginger said, "Try a couple of Mills hand grenades." That was a mistaken decision. They were ready, as we were to learn in the next few minutes.

Their hand grenades were coming over like rain. The lads behind were catching them and hurling them back as we'd often done before. The grenades had a five second fuse, and if the distance is not too far they can be thrown back, by those who can catch them. It was important to keep heads down. Whilst we wondered what next to do, I don't know, perhaps a half an hour or so had passed away, with each side exchanging hand grenades — suddenly I noticed, I suppose the others had also, a sniper had climbed out onto the periphery of their redoubt, lying down very flat and still. He was about three yards away from me. At that moment a young officer came up. How he had organised himself sufficiently to be interested in this affair I could not imagine, a bravado so unusual without a bravura. I hadn't much time to look at him, but I'd seen him before. He had joined us from England about two days prior to this, I'd

heard his name but I am unsure of it now — think it was Preston, or Penrose, something similar. He had replaced a nice lad, 2nd Lieutenant called Williams whom we had lost at Thiepval.

Anyhow, there he was, looking very smart in a new light fawn double breasted trench coat, complete with epaulettes and rank badges, a new highly polished green steel helmet with rank star emblazoned on the side. He came and positioned himself beside me, holding a new revolver in his left hand. This seemed unusual but perhaps he was ambidextrous. It was saddening to see him there. Maybe his collar and tie friends or acquaintances had made him be Orderly Officer for the day as he was a new boy. But who knows, this may be the reason we as some of his platoon were sent on this mission of murder.

One of the rules of the game, as defined in the said little red book, states clearly that under no circumstances is it permitted to address an officer, unless first addressed by him. I so much wanted to tell him to keep down, to avoid revealing himself to the sniper. He was so vulnerable in this well dressed state, but I dare not speak because he hadn't spoken to me! He could have shot me for insubordination! That revolver, in a shaking hand, looked dangerous.

It seemed important to me to have a peep at Mr Sniper. Removing my tin hat, for that was how we described the shrapnel helmet; my face pressed to a little heap of wet mud, the sniper was clearly visible, from such a short distance. As he lifted his face to reload the rifle, I saw a good looking young man. He had removed his head dress to reveal the fair hair of the Aryan race, quite a good camouflage in the mud. Lads passed the word down, 'keep bumming, we'll try and get him.'

At this time the Second Lieutenant in his nervous excitement decided to have a look. With his tin hat still on his head, he stretched up to see further whom the lads referred to. Bang! He rolled back into the trench, out-stretched in the mud. The lads gathered him up under the arms and dragged him away. He was occupying six feet of our standing room, limited standing too it was, and we hadn't space. We didn't want to walk on him. We had walked on several German dead, we hated that, despite the horror of the occasion, it was something we preferred to avoid.

Leo Neasham was a Private in the Royal Norfolk Regiment, and a member of Blind Veterans UK until his death in 1985.

My time in the Dardanelles, by Frank G Braithwaite.

For almost 100 years training has been at the heart of the work of Blind Veterans UK. The First World War veterans were taught to read Braille and in the workshops they learnt netting, basket making, mat making and boot making. There were classes in massage and poultry farming. It was pioneering work.

Below we bring you an account by 19 year old Frank G Braithwaite, an early member of Blind Veterans UK. Frank's account was written in 1916 after he was blinded in the Dardanelles.

An apprentice cabinet maker in his family's business before the war, Frank trained as a boot maker at Blind Veterans UK in Regent's Park and went on to become a very successful businessman.

My Time in the Dardanelles.

Saturday, June 19th, 1915, at midnight, the 136th Fortress Company Royal Engineers, to which I had the honour to belong left Buxton for the Dardanelles.

There was a great crowd to see us off, and I saw some awfully funny and pathetic sights. We embarked at Bristol on a troopship on Sunday, June 20th, 1915. We were packed on board like sardines. I tried to swallow a lump in my throat when we left England.

After an uneventful voyage (except for an incident with a hostile submarine) we arrived at Alexandria on Saturday night, July 2nd. All night we worked at disembarking the horses, mules and wagons.

After a short stay at Alexandria, we got fresh orders to embark for the Peninsula at once, so we set sail again. Wednesday July 7th, midday. We arrived at Lemnos, an island in the Mediterranean Friday, July 9th. On Sunday, July 11th, four men and myself out of 20 men in the mounted section, got on to a German prize boat, with the rest of the company, and once again set sail for Cape Helles, Monday, July 12th. We heard and saw firing that night, and had a very queer feeling about the knees.

Thursday, July 15th, we sailed back about 20 miles out of range. The Turkish guns too hot for us. The mounted section consisting of four men and myself, landed at Helles on Saturday, July 24th. My feelings when I came under heavy shell fire for the first time are difficult to describe. I felt as if I could do one of two things, either to run home as fast as I could, or take Constantinople with two or three men.

Thursday, August 5th, we attacked, to employ as many Turks as possible, while our other Army landed at Suvla Bay. We were blown back with severe punishment, and I should not like to see the list of casualties from August 6th to the 9th.

Sunday, August 9th, I attended my first service in the field. About 1,000 men were present, remnants from four or five regiments. The band for the hymns consisted of about six men with mouth organs and the Chaplain stood on a high biscuit box and beat time to the hymns, which every man let go as if he meant what he was singing.

Little firing during the week, nothing worth noting. Both sides seemed absolutely exhausted from the result of their terrible fighting.

I attended another field service on Sunday, August, 15th, the Chaplain was very good, the text which stuck in my mind, was "In the midst of life we are in death," and I'm hanged if he is not right.

Thursday, August 19th, I saw my first soldier's funeral. It was not the usual slap-up affair of a military one in peace time.

From August 19th to November 21st, things seemed quiet, our Company getting smaller as the result of fighting, shortage of water and poor grub.

Sunday, November 21st, the Turks attacked us and were driven back with heavy losses, the bombardment continuing until late in the night. I was standing on a hill well out of range, and it was one of the prettiest sights I had ever seen, exactly like a huge firework display.

November 13th, our Company had got down to 22 Officers and men out of 104.

December 1st, when we woke up in the morning, in our dug out, my chum said "I have had a rotten dream, there's going to be some blood in this dug out." And sure enough, about 1.20 a 9.7 explosive shell dropped in among us as we

were having dinner. There were three of us sitting there and it smashed Corporal MacKenzie to smithereens, badly wounded my other chum and knocked me about a trifle. As the result of my wounds I was rendered totally blind, and this is why I am writing in this foreign language [Braille].

I lay at the dressing station two days, the sea being too rough to get away. As we were leaving the Peninsula for the Hospital Ship we were given a good send off by the Turks, but fortunately all went wide.

I was taken to Lemnos where I was admitted to an Australian Hospital. During my stay there I had three operations and felt jolly cheap. At this point, I should like to say that the Australian sisters and doctors were really grand.

On my birthday, January 2nd 1916, (I was 19) I was embarked on the SS Britannia for home. During my six days voyage, I had another operation, this making my fourth. This added to the movement of the boat made me feel jolly cheap. Eventually, I got to Southampton, which I had almost given up hope of ever seeing again.

Immediately on arrival, I was put on a hospital train for London, the worst train ride I have ever had. On reaching Waterloo, I was put on an ambulance with a most charming Sister inside, who held my hand all the way across London to St Mark's Hospital, Chelsea, arriving there about 12.30 at night.

After staying there about three weeks, I got an invitation from Mr A Pearson, who is well known in the blind world, to come to Blind Veterans UK Hostel for the Blinded Sailors and Soldiers, but I was rather doubtful about accepting it, as I was so terribly homesick.

I applied for a fortnight's leave, which was granted, and I went to my home at Guildford, where I spent a happy time and quite cheered my parents up. After a rest, I felt better and decided to go to Blind Veterans UK to be taught a trade and some other things suitable for the blind.

The house is long and low, also exceedingly large, just like a country mansion, in the heart of London. It stands in 15 acres of ground, which joins Regent's Park, so that we are able to go boating on the lake there every morning before breakfast.

Although there are about 140 men at the Hostel, through the kindness of several friends and with my own personal thoughts, I can safely say that I am one of the happiest chaps there.



Picture: Frank G Braithwaite, Royal Engineers.



Picture: Frank is seated second row, second from the left. Sir Arthur Pearson stands in the centre at the front.

Speaking about Frank, his great nephew Michael Blow said: "My sister Carole and I discovered Frank's account following the death of our Aunty Joyce, Frank's daughter. We looked at it and we thought 'what's this?' and then we read the first sentence and thought 'well this is different or interesting'. And then of course by the time we got to the second or third paragraph we were caught up in its narrative.

"I knew Frank when I was a young schoolboy as he was the brother of my grandfather. One was always aware that he was different to anybody else in the family. As you got older you learnt that it was because he had been blinded and that he had glass eyes as a result of his injuries in Gallipoli. He was a very buoyant happy character and one who worked on the present rather than the past. He was a role model for us. The Braithwaite side of the family were a very optimistic group of people who felt that whatever hand life had dealt you had to get on with it and make the best of it. I remember him as a chap in a business suit and a tie dressed very smartly, sitting behind a desk using his typewriter, which I suppose was one of the great legacies of the training that he had received at Regent's Park and the way he communicated with people. I think by then he had others doing the actual mending, if they were still doing it as he had expanded his business.

"My father remembers Frank well; he said that most days Frank would go to the local hotel at lunch time and meet some of his business colleagues. And his general optimism and enthusiasm for life has I suppose rubbed off on us. He certainly didn't feel sorry for himself. Or feel that in anyway life had done him down. He just got on with things. He was definitely a role model. After his time in the Dardanelles he could quite easily have been excused for lapsing into self pity, but he didn't. He got on with life thanks to Blind Veterans UK and with the strength of his character."

The young man who wrote the account of his time in the Dardanelles went on to lead a very full, happy and prosperous life. After training as a boot repairer, he moved to Guildford in 1916, where, using the skills he learnt at Blind Veterans UK, he set up F.C. Braithwaite. Frank married Mary, a young woman he knew before the war and they were very happy. They had a daughter Joyce who worked as a secretary in the film industry, meeting all the big names of the day, including Marilyn Monroe. Joyce married Winston Churchill's bodyguard at The Savoy and Winston Churchill gave them a white cat for their wedding present.

Lord Fraser wrote of Frank: F.G. Braithwaite of Guildford was an outstanding

example of success. 'You will see from my bill head,' he wrote in 1921, 'that I have gone a step further than boot repairing. I have quite recently started in the wholesale trade. I don't think this will be too big an undertaking, for there must be no limits to my business. I now rank amongst the three largest boot repairers in the town; also you will see above that I am allowed to use the King's Seal, for I employ all disabled men.'

Three years later he was still on the King's Roll of Honour with a staff of eight, including a traveller. He became a prominent freemason, and did a great deal of voluntary work for ex-Servicemen. Lord Fraser summed up by writing. 'Once we had success of transitions of this kind we modified our training.'

Frank's great niece, Carole Penn, was just a small girl when she met Frank and she recalls that first meeting. "I was four years old when I first met Frank when we went for Sunday lunch at Green Gates, their family home in Farnham Road, Guildford. It was an enormous house and Frank was in a very large drawing room, sitting on the sofa and he wore a very smart suit. I stood in front of him and he felt my features. I remember I was petrified at first because he wanted to know exactly what I looked like and I can remember he had quite potted skin, which I obviously now know was due to the shrapnel injuries. But after that initial feeling of panic I relaxed as he was a very happy friendly person. He ribbed me a bit over lunch as I was very small and useless at eating, I never ate vegetables. Knowing Frank helped me in many respects. When you're growing up and you meet somebody who is supposedly different, you realise they're not really different. It made me realise that everybody is the same and it taught me not to judge."



Picture: Frank using his Remington typewriter just as his great nephew Michael Blow remembers him.

Mons. A short period in a Soldier's life by Sergeant Nolan from the Review July 1916.

The above title may seem a peculiar one, yet when we consider that a soldier's experiences are many and varied, it is not such a strange one after all, so I shall try and relate a few incidents of the early part of the campaign. As the world now knows, very few of the British race took part in these adventures, as at that time we had not the huge Army we have today.

About 2pm on Sunday the 23rd of August, at a small village called Gibly, five miles south of Mons, we received orders to fall in, and marching a couple of miles in the direction of Mons, began to entrench, when we were suddenly disturbed by the bursting of a German shell over our heads about 3.30pm, and so took up our part in one of the greatest battles that ever took place in the annals of British history. The battle continued throughout the night and well on through the next day, and though we had terrible odds against us, the thought of giving ground never for one moment crossed the mind of a single man. The fight continued with terrible intensity until the Germans carried a trench on our right flank, capturing two Maxim guns, and annihilating a whole company with the exception of six men.

Our orders during this fight were short and crisp: "Hold on, boys, no surrender!" and we carried them out at a terrible cost. As the day wore on we received orders to retire. About 3.30pm we carried out this movement, when the enemy were only about 150 yards off our front, leaving our packs behind, losing our convoy, but rescuing as many of our wounded as we could, content with the knowledge that we had earned the respect of our foeman, even though we had lost the greater proportion of the battalion. So ended the battle of Mons. Then commenced that dreary retreat, which demanded the endurance of every man to carry it to a successful conclusion.

We marched the whole of that night and the following day, not being called upon to take any further part in the fighting until the evening, when, swinging suddenly to our right again, we manned some trenches previously prepared by the Engineers and engaged the Germans again, with the same terrible odds arrayed against us, in a desperate attempt to cover the retirement of our forces.

That night we were in a serious predicament, as we entered the combat using

the same ammunition that British troops always use in action, 15 rounds per minute, only to realise before long that we were running short of ammunition. A word sprang from the lips of one of our men: "Running short of ammunition, sir." Sharp came the reply from the CO: "Three rounds per minute men," and the firing dropped as requested.

A feeling of despair pervaded us all. What had happened? Were we running short of ammunition? If so, what would happen? The German infantry were advancing on our front as rapidly as they could, the cavalry on our left, yet with the obstinacy applicable to the British we hung on. Suddenly a voice rang out again: "Two rounds per minute," and the rapidity of the fire decreased. We thought all was lost when a voice of a private shouted: "Cavalry advancing on the left, sir." No words were wasted in the order that followed: "Engage them and no surrender."

Thinking all was lost we prepared to do so, when suddenly, to our surprise, from a wood a little to our rear came forth the gallant 9th Lancers, who, meeting the Prussians at full tilt, after a short tussle made them turn. Shortly afterwards we retired from that position, and after marching all night took up a position at Cambrai. We were under the impression at that time that we would only be engaged for a couple of hours, but were doomed to disappointment, as the fight continued the whole of the day until, the batteries on our left being silenced, we were forced to retire once again. We marched to St Quentin, 20 miles away, and after a halt of a couple of hours were shelled out, so proceeded to Ham, making in all a march of 37 miles, the record march of the campaign.

There I saw the sight of my life. The gallant Gordon's, to take up outpost duty, marched back two and a half miles and swing past us as if 40 miles were an everyday event. This was the first four days of the campaign, and bore fruit, as the German intention was to hem us in at Maubeuge, but failing that, and being punished so heavily, they refused any more combats for the next four days, this proving to us that they are an enemy that can be and will be defeated in a very short time.

A career soldier and veteran of the Boer War, Sergeant Nolan was blinded on 13th October 1915 at Givenchy. It was the second time that he was wounded. He was visited in the 2nd London General Hospital by Sir Arthur Pearson. He trained as a poultry farmer and mat maker at Regent's Park.

Albert Southerden speaks of his mother and father and their service in WWI.

In 1916, at the age of 19, Dorothy Young left her position as a Parlour Maid at 6 Montague Mansions, Portman Square, London W1 and moved to Dover to serve with The Navy & Army Canteen Board. Dorothy had probably entered service at the age of 12, but it was a time of social change, a new era for women and she embraced the adventure of the times.

Jennifer Newby, author of *Women's Lives* (published by Pen & Sword), said: "The First World War was a defining moment in women's history. As thousands of men headed off to war, women replaced them at work as bus conductors, factory workers, farm labourers — roles previously thought beyond their strength. Women wore trousers, earned their own wages and eventually gained the vote, but above all they learned what they were capable of."

Dorothy Young was the mother of Albert Southerden, who joined Blind Veterans UK in 2006. His father Harold Served with the Royal Army Medical Corps in WWI.

Speaking at his home in Halifax, Albert said: "My mother didn't say if she enjoyed her work with the Navy & Army Canteen Board, I think it was one of those slightly adventurous things to do, as women didn't have so much scope in those days. She wouldn't have been under any obligation, either social or financial to join up, and she probably took a cut in income.

"I think her younger sister Lucy may have influenced her as they both left service and joined together. Lucy was a very adventurous person and after the war she moved to Canada where she lived for the remainder of her life. My mother was the second eldest of five girls and apparently they were all stunners. I have her permit book as Dover was a militarised zone and you needed permission to move around. I think she must have met my father when he passed through the canteen, perhaps after he was gassed and was returning home to recuperate.

"I don't think she would have seen the hospital cases, but she would have met the men who had sustained minor wounds and had come back to convalesce before they were sent back. The majority of people were perhaps on a few days rest, but I don't really know what the military arrangements were."



Picture: Certainly a stunner. Dorothy Young in the uniform of the Navy & Army Canteen Board in 1918.



Picture: Dorothy Young, left standing, and Lucy Young, centre standing, with colleagues of the Navy & Army Canteen Board.

Albert's father Harold also left a life in service. When war broke out he was 19 years of age and he left his job as a gardener to join the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC).

"As a young boy I heard my father mention that he was at 'Wipers' as he would refer to his medals as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred when he wore them on St George's Day, but like most men of his generation he never spoke to me of the war. When my son was small my mother would stay with us and she would speak with my wife Maureen, telling her about my father's war. The two of them developed a mother daughter relationship and they would sit talking in the kitchen — they would chase me out if I tried to come in while they were talking!

"It wasn't until after my mother's death that Maureen told me all the tales my mum had told her about my father. Apparently he was in No Man's Land one day when there was a gas attack and my father took off his gas mask and put it on the injured man he was treating. My father was of course gassed. I knew he had been gassed as that was one of the things he mentioned as he had pretty poor lungs as a result.

"My father was a gardener before and after the war, but I think he really wanted to be a doctor as he had done various first aid courses. Like a large proportion of the population at the time who were in service he had left school at the age of 12. That's why he subsequently became a member of the British Red Cross as a part time volunteer as he had a keen interest.

"He was a conscientious objector, which could be taken as an admission of cowardice, but he simply didn't want to take a life. He wanted to serve his country, but not to take the life of a fellow man. That's why he joined the RAMC and he would go unarmed into No Man's Land to treat the wounded. I think he showed extreme courage in his conviction and in his actions. He returned to the Red Cross in the Second World War as he was above conscription age.

"My daughter in law's grandfather, Harry Bentley, was hit during WWI. The bullet smashed the butt of his rifle and took a great chunk out of it, went across the back of one hand leaving a groove across the fingers, it hit something metal, hitting a cigarette case in his pocket and lodged near his heart. He was hauled back into the trench and they decided that he couldn't possibly survive and they put a big red X on his forehead and put him to one side against the dead and dying. Three days later he asked for a drink of water. But that bullet still remained in him for the rest of his days. He was on North Bridge in England

one day when he met two of his ex regiment mates. They greeted one another, but they looked a bit astonished when they met him, and as he walked away he heard one of them say 'well who did we bury then?'

"He said they looked as though they'd seen a ghost. So perhaps somewhere on one of the battlefields there's his name on a gravestone. There must be hundreds of stories like that."

A skilled carpenter and joiner Albert Southerden Served with the RAF for two years before returning to his profession and becoming a lecturer in Technical Education.

Asked about the impact of Blind Veterans UK on his life, Albert said: "Each week I participate in an RNIB group telephone conference call with five or six people and one of them is a blind veteran who lives in Hereford. He always sings the praises of the Llandudno centre. Through my training with Blind Veterans UK I continue to use a computer and I am able to deal with my post as I scan printed documents and it reads them to me. Handwritten post is more difficult! It's been said before, but you're never on your own with Blind Veterans UK, as someone is just a phone call away, either a fellow veteran or a ROVI, or your Welfare Officer and there are the centres for activity weeks, clubs and training. Personally I get great pleasure from attending the Computer Club."



Picture: Albert Southerden with his father's Comrades of the Great War Certificate.

The RAMC and conscientious objectors during WWI, by GJ Haines.

The cloud of poison gas was advancing silently but relentlessly towards Harold Southerden of the Royal Army Medical Corps as he tended to the wounded soldier laying on the mud of Ypres as the fighting raged around them. Harold had been trained for moments like this, the whistles and shouts to put on the gas masks were all around him, mixed with the scream of his patient. He had heard and seen what gas could do, the blinding, the choking. He had even heard of one man who had lost all his skin due to the corrosive effects of the vapour. He knew that he had one choice though as the cloud rolled closer. He took the mask off his face and placed it on his patient. He was here to save lives, not to take them. The cloud embraced Harold.

Harold Southerden was a man of conviction and principle. He had not joined the army through the normal channels but as a conscientious objector.

Harold was one of over 16,000 (the exact figure varies from 16,000 — 16,600) conscientious objectors who refused to take up arms although the government ordered them to do so. The Military Service Act had been given Royal Assent on the 27th January 1916 and it came into effect from the 2nd March 1916.

Men aged between 18 - 41 were expected to enlist when called and join the army. The Act when first enacted did not apply to married men, those widowed with children to look after, the clergy, those working in a reserved occupation and those serving in the Royal Navy. Within three months the act had been altered and now extended to apply to those men who were married. By 1918 the Military Service Act now applied to men aged 18 - 51.

Before the Military Service Act came into law there had been demands from pacifist organisations, such as the No-Conscription Fellowship which was founded in 1914 and campaigned that there should be an exemption clause to enable those whose beliefs on moral or religious grounds to be exempted from military service. A clause was put into place and posters were displayed that advertised that you could apply by 2nd March 1916 to have your case heard by a Military Service tribunal.

The government recognised three categories of men who conscientiously objected, 'Absolutists' men who were opposed to war and did not wish to take

part in any activity that may in some regard aid the war effort. 'Alternativists,' men who were willing to work but not under military control and 'Non-Combatants,' men who were willing to join the army but would not bear arms against another. It was this category to which Harold Southerden belonged.

Three thousand and four hundred men accepted a call up into the Non-Combatant Corps or the Royal Army Medical Corps. The Non-Combatant Corps was set up in March 1916 and was part of the army. The C.O.s were ranked as army privates, wore army uniforms and were subject to army discipline. They did not carry weapons. Their duties mostly focused on labouring work, including building, loading and unloading but not handling munitions. The press called the Corps the 'No Courage Corps' or the Royal Army Medical Corps. Those who were sent by tribunal to the Non-Combatant Corps and refused to wear the army uniform were subject to army court-martial. Some 5,970 C. O.s were court-martialled and sent to prison, usually sentenced to hard labour. The last C.O. was released from prison in 1919.

Those, like Harold, who joined the RAMC, agreed to face the dangers of war, but were vehemently opposed to carrying a weapon. They were in the frontline as the opening of this poem 'The RAMC,' by Cpl W. Atkins of the A. Coy, 1/8th Worcs published in 'The Southern Cross' in 1917 testifies to:

We carry no rifle, bayonet nor bomb,
But follow behind in the rear
Of the steel fringed line that surges along
With a ringing British cheer.
Through the tangled wire of the blown-in trench,
Spite of shrapnel or bursting shell,
We make for the spots-Khaki-clad helpless blots-
That mark where our front rank fell.
We are the men who carry them back,
The wounded, the dying and dead.
It's "Halt!" "Dressing here" - "Come, buck-up, old dear."
You're all right for "Blighty" so be good of good cheer -
Turn him gently, now bandage his head."
The "stretcher-bearers" doing their bit,
Of V. C.s not many they score,
Yet are earned every day in a quiet sort of way
By the "Royal Army Medical Corps."

The RAMC lost 470 Officers and 3,669 other ranks were killed in action or died of wounds in the First World War. During the war their men were awarded many medals for valour including 3,002 Military Medals, 395 Distinguished Conduct Medals, 1,484 Military Crosses, 499 Distinguished Conduct Medals and seven Victoria Crosses.

The popular press dubbed the C.O.s as cowardly. Pressure was placed on men to join up and those who did not were seen as being outside of society. This pressure was not just enforced by the eyes and pointing finger of Lord Kitchener on the recruiting posters. The Order of the White Feather was established in the United Kingdom to present men in the street with white feathers as a symbol of cowardice. Baroness Orczy (who wrote the Scarlet Pimpernel) took this act a step further and established a Women of England's Active Service League. The membership of this league gave a solemn pledge never to be seen in public with a man who had refused to fight. The Government were eventually forced to issue men who were working on war work on the home front a badge to show that they were indeed doing their bit.

Those who chose not to take up arms but agreed to join the RAMC were anything but cowardly. Conscientious Objectors featured in the RAMC roll of honour. Like Harold Southerden they saw their role as saving lives and thought nothing of putting their own lives at risk to achieve this. Ernest Gregory of the 1/3 West Riding Field Ambulance was one of the recipients of the 3,002 Military medals won by the RAMC during the war. He served as a stretcher bearer and won his medal at Passchendaele. This was for bravery in the field for bringing in the wounded while under fire and wading up to his armpits in shell holes full of mud. A photo of Gregory shows him posing in his uniform, his belt is of an unusual military design, it has no ammunition pouches. His Conscience would not allow him to carry any. Like Harold Southerden he was a conscientious objector.

Gary Haines is an archivist by profession, and has worked with a diverse range of organisations from The Mercers' Company to the Whitechapel Gallery. He is also a researcher and writer, both fiction and non-fiction. He has had two books published on the history of the East End, the place of his birth, *Images of London: Bethnal Green*, The History Press, 2002 and *Bow & Bromley-By-Bow*, The History Press, 2008 and is a regular contributor to the East London History Society newsletter and has also been published in *Stand To! The Journal of the*

Western Front Association. Gary has a great passion for learning and for telling the stories of those whose history is never told. He is now into the second year of his PhD with the History of Art and Screen Media Department at Birkbeck College. The subject of his research is 'The Visual and Cultural Representation of the Sightless British Soldier, 1915 -1939'. He has a long association with Blind Veterans UK and worked in 2008 as a Collections & Archives Assistant. Gary recently gave a paper at the 'Commemorating the Disabled Soldier' at an international conference held in Ypres and a journal article based on this talk will be published by the *Journal of Great War Studies* in 2014.



Picture: Harold Southerden in the uniform of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the First World War.

Sikh soldiers and the First World War – a history to be told.

Sikh soldiers made a major contribution to the allied First World War effort but this fact has often been overlooked. Thanks to a grant of almost £450,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to the United Kingdom Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA) the First World War Centenary commemorations will see this untold story revealed in a number of fascinating ways over a three year period.

London based United Kingdom Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA) and its volunteers will be combing regimental histories, official dispatches, correspondence and war grave records among other sources to create a detailed picture of the Sikh involvement in the conflict. Crucially they will combine these materials with family recollections and personal memorabilia from Sikhs living in the UK to create as comprehensive a picture as possible of the lives of those who fought, as well as of those who they left behind.

Although accounting for just 2% of the population of British India at the time, the Sikhs made up more than 20% of the British Indian Army at the outbreak of hostilities. By the end of the war around 130,000 Sikhs saw active service. They fought on most of the war's major fronts, from the Somme to Gallipoli, and across Africa and the Middle East, Sikhs fought alongside their British and Indian counterparts to serve the greater good.

Wesley Kerr, Chairman HLF Committee for London, said: "The First World War was a seminal event in modern history, touching every continent and involving millions of civilians and soldiers throughout the British Empire. The 130,000 Sikhs who served on various fronts, taking heavy casualties, played a crucial role. The Heritage Lottery Fund is very pleased to support this fascinating, landmark project which will enlist citizen historians to chronicle the past and bring to life powerful, important stories for a new audience of today's Britons."

UKPHA Chair, Amandeep Madra, said: "UKPHA is delighted to have received Heritage Lottery Fund support for our ambitious project. Given the major commemorations that will be taking place nationwide in 2014, this seemed like the appropriate time for the Sikh contribution to be recognised in a fitting way. The role of Sikhs in the Great War is a largely unknown but

fascinating part of the story of the Allied war effort and indeed 'the British story'. UKPHA looks forward to revealing the untold stories of these soldiers and, just as importantly, the families they left behind, and we will be calling on people from all backgrounds to help us in doing so."

For the UKPHA project a major emphasis will be placed on involving younger people and on involving Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike to explore this remarkable story. This will include the provision of structured learning and volunteering opportunities, offering new skills training and chances to work with professional institutions and experts. The project will run for three years from 2014 to 2016. Similarly the project database — linked to the Imperial War Museum's own Lives of the First World War site — will ensure that there is a lasting legacy for the individual stories of Sikh combatants and those they left behind. The open access site will enable for the first time these memories and memorabilia to be collated and made accessible for families, the community, historians and researchers alike. Members of the public will be encouraged to undertake their own research into their and others' family histories to help create the database, the commemorative publication and exhibition materials.

The Sikhs, once fierce adversaries of the British during the two bitterly contested Anglo-Sikh Wars in the Punjab during the mid 19th century, played a disproportionately large role, given their numbers, as part of the British Empire forces in the First World War. They went on to have a major impact in terms of campaigns fought, medals and commendations won and the widespread respect and reputation they gained as fighters.

Sandeep Singh Brar, SikhMuseum.com Curator, said: "Leaving their homeland, the Punjab, Sikhs joined the British Army to fight and help Britain, something they did out of honour and loyalty. They knew that their martial bravery would aid the British Army. The Sikhs contribution to the war helped the British Army to defeat the German army and defend Britain.

"Sikhs were allowed to use traditional Sikh weapons such as chakrams and talwar swords, and it was not uncommon to see the Sikh holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, being carried before a marching Sikh battalion or even on the front lines among the battling Sikh troops. In the first battle of Ypres at Flanders in 1914 a platoon of Dogra Sikhs died fighting to the last man, who shot himself with his last cartridge rather than surrender. After the bloody battle of Neuve Chapelle in 1915 the Sikh regiments had lost 80% of their men, three regiments stood at only 16% of their original complement. In the ill-fated Gallipoli

Campaign in 1916 the 14th Sikh Regiment sustained very heavy casualties. Their commanding officer General Ian Hamilton wrote of them after the battle: 'Their devotion to duty and their splendid loyalty to their orders and to their leaders make a record their nation should look upon with pride for many generations.'

Lt. General Sir James Wilcox, Commander of the Indian Corps wrote: 'It was the dark days of 1914 when our men had to face mortars, hand grenades, high explosive shells for which they themselves were not provided. They could reply only with their valour, their rifles and two machine guns per batallion. And yet they did it.'

A letter home that was witten by a Sikh soldier sent during the First World War read: 'Thousands and hundreds of thousands of soldiers have lost their lives. If you go on the field of battle you will see corpses piled upon corpses, so that there is no place to put hand or foot. Men have died from the stench. No one has any hope of survival, for back to Punjab will go only those who have lost a leg or an arm or an eye. The whole world has been brought to destruction. (Source www.sikhs.org/WWI).



Picture: Men of the 15th Sikh Regiment spend time with the locals in a Flanders village after spending weeks in the trenches of the Western Front, circa 1915. (Source: UKPHA Archive).

We would like to thank Harbakhsh Grewal of The UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA) for his contribution to this article and photographs. The UKPHA was founded in 2001 to foster a greater appreciation of Punjabi and Sikh heritage in Britain and encourage the preservation of endangered items of Punjabi material heritage. Website: www.ukpha.org

We would also like to thank Sandeep Singh Brar, SikhMuseum.com Curator for his input into this article as he allowed us to use information from their website. The website is at www.sikhmuseum.com and www.Sikhs.org/WWI

Harbakhsh Grewal, Marketing & Communications at UKPHA, said: "Interestingly the opulent and rather fantastical surrounds of Brighton Pavilion served as a hospital for wounded Indians during the war. Perhaps Blind Veterans UK work would have included activity at this most impressive and surreal of war hospitals? For people who would like to find out more our exhibition 'Empire, Faith & War: The Sikhs & World War One' will run from 8th July to 28th September 2014 at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG."



Picture: A French lady pins a flower on the Sikh saviours of France, Paris. Postcard 1916. (Source: Toor Collection). Image kindly supplied by Harbakhsh Grewal of The UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA).

My Uncle Ted and his horses on the battlefields of WWI, by Ted Ellerton.

I had an Uncle Ted, Ted Oliver, who was my idol; he was responsible for the care of all the shire horses that were used by the carters at J Arthur Rank's flour mill in the city of Kingston upon Hull.

When the horses finished work I often rode on one as my uncle took them back to the stables, and sometimes I stayed there with them. Whilst I sat with my uncle and the horses he would talk about his life with horses and once he talked about the terrible way that horses were treated in war.

One night I rode back on a cob with my uncle, as one of the mares was in labour and I spent the night in the stables as he nursed her. He spoke of the time when he was in charge of a gun carriage in action and they came under heavy shellfire in deep mud. He said how he tried to get the crippled horse out of its harness in order to keep the gun team moving forward.

He would relive those terrible times as he comforted the horses in the stable. He spoke of Ypres and the time when his gun team were blown up and that he recovered sometime later. He said that there was nothing living around him and until he was strong enough to return he had to hide for some days, living off old turnips that he found in the field.

He said that it was an odd feeling to be alive amongst the bodies of the men and the horses who had been killed. When he tried to stand he found he couldn't as he was so weak, but eventually he did return to his battalion and he was put to work again on the gun carriages. He had a good reputation working with gun carriages. After that night he never spoke to me again of the horrors he saw on the bloody battlefields of the First World War.

In World War I some 10 million fighting men were killed, almost 800,000 of them British.

A million horses were sent to France between 1914 and 1918. Only 62,000 returned.

Ted Ellerton lives in Dronfield in Derbyshire. He joined Blind Veterans UK in 2001.

The Soldier's Kiss by the Great War poet Henry Chappell.

Only a dying horse! Pull off the gear,
And slip the needless bit from frothing jaws,
Drag it aside there, leaving the roadway clear
The battery thunders on with scarce a pause.

Prone by the shell-swept highway there it lies
With quivering limbs, as fast the life tide fails,
Dark films are closing o'er the faithful eyes
That mutely plead for aid where none avails.

Onward the battery roll, but one there speeds,
Heedless of comrade's voice or bursting shell,
Back to the wounded friend who lonely bleeds
Beside the stony highway where it fell.

Only a dying horse! He swiftly kneels,
Lifts the limp head and hears the shivering sigh
Kisses his friend, While down his cheek there steals
Sweet pity's tear; 'Goodbye, Old Man, Goodbye.'

No honours wait him, Medal, Badge or Star,
Though scarce could war a kindlier deed unfold;
He bears within his breast, more precious far
Beyond the gifts of kings, a heart of gold.

Billy Baxter's War Horses.

Someone who is extremely knowledgeable about horses and the important role they take during war is Billy Baxter, the Rehabilitation & Training Liaison Officer at the Llandudno centre.

Billy began: "Reading about Ted Ellerton and his Uncle Ted brought back memories of riding on horses with my grandfather as a lad. For those of you who don't know my military background I served for 21 years in the Royal Horse Artillery. On graduating from the Junior Leader's Regiment in 1980 I was posted to the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery in London and I have some very fond memories of being there as a horse gunner. I trained with the horses as a mounted gunner and I was posted to F Sub Section, which are the black horses. Incidentally there are six sections of horses in a Field Battery for the horse artillery.

"The Kings Troop was formed by King George the sixth and the horse artillery earned their spurs mainly in and around Waterloo, but more importantly in World War One. The 13pdrs guns all saw service in WWI. We know of the horrors of World War as we have all read accounts and seen footage of soldiers going over the top, but thought must also be given to the animals who bravely served their human masters. These horses performed many tasks, but the ones that come to mind for me are the horses that pulled the guns.

"As a mounted gunner with the King's Troop I can say that everything is still done today as it was over 100 years ago, right down to the preparation of the equipment, the 13lb quick firing guns that the horses pull. Six horses pull the limber and the 13lb guns, which weigh close on to 1½ tonnes. The inside horses at the front are a stocky breed, they're called Wheelers.

"The horses that you'll see in the King's Troop that pull the guns are Irish Draft horses and they are what we call 'hogged'. If you look closely the manes are cut short, their tails bandaged, and their coats are closely clipped. This makes the maintenance and care of the horse a lot easier. It makes them easier to groom and wash down, but more importantly this is still because of the circumstances the horses faced on the Western Front. We've seen the pictures of horses at Passchendaele and the Somme in quagmires of mud, which stuck to the horses' coats and pulled them down. Having them hogged made it easier to wash them down, to take care of their hooves and legs and it stopped the harnesses from becoming stuck in their manes with the traces and the gear.

"The attrition of horses in World War One was immense, not just due to enemy action, the shells and gas and everything that the soldiers had to deal with, that the horses did too. Horses were susceptible to skin complaints and the maintenance of a horse was of paramount importance.

"The horses pulled the guns quickly and swiftly across the battlefield and in a lot of cases they were worth their weight in pure gold because they could pull large weights over very rough conditions. You must remember that mechanised vehicles were in their infancy and they were prone to getting bogged in or breaking down. Even the tanks ground to a halt in certain conditions, but the horses would persevere and get through. They were a valuable commodity to the army to transport not only the guns, but also the supply trains in and around the Western Front.

"The poem *The Soldier's Kiss* by Henry Chappell that followed Ted's account triggered an image of a photograph that has pride of place on my dining room wall. There are two pictures there, one a sepia photograph and one a print of a painting by a war artist of a fatally wounded horse that is being cradled by a gunner holding the harness and saying quite simply 'Goodbye old man.'

"This print of *Goodbye Old Man* was immortalised by Henry Chappell's poem. His use of language is very powerful as he describes to the reader the horrors soldier and horse endured. It conveys the sense of compassion and the love a soldier has for their charges. In the background, behind the gunner and horse you can see down a stony road and shells exploding in the fields and the Battery galloping to safer ground. In the mid distance is a soldier shouting to the gunner — and you can just imagine him shouting — 'Get a move on! Get out of there! We've got to get out!' But the gunner's bravery succumbs to the danger as he says goodbye to his beloved horse.

"The painting was commissioned by the Blue Cross in 1916 to raise money to help horses on active service. The artist is Fortunino Matania and it is one of his most famous war-time illustrations. Now I'm getting to my point which is very, very unusual. You couldn't actually invent this story.

"On my dining room wall, to the right of the print of *Goodbye Old Man*, is a sepia photograph of a young man on a horse that's hogged. It is an artillery horse that will go on the ships as part of the British Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium. That boy was William Spooner. His name might not ring a bell with you, but he was my wife Karen's great grandfather.

"I first saw the photograph when I was courting Karen and we went to her grandmother's house to meet the family. I remember asking her grandmother Olive: 'Who's the gentleman on the horse madam? I believe he was in the Royal Horse Artillery.' She said 'Indeed he was. He was my father William Spooner. He was on that horse when he was 15 years old as he lied about his age and broke his mother's heart when he enlisted for the big adventure in World War One.'

"William Spooner survived the war and died in Norfolk at the age of 72. I did some digging around and told Karen's grandmother that I had Served in the same Regiment as William, I was in E Battery and William was in B Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. I looked at the Battery records whilst I was in the Regiment and I saw the war diaries and in them, clearly written down in the old copper plate writing were the names of the drivers and the men and the detachments that made up the gun team of the six guns in B Battery.

"In the records for B Sub, B Battery, Royal Horse Artillery the driver was a W.M. Spooner. He was reprimanded and disciplined on numerous occasions for not leaving his mortally wounded charges. I like to think that the war artist's picture might be of William Spooner, as he's shouted at by his Section Sergeant, with this magnificent image captured in Goodbye Old Man.

"Heavy horses were sought after, the Shires, the Clydesdale, the Suffolk Punch, the Cleveland Bay and the Percherons, but mainly the Shires, the Suffolk Punch and the Clydesdales, as those breeds were used to transport the larger carriages. The attrition of these horses was quite incredible and they were on the endangered list and today there are less Clydesdale's on the earth than pandas, but they're making a slow comeback through the care and love of breeders. Thanks to Sally Anne Oultram, who does so much for the survival of rare breeds I befriended a Clydesdale called Ted, Ted Clydesdale, and I ride him at shows.

"The beginning of my rehabilitation with Blind Veterans UK goes back over 13 years to 2000. You've heard my story of how I lost my sight and it was horses that were part of the healing of me.

"If I can take you back to the day that I lost my sight when I woke up and couldn't see my wife Karen in bed beside me, my Army horse Mavis, an Irish Draft horse that was part of the King's Troop at our Regimental lines in Tidworth died. I rode her regularly when I was Provost Sergeant and she was sadly killed the same day I lost my sight. Mavis was kicked in the chest by a polo pony and

her lungs collapsed. According to the vet she died bravely as she looked at him as though she knew that she didn't have long left on this earth. She just looked at him as though she was saying 'for God sake get on with it' and she died bravely. I know that for a fact as I spoke with the veterinary officer who despatched her. I was more concerned about Mavis being killed than losing my sight.

"I was introduced to a horse when I first went to the Brighton centre as part of my rehabilitation. I went to Rottingdean and they threw me on the back of a horse and it was there, riding that horse totally blind that I started to learn about trust and about rebuilding my self confidence. For me the hardest of the three As was acceptance, and riding the horse was part of the rehabilitation and the start to accepting that I was blind and I had to start to build a new life, a life that was different from the one I knew. I owe it to a horse. I mentioned earlier Ted Clydesdale, he knew that I was blind and I put my trust in that horse that weighs close on to a tonne and is 18 hands. Horses are incredibly important to me and to this day at any opportunity I throw my leg over a horse as I just love the freedom and the trust and the feeling of riding. Apparently I ride better now that I'm blind than I did when I could see, purely because I have to trust the animal and feel what it's doing. Long may they remain as part of our military heritage and serve us long and proud for many years to come."



Picture: Billy Baxter holds the gun carriage wheel in a Royal Artillery re-enactment of the first artillery guns fired in WWI as Gunners Put the Clock Back.

One of the Big Pushes, by 19715 L/Cpl H V Burdett, King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

T'was on the eighth of April
Eighty yards beneath the soil
The Shropshires were there in billets
Awaiting their country's call

The Chaplain ordered service
Just voluntary in Blenheim Cave
Meaning to do his utmost
For there were many souls to save

But after tea was over
A soldier's meagre meal
A few they started singing hymns
And others joined with zeal

They still came round in numbers
And soon we had a throng
Then came the time for service
But the Chaplain joined in song

Of course there was no service
But the Chaplain was not vexed
For he knew the boys were trying
To give the Lord their best

The service ended in a prayer
And the boys were full of joy
Although they knew the next day
Many a mother would lose her boy

And on the 9th of April
O'er the top we had to go
But no one man did murmur
For they had to face the foe

But during operations
Quite a few good men we lost

But the boys were bent on business
And the Russians paid the cost

They talk of Gallipoli
And the famous Suvla Bay
But none could show more courage
Than the Shropshire's on that day

And when we reached the wire
Not a strand of it was smashed
But the boys got through it somehow
And took the trench with a dash

Once more we gain some credit
In History's greatest War
But roll on time when we shall sit
In peace and happiness once more

To think of what we go through
And the 'Objectors' still object
I am afraid Tommy and Jack will grumble
And what else can you expect?

The poem was given to us by Blind Veterans UK member Jeffrey Burdett, as it was written in 1916 by his late father Herbert, who wrote it in Belgium while on relief from the trenches of Ypres. Like so many poems of the time it lay undiscovered for years until the passing of Herbert and then his wife Alice. When it was discovered the paper had yellowed with age.

Jeffrey said: "Like so many men my father never spoke of his time in the trenches and we knew nothing of the poem until the death of my mother when we had to clear my parents' house. I know that my father had been gassed in Ypres and that he also sustained a stomach wound and lost the ring finger on his left hand. Reading the poem I felt I understood my father's experiences a little better and that I understood my father better."

Jeffrey, who is from Derby, joined Blind Veterans UK in 2007. He values the training he received at the Sheffield centre, which helped restore his confidence. He also values such equipment as a scanner and magnifiers. He and his wife Mary took their first holiday in five years when they stayed at the Brighton centre. They are impressed with the kindness of all the staff they meet.

Writer Sarah Phelps tells the Review about her new WWI BBC drama, *The Ark* (working title). By Catherine Goodier.

The BBC has commissioned more than 2,500 hours of programming to mark the centenary of World War I. The coverage will start in early 2014 and will run through to 2018 on BBC TV, radio and online across international, national and local services.

The drama that will launch the BBC's centenary programming is *The Ark* (working title), by writer Sarah Phelps. Screening on BBC1 from February, it tells the story of women of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VADs) and military nurses in war time France from 1915. The *Ark*'s high-profile cast is headed by Oona Chaplin (*The Hour*), Hermione Norris (*Spooks*, *Cold Feet*), Suranne Jones (*Scott And Bailey*), Kevin Doyle (*Downton Abbey*), Kerry Fox (*Shallow Grave*, *An Angel At My Table*) and Marianne Oldham (*WPC 56*).

We bring you an interview with Sarah Phelps.

Review: What was the origin for *The Ark*?

Sarah Phelps: We were filming [the 2011 BBC adaptation of] *Great Expectations* and we were coming to the end of the shoot. The people I'd been working with asked me to read *The Roses of No Man's Land* by Lyn MacDonald, who is a historian. It was a history of the nurses, both military and volunteers [VADs] during WWI. I read it and found it captivating. It was part of a World War One that I didn't know about, one I'd never really heard about. I started reading a lot of histories about the First World War coming at it from loads of different directions.

The BBC was very keen to have a drama that launched the centenary of the Great War. I perhaps came at it from a slightly different angle. The vision of the war is of the trenches and young men in the trenches and we wanted to have something that gave a different experience - one that gave a women's experience, as well as to get those women and men to tell a story of what England was, what Britain was then and the changes everyone was going through. It became really exciting.

I didn't know about the Voluntary Aid Detachment. I know that sounds fearfully ignorant, but I had no idea that women in Britain had volunteered in absolute droves to go all over the world nursing men with just a few months training under their belts. They were catapulted into this extraordinary situation where

the whole idea of what a man is and what a man should be and what a woman is and what a woman should be was absolutely flipped on its head by what the war did to them.

Review: Did the series' characters come to life quickly?

Sarah Phelps: The characters did kind of spring to life immediately. I wanted them to tell a story about England as well. A lot of the young VADs were from well to do backgrounds, which they had to be as it was voluntary and they didn't have an income. I wanted to create variety in the characters, so that you could tell different kinds of stories about their lives so they weren't all just upper middle class and a bit posh, as a way to put variety into their lives about where they have come from and what their lives would have been.

So one is very young and has lied about her age so that she can go and be a VAD and do her bit for the brave boys. One is that bit older and is already considered on the shelf and a failure as a woman because she has failed to get married and to have children, which is what she's been trained for. And one of them comes from quite a dark background and the big story is being told through her eyes as it were.

There's an orderly who's quite a rough lad and surgeons who come from different backgrounds and different places. And there is my civilian nurse and her story is a big part of the first series and my two military nurses, both of whom are utterly professional and utterly wedded to the job, which of course they had to be. Military nurses weren't allowed to marry at this point. They were as dedicated as a nun. They made a promise, they made a pledge. You didn't marry. You gave your life to the service of nursing. We have those two women, a senior nurse and a Matron who has just been given the job as Matron to run the hospital.

Review: Did you feel protective of your characters as you put them through hell?

Sarah Phelps: Well, they do go through hell but at the same time World War One is almost the moment when the 20th century really begins. Medicine and surgery make an incredible leap forward. When you read about what was available to the surgeons and the doctors and the nurses in 1914, it's stunning that actually anybody survived the onslaught of heavy industrial warfare. They didn't have blood transfusions; pain relief was pretty blunt, just morphine or variants of morphine. In terms of using anaesthesia, there are awful descriptions

of men having to be held down when they're being given chloroform because they hated going under so much and sometimes operations would be performed while patients were awake with a kind of local anaesthetic. But by the end of the war plastic surgery has begun. By the end of the war they've found a way to store blood for blood transfusion by using citrate and it makes this huge leap during those four years.

It's also a time when something has re-evaluated in the way that men would be understood and women would be understood. They would be different forever after these four years. Something really radical changed and we also gained an understanding of what happened to the mind under extreme duress.

It was hell and it was terror. In a lot of my reading there would be terrible, terrible shocking things like barbarity and terror and cruelty, and yet at the same time you hear the most extraordinary descriptions of singular acts of courage and bravery and shining humanity which absolutely takes your breath away, which reminds you what this war is about. It is the very, very worst that we are capable of and the most beautiful, shining and extraordinary best, sometimes at the same time, at the same moment, in the same few feet of trench.

We begin in 1915 when the first wave of VADs went to France. Up until that point there had been a handful of military nurses in the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps who were struggling to cope. Then this influx of civilian nurses and civilian girls of voluntary nurses came in and it was a huge culture clash as well, which is really fascinating. Obviously it changed as the war went on. In the first instance as I understand it from my research the guidelines to be a VAD was that she had to be over the age of 23 and she had to be unmarried. That meant that for a lot of these women their experience of men may well have been of fathers, or brothers, or the odd beau, the odd sweetheart. Certainly not men in absolute desperate dire straits of anguish, of unbelievable pain, of terror and of general nakedness.

They lived in tents in the most extraordinary weather conditions in the depths of winter. And they really stepped up and nursed men in absolute extremis. There were two sisters whose diaries I read and their training seemed to basically consist of knitting balaclavas and learning how to roll bandages. Then they were suddenly thrust right into the eye of the storm as it were, but they just rolled up their sleeves and they got on with it. And it astonishes me as well about the extremes of what they witnessed. They gave descriptions of terrible

head injuries for which they could do absolutely nothing of course. And terrible gas injuries, which lead to men drowning in their own lungs. And these young women and the military nurses sat by their beds and kept them company. And were there. It just astonishes me.

Review: From your research what was the powerful image that stayed with you?

Sarah Phelps: There was the most incredible, the most wonderful image, which I've built into the second episode, which is the sound that a fork made on the edge of a bowl as a young VAD whisks up egg white in a dark ward to do the two hourly feeding of a young man with absolutely the most appalling facial and head injuries possible. They gave the egg flip to men who'd had jaws shot away. It's just a beautiful description of the tsk, tsk, tsk of the fork on the edge of the bowl as this young woman stands there in this dark ward as she tries to spoon just enough protein down a young man's throat in a desperate hope of keeping him alive.

Review: Did you have family members who were involved in WWI?

Sarah Phelps: Some of the stories that have gone into *The Ark* are stories from my own family background. My great uncle Hubie was gassed when he was in *The Artist's Rifles*. He was trained by Henry Tonks, who went on to develop the tin noses shop. I had my great uncle's experiences at Dunkirk. I had my grandfather's experience going from Normandy, pretty much to the gates of Belsen during the Second World War. I've drawn on aspects of their characters for some of the men. And I've drawn on my grandmother and great-aunt's for aspects of the characters and the back stories of the VADs and nurses.

Review: Is there part of you in any of the characters?

Sarah Phelps: They're all a little bit me to be honest. I have one character who at 6 o'clock says I will have a cocktail. That got to look like an act of courage to me. I don't care what's being chucked at us. I don't care what's happening I will have a cocktail and it will have an olive in it and I will stay smiling and I will stay happy because I refuse to be cast down. I think because they're my people they all have a certain quality of me in them, but in the main I've just made them all up.

Review: How does it feel that *The Ark* will launch the BBC centenary programming?

Sarah Phelps: It feels absolutely terrifying! You just really, really hope that as a writer you've done it justice and you can tell a really epic story, because it is an epic story. While the war is going on and while these poor men are flooding down from the front with terrible injuries and terrible mental and emotional and psychological anguish, they are, at the same time, grabbing at life to live every minute that they can. In all my research, what really came across very strongly was the feeling that you live very, very intensely during a time of war. It would seem rude and churlish to not live intensely while all around you people are suffering and dying. I wanted to show the cheek and the optimism because what comes across is that Tommy irreverence and that cheek and that optimism and a kind of wisdom and generosity. And that incredible thing about the very best that humanity can offer each other — like great bravery, great personal sacrifice and then people shrugging it off and going 'oh well it's nothing.' I hope all that really comes across in the series.

The Ark (working title) will be screened on BBC1 from February 2014. We would like to thank Sarah Phelps for speaking with us and Ruth Neugebauer of the BBC drama team for arranging this interview.



Picture: Hermione Norris and Kerry Fox in Sarah Phelps's drama *The Ark*, which will launch the BBC's First World War programme schedule in 2014.

The Rose of No Man's Land, by William McLean, published in the July 1920 Review.

There's a Rose that grows in No-Man's Land
And it's wonderful to see,
Though it's sprayed with tears, it will live for years in my Garden of Memory.
'Tis the one red Rose the Soldier knows
'Tis the work of the Master's Hand,
Midst the War's Great Curse Stood the Red Cross Nurse:
She's The Rose of No-Man's Land.

I wonder how many of us ever think how true those words are? I was standing on the ground where one of the greatest battles of England was fought some years ago, and as the scent of the Rose came to me, my mind travelled back to when we were in France. We were advancing, and the Hun was well ahead of us. There were streams of villagers coming along the road, glad to be free from the Hun, and amongst these was a young woman, carrying a large bundle on one arm, and in her other hand she carried a small book. She sat down to rest, and we got into conversation with her, and she showed us a small rose that she had in the book. She had kept this since the beginning of the War. It was given to her by a sister who had gone to nurse the French soldiers, and who had not been seen or heard of since. It was not until I stood on this old battleground that I recalled this incident, and then I thought of these words. "The Rose of No Man's Land." I thought then of this Nurse — perhaps in an unknown grave in what was once known as No Man's Land, and this brings the words of another song to my mind: "For You a Rose — For Me there's just a Memory."

And I wonder to how many other people today, especially soldiers, these words would convey the same meaning. It is only those who were wounded who know what it was to hear the soft voice of the Sister who dressed his wounds and cared for him during his days of sickness and pain. The soldier received the loving care of "The Rose of No Man's Land" and for her — "There's just a Memory."

Today there are many of these roses who are loth to fade still giving their fragrant scent to us at Blind Veterans UK.

A Bombardier in the Royal Field Artillery, William McClean was blinded in the First World War when he came to Blind Veterans UK. The roses he referred to at Blind Veterans UK were of course the VADs and nurses at Regent's Park.



Picture: The First World War men dance with the VADs and nurses at our Regent's Park centre.



Picture: VADs and men on a seesaw in the grounds of Regent's Park.

Angus Buchanan - First World War Blind Veteran who was Awarded the VC.

On November 8th 1917, Captain Angus Buchanan was decorated by King George V at a special investiture in Durdham Down, Bristol, with the award of the Russian Order of St. Vladimir, 4th Class with Swords. In September 1916, the London Gazette carried the citation of the award of the Victoria Cross for his most conspicuous bravery during action at the Falaiyah Lines on April 5th 1916.

The citation read as follows: 'During an attack an Officer was lying out in the open severely wounded about 150 yards from cover. Two men went to his assistance and one of them was hit at once. Captain Buchanan, on seeing this, immediately went out and with the help of the other man, carried the wounded man to cover under heavy machine gun fire. He then returned and brought in the wounded man, again under heavy fire.'

Captain Buchanan was recalled to be the only holder of the Victoria Cross who was blinded during the Great War. He Served with the 4th Battalion South Wales Borderers and already in June 1916, by then a Lieutenant, was awarded the MC for his service in Gallipoli. During the same battle where his bravery earned him the VC, he was badly wounded later in the day, and was sent to India to recover. He soon returned to his battalion in Mesopotamia and was mentioned in Despatches for his gallantry in action.

On February 13th, 1917 he was wounded yet again, this time in the head, causing him to lose the sight of both eyes. He came to Blind Veterans UK on 20th November 1917 and learnt Braille and typewriting at our training centre in Regent's Park, passing Braille writing and reading tests and typewriting tests in 1918. He lived with other war blinded officers at the house in Portland Place, London. He returned to Jesus College, where he had obtained a scholarship prior to the war, to study law and obtain his degree. All the time he was at Oxford he actively took part in rowing for the college, an activity he had enjoyed at Regent's Park. He was then articled to an Oxford law firm and in February, 1929 was admitted as a solicitor, returning to Coleford to go into partnership. An active man, he enjoyed walking and fishing. He is reported to have made a habit of catching the first salmon of the season in the river Wye. He also became Chairman of the Forest of Dean Golf Club. Sadly, his health gradually deteriorated and Captain Buchanan, who never married, died on March 1st 1944 and is buried at Coleford Cemetery.

If Only by Revd. David T Youngson.

As the years go by childhood memories which, at the time meant very little, come into focus making one think of opportunities missed. The meeting of a long lost friend, unearthing of photos and cine film, revisiting of somewhere or an event of history relived in the media are areas which rekindle those childhood moments.

But what looms large in my ageing mind are a series of incidents concerning individuals which, at the time, appeared to have no connection with each other. Like pieces of a jigsaw they have come together, over the years, to give me a better understanding of a period of history which has occupied a lot of my life during the last thirty years.

As a young boy I went shopping with my Granny in Broughty Ferry where we lived. In the main street outside the entrance to the Occidental Bar there sat a pavement artist. I was fascinated to look at his work but also very curious as to why he had no legs. More often than not I was pulled away by Granny and scolded.

I was brought up by my Granny and Grandad, who was the Head Gardener of an estate, whilst my Dad was at war and my mother was doing voluntary work for the Church of Scotland Home Missions in Dundee. Once a week a couple would arrive in the early evening to play whist with my Grandparents. Playing with my toy soldiers in front of the fire I eavesdropped on their conversations and learnt that the man was the Chief Cashier at the Dundee West Railway Station. He was well built with a great sense of humour and when he laughed his face turned red and often bouts of coughing ensued. The lady was extremely kind and always brought some sweets for me.

Moving to England we found ourselves living next door to a large and very musical family. Learning that I had begun to play the violin the man took me in hand and his extra tuition certainly helped me to make rapid progress. He was a postman, tall and direct with a military bearing. I had a feeling at the time that there was much more to know about him.

At the Grammar school there was a Form Master who taught English and was very severe with errant youths, sparing no one from the cane. He had an artificial left leg. A Chemistry Master who we all loved was easily distracted and told stories about his war time experiences, creating a rush at the end of the

period to get some work done. Our Headmaster had a scarred left cheek and a glass eye, which distracted you from his kindly smiling and understanding face. Each of them had a story to tell but at the time I knew little of them to enquire. As the pieces came together in later years I realised just how much I had missed. They had all served in the First World War.

The Pavement Artist I mentioned earlier, lost his legs on the Somme, and earned a living creating pictures from sweet papers. I visited the kindly lady after the death of her husband. She confessed that they had always regarded me as the son they never had. He had been gassed during the First World War. The Postman who had a wonderful appreciation of music had served in the Guards throughout World War One having been a music hall musician prior to and after the war until the Depression. My lasting memory of him was his introducing me to the Max Bruch solo violin pieces. The Form Master with the artificial leg had also been involved in the conflict and was a stern and bitter person. Like the whist player the Headmaster and the Chemistry Master were married but they were childless.

As the years went by, I began to understand why the Chemistry Master had said that when urine was placed on a handkerchief and put over the face it was not a joke but a means of avoiding gas attacks in the trenches. In the Second World War he had been a Scientist working with munitions.

All had an individual story to tell and as a young man I didn't understand. As their lives began to unfold for me in later years, I realised that had I known more about them I would have appreciated who they were and what they had lived through. It would have helped me in my research of the subject which I have been engaged with for many years.

Perhaps however, like their fallen comrades they were silent being grateful for life, determined to live and encourage others to do so. As I continue my research I sometimes pause and say to myself, "If Only".

Rev David T Youngson joined Blind Veterans UK in 2000. He has researched the First World War for some thirty years and is the author of "Greater Love" which is a directory with notes of all Army Chaplains who made the Supreme Sacrifice. Greater Love has sold nearly three thousand copies. His interest in World War One also stemmed from research into his Great Uncle. Greater Love is published by Printability Publishing Ltd and retails at £13.75. ISBN number: 1872239536.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Joe French KCB, CBE of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) ensures that 1.7 million people who died in the two world wars of the 20th century will never be forgotten. It cares for cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. Its values and aims, laid out in 1917, are as relevant today as they were almost 100 years ago.

Blind Veterans UK Vice Patron, Air Chief Marshal Sir Joe French KCB, CBE who had a full career in the RAF for almost 40 years has been a Commissioner of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for more than five years. Here he speaks with the Review about the formation of the Commission.

"Fabian Ware was our founding father and we were formed as the Imperial War Graves Commission in May 1917, which followed on from the Graves Registration Unit. We became the Commonwealth War Graves Commission once independence was given to many of the Commonwealth countries in 1960. Fabian Ware was conscious that a lot of people had different views of how we should commemorate the war dead. Some people wanted them to be repatriated, but it became accepted practice that was not possible given the sheer scale of the number of men who were killed, and it was decided that they would be buried where they had perished.

"He then had to answer the question — 'How do you commemorate so many?' To that end he brought about a whole range of guiding principles. One principle was that regardless of rank and status there would be a common headstone as everyone was to be equal.

"He appointed Sir Frederic Kenyon, the Director of the British Museum to advise on architecture. Kenyon felt that if you did this by committee it wouldn't work and so each cemetery, or each monument, or memorial was given to a separate architect. He wanted to avoid families with money having grand headstones and those with no money having nothing. His vision was that the stones should be lined up as soldiers on parade. The neat ranks you see in the cemetery is to a degree a throwback to that. There are one or two personal memorials that got under the wire, but they are very few and far between, and tend to be in this country rather than in Belgium and France where we have much stronger control than we had in this country.

"Kenyon also had the view that those who are buried in the cemeteries should

face East. It was not the religious symbol of East, but for the First World War that is the way the soldiers were facing for the great majority of the war. Of course it didn't always quite work out that way.

"Depending on the size of the cemetery there is the Cross of Sacrifice, which has a sword in it. And the size of that varies on how many people are buried in the cemetery. The Cross of Sacrifice was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and is usually present in Commonwealth war cemeteries containing 40 or more graves.

"If you go to Tyne Cot Military Cemetery in Ypres the Cross of Sacrifice is on one of the three German bunkers that were there during the First World War. The Northumberland Fusiliers thought that the three bunkers looked like cottages from Tyne Side and that's how the cemetery got its name: Tyne Cot.

"There is also a Stone of Remembrance that was designed by the British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens that is in cemeteries that contain 1000 or more graves, or at memorial sites commemorating more than 1000 war dead. Hundreds were erected following World War I, and it has since been used in cemeteries containing the Commonwealth dead of World War II. It is intended to commemorate those 'of all faiths and none'. Reading the earlier article on Sikh soldiers we of course commemorate the Indian war dead.

"The words that are engraved on the Stone of Remembrance are: 'Their Name Liveth For Evermore'. Those words were chosen by Rudyard Kipling who lost his son John, who later became Jack in his poem 'My Boy Jack', who was an Irish Guardsman who died in the Battle of Loos in 1915.

"Lutyens worked a lot with Gertrude Jekyll who had a vision of an English country garden and that the cemeteries should be surrounded by a wall. Her vision still works today as you see that most of them have beautiful walls, each one different depending on where they are. There are also shelter buildings where people can sit. Gertrude Jekyll included trees or a hedge where there was a seat that she called a seat of consolation and you see a lot of people sitting there as they take time to console and sit in contemplative silence. Obviously gardening changes down the years, but the basic principles are abided by.

"On 4th August 2014, 'the day the lights dimmed over Europe', I will be at our cemetery in St Symphorien. It is a First World War cemetery that is two kilometres east of Mons in the Belgian province of Hainaut.

"St Symphorien was originally a German cemetery. The land was given by a local landowner and at the end of the war we took it on and it is a mixture of both Commonwealth and German graves. The event on 4th August will be a joint one with the German War Graves Commission, the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (VDK) as we work very closely with them in many of our cemeteries, although we look after the whole of St Symphorien Military Cemetery.

"St Symphorien is the final resting place of the first person believed to have been killed in WWI. He was Private John Parr, 4th Battalion, The Middlesex Regiment who was killed on 21st August 1914. It is also the final resting place of Private George Edwin Ellison, C Troop, 5th Royal Irish Lancers who is thought to be the last British soldier to be killed at 10.58am on 11th November 1918. Private George Lawrence Price, a Canadian, is also buried there. He is believed to be the last Commonwealth soldier to be killed, as he is said to have died at 10.59 on 11th November 1918. Lieutenant Maurice Dease VC, 4th Battalion, The Royal Fusiliers is also buried within the walls of St Symphorien Military Cemetery. He was posthumously awarded the VC for his actions on 23rd August 1914, at Mons, Belgium.

"It's a beautiful cemetery as you'd expect. There's just so much there that shows co-operation between the British and Germans and that there was still respect even in death. The fact that the Germans buried our people there and we now look after their graves I think shows that we can forget the troubles."

When asked what he thinks of as he stands among the graves in the Commonwealth Cemeteries Sir Joe answered: "It's mixed feelings and mixed emotions. From the Commission's point of view it's that we are meeting our charter of a fit Remembrance for all those who lost their lives in two World Wars. We're coming up to our centenary and the 100th year since the start of the First World War and I think how we are still fulfilling our contract to honour and respect the dead.

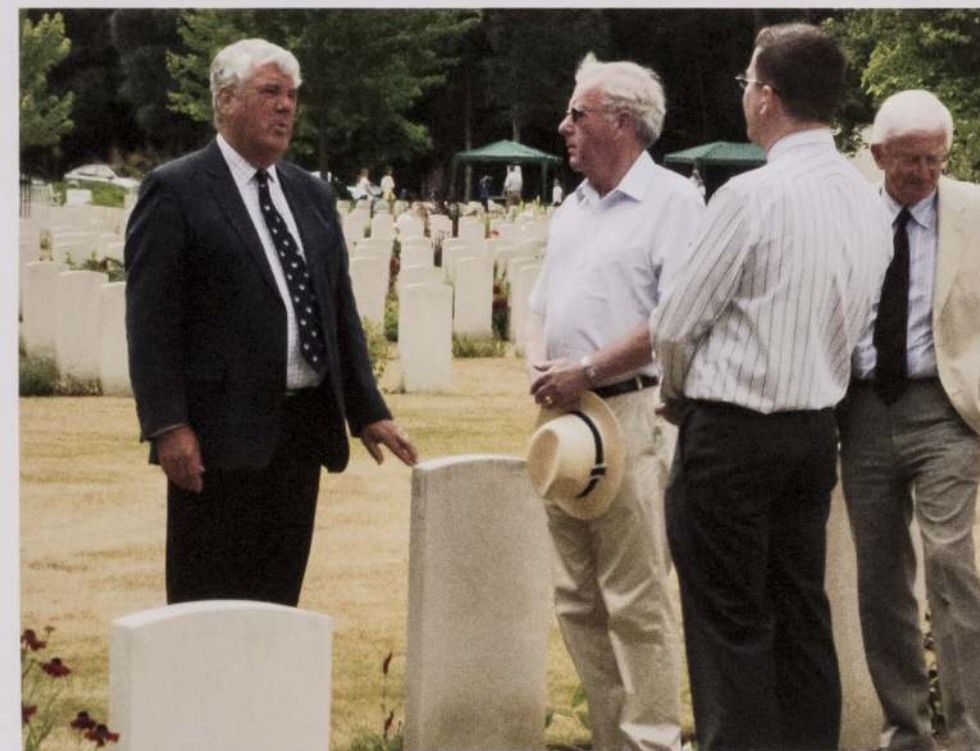
"If you think of St Symphorien from the four and a quarter years from the first man dying to the last man, a million people from the Commonwealth died in that period. I think you've got to wonder about war, almost the futility of it. I always have very mixed emotions. I get a great deal of satisfaction from looking at the visitors' book in each of the larger cemeteries. We visited one in Normandy in October 2013 where there's quite a large German plot and there was a lady who had visited her father's grave for the first time. She was with

her family and there was a moving entry in the book about how beautiful the cemetery was and how happy she was to have seen it.

"We opened a new cemetery in Fromelles in July 2010 for the missing soldiers from the Battle of Fromelles. The Battle was fought in July 1916 and for the Australians it was their largest loss of life in a single day. They lost over 5,000 people in a single day. A historian was worried that enough bodies hadn't been found and he worried about this for many, many years. Eventually they took soil samples in an area near Fromelles and found human remains. With aerial photographs and imagery they worked up where they thought they would be and they unearthed the bodies of 250 men.

"We had no names for the men, but DNA was taken and over 130 men have now been identified. We went as Commissioners to see the last two bodies coming out of their resting place where they had lain for the more than 90 years. When we went to the opening ceremony there wasn't a dry eye, as families of the men who had been identified read letters out from relatives and it was a most moving event. The fact we'd been able to identify so many of the men means that we've gone from 'Known to God,' as more than half of them now have their names on their headstones."

If you would like to trace a relative through the CWGC or read of their work and events, the website is at: www.cwgc.org



Picture: Sir Joe French KCB, CBE (left) at VC Brookwood.



**Picture: A soldier on the Somme, by Derek O'Rourke.
Website: www.blindpainter.co.uk**

