



THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association
with the CWGC



News from the Front line

Summer 2009

This second quarter feels like it has been a bit non-stop in the Rogers household with the Photographic tour to France, where the combined TWGPP team managed approx 60,000. This was followed just a week later with a trip to Cairo during which all those graves from there and Alexandria were completed adding a further 17900 to total held.

Around the world we have been getting more assistance - in Africa from Staff at the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, as well as British Council, so inroads are being made on that continent. South America is coming on with Jeannie and Rolly pursuing the small numbers of cemeteries but still very much needed. Europe is doing well, with Greece now considered complete, with continued help from Martin at CWGC. Derek reports France departments being snapped up. There are, of course, volunteers helping throughout the world and without whose assistance we would not exist so thank you all around.

Audits are being completed by Derek on UK counties and proving to be pretty much completed as we expected but these will be on going as time permits.

I have been getting involved in presentations to promote the project, utilising the presentational equipment that we have purchased from very kind donations, including those from AMSS Ltd who are now on our sponsor page and Dave Lovell who donated all of his 60th Birthday money! Did I mention 60? These presentations have gone down well and more are planned with U3A, Rotary club and Western Front Association, along with local history groups and villages researching their local memorials.

For those who have not noticed we have now added a Gallery page to the website where we will display any pictures sent in of general interest to the project cause. Included amongst



The new shirts get an airing in Dantzig Alley

these are the Project Team photo in Dantzig Alley in which the 'Uniform' looks quite smart. These shirts are now available via the link in the News and FAQ's page.

Other busy periods included ANZAC day and the 65th Anniversary of D Day in June, when we had many requests, as these anniversaries are brought to the public's attention via the media.

My desk at home is piled high with CD's, DVD's and Memory sticks so if your images have not gone up to site yet please be patient as I have to go to work as well ! Enjoy the Summer.

Steve

Re-internment - Problems in France by Trevor Sturgess



During your photo shoots many have commented on the condition of gravestones, predominantly in UK, where the families had chosen a personal memorial rather than the CWGC pattern stone. In many cases the families have now forgotten these stones which have fallen into disrepair but at least they are monitored by CWGC Inspectors and locations known. A recent article in a French newspaper sent in by Trevor Sturgess suggests that in France they have a problem which is hard to overcome. Apparently it was common for French families to go to a war cemetery soon after WW1 and actually remove the bodies to be re-interred in a local family plot.

No official records were taken so once reburied the location was unknown to the authorities although the family stone might have 'Mort Pour La France' inscribed on it. After all this time these stones have also fallen into disrepair so local councils have been digging the plots up and re-interring the remains (for a second time) into unknown plots with no indication of National sacrifice. Thousands of French war graves could be lost as a result. 'Souvenir Francaise', an organisation set up in 1887 to commemorate war dead, have decided that where possible re-interred remains in communal graves will have a single 'Mort Pour La France' headstone to address this. However, a few communes have objected to the remains being dug up and moved to a communal grave and even though they do not have the funds, or even want to maintain the graves in the local cemetery, they are preventing the relocation occurring!

Editorial – Pauline Pedersen

Attached you should find the Booking Form for this year's annual Get-Together to be held on **Saturday, 5th September**. The date is a little earlier than usual to allow for the mainly-outdoor venue: the **National Memorial Arboretum**, Alrewas, Staffordshire. Hopefully all the details you need are included on the booking form. Do try to join us as this is a very special place. On the occasion I took my then 84 year old godmother to the NMA the sculptor was putting the finishing touches to his ATS creation. "He has the hat just right", she exclaimed, having been an ATS girl. I went across to pass on the comment to him whereby he promptly left his work and came to join us for a cup of tea and chat to my godmother. In the course of conversation we learnt that he was also responsible for the very poignant Shot at Dawn sculpture on site.

Without reaching for a dictionary, hands up those who know what Taphology is? I admit I didn't but apparently it means 'a love of cemeteries'. Adele Pentony-Graham belongs to the Carterton Cemetery Clareville Taphophile Group, New Zealand. She is an ex-Londoner but now 'a kiwi by choice'. Her interest is in the Featherston WWI Military Cemetery where over 150 soldiers are buried, many of whom died of influenza.

When she was home in 2004 and in Brockenhurst, quite by chance she met a member of the CWGC staff who, much to her surprise, had actually visited Featherston.

My Compact OED doesn't list the word 'taphology'; I had to Google it for an explanation. If any of you know differently I'm sure you'll be in touch! Maybe I should consider getting a new dictionary. Taphophiles or not, I hope you all have a great summer. Don't forget 5th September.



Arabian nights – Uppingham School

On 26 March 2009 a group of eight intrepid lower sixth formers from Uppingham School, accompanied by two Classics teachers, embarked on a nine day tour of Libya. The school tour was lead by Managing Director Amelia Stewart of Simoon Travel (www.simoontravel.com) who is currently developing educational tours in Libya after the inaugural school tour to Libya with Eton College in 2005. The tour started in Tripoli and travelled east to visit the sites of the Pentapolis - primarily Cyrene and Apollonia. Prior to the tour Amelia had decided that a visit to the Benghazi military cemetery to photograph each and every one of the war graves would not only help The War Graves Photographic Project but also be an invaluable experience for the students. So on the return leg of the journey travelling from Susa back to Benghazi we stopped at the cemetery. Eager to make sure not a single grave was left out each student picked a row and quietly started to photograph the graves stopping to read each inscription.

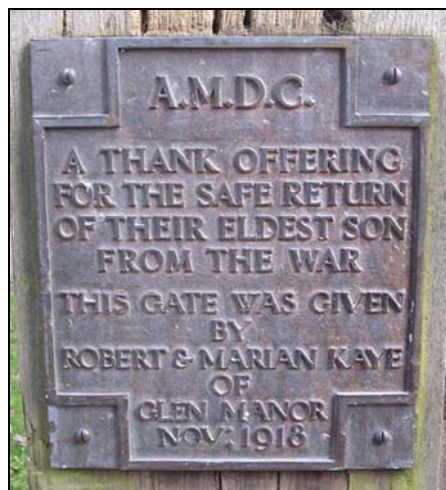


Someone asked if they should photograph those graves marked 'Unknown Soldier' and a unanimous vote decided that yes they must as no one wanted to leave any graves out. It was a humbling experience. One girl commented how difficult it was to keep bending down to take the photo time after time...and then quickly stopped embarrassed as she realised this was a ridiculously small price to pay in comparison to what those had paid before her. All felt satisfied upon leaving on having accomplished something that might hopefully be of help to TWGPP.

A Brother in Egypt

The picture on the right is of 81 year old Shelia who lives with her husband in Selby, Yorkshire.

She is holding the picture of her brother's head stone which Peter Gillings, a TWGPP volunteer, requested having chatted to Sheila in her home town of Selby. She last saw her brother when she was 11 yrs of age when he went off to war but was killed in Egypt in 1940. Sheila has never visited Egypt or seen the grave. Obviously she was 'delighted' that someone was caring enough to re unite her and her brother and was somewhat tearful at the result. Her brother was L/Sgt William Cooper 4451267 1st Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry, who died 6th September 1940 aged 22 yrs. Sheila and her family would like to thank everyone in the 'project' for making this possible.



One that came home

We normally look for graves or memorials that commemorate those who did not come home but this unusual memorial plaque was found on a church gate at Great Glenn by Margaret Richardson. For a change it commemorates someone that actually made it home and for which the family was obviously grateful.

Belfast City Cemetery – Michael McRitchie

Michael McRitchie and his wife have been working in Belfast City Cemetery in the heart of Belfast's most troubled area and neglected for 30 years because of the unrest raging around it.

This Project is easy, we thought, as my wife and I moved along the well-kept rows of simple headstones on a bright, cool October day. With 160 photographs checked off on our first day, I confidently emailed Steve that he'd have the completed CD before Christmas. Big mistake. Nine months later, plus a pair of working gloves, a saw blade and many scratches, I realised that the task of the volunteer is not as easy as it may seem.

I came relatively late to the Project after reading about it in a newspaper. By that time most of Northern Ireland had been completed, except for the 575 casualties in Belfast City Cemetery. For some reason nobody seemed keen to go there.

The City lies in the heart of Belfast's most troubled area and was neglected for some 30 years from the outbreak of civil unrest in 1969 as the Council had more important commitments such as trying to maintain essential services and clearing up after the countless bombings which began in 1971. During this time hundreds of monuments were smashed or stolen for barricades and the war headstones had to be removed for safe keeping.

Since the peace agreement the City Council has been restoring the cemetery and the war headstones have been replaced. Its workers are doing a great job. The cemetery, long closed to new burials, has become something of a public park and local people we have met are particularly pleased that the war graves are once again properly marked.

The first day was easy but we soon moved into older parts of the cemetery, with the distinctive CWGC stones dotted about at random and often screened by undergrowth or other monuments. I sent a plaintive email to Steve asking if there was any method of covering these large cemeteries and his reply came back headed: Stout Shoes!

We did print another 22-page listing sorted by grave location. Combined with the alphabetical listing, this enabled us to work systematically through the sections and even to confirm that we were in the location we thought we were, as one overgrown section looks very like another. As an extra challenge the cemetery has the Glenalina extension which duplicates the alphabetical sections so you have M, M1, M2, Glen M, and Glen M1. You can guess what happens

As we progressed grave location became steadily more difficult. We were particularly pleased with finds such as P191 which was discovered only because of P190, a CWGC headstone for Chief Boots Charles Jeffers of the Belfast-built SS Celtic. Alongside was a solid block of ivy-clad undergrowth which appeared to cover a room-size Victorian tomb. When I pulled back some of the ivy, which was as thick as my arm, we could make out the word 'duty' on a stone beneath. Next day we returned with appropriate gear and 20 minutes' hard cutting exposed a fine memorial erected by White Star Line to the stokers who had been killed when the ship was torpedoed. The stone had been tipped back by vandals to rest on a tree growing from the grave behind it and ivy had covered the lot.

It was the first of many graves which we cleared, bringing a caution from Steve that many councils in England left undergrowth alone to encourage wildlife. I assured him that the council had itself started a major clearance, while the wildlife was either stoned out of its mind in section G1, or offering cheerful if slurred greetings from its 'local' at the end of section M. The latter even put their empty wine bottles in the litter bin!

For light relief we took a week in the Western Isles, visiting 15 of the 18 cemeteries on Lewis and Harris. This was a moving experience which really brought home the terrible price paid by the Hebridean communities.

The CWGC was very interested in our Belfast work as its inspector was due to visit. We therefore noted all damaged or missing headstones and received an appreciative note for the CD of photographs and two-page report which we sent beforehand.

Belfast continued

The mild winter enabled us to work until mid-February, but then it became too cold and dull so we concentrated on the paperwork, itself almost as big a task as the photography. By then we had most of the photos taken, but almost 100 were still outstanding. A chance meeting with Eric Conn, the CWGC contractor for Ireland, gave the answer in that he used original records to produce a map with GPS locations of each grave. His hand-held receiver gives locations to within 30 metres.

My first step on starting the project had been to contact City Hall, where cemetery officer Maggie Tomlinson provided a cemetery map and assured me of every assistance in the Project. From the outset the council workers had made us welcome and on resuming work in the spring I met Maggie and her colleagues, Louise and Patrick, in the cemetery office.



Captain Douglas before....

With access to the records I was able to plot our missing graves onto an enlarged map, together with grave numbers in each corner of the section concerned. As graves are 4ft 6ins wide we could then pace along two sides of the section to obtain a cross reference on the required location.

The City Cemetery office can be quite busy as the word is out and increasing numbers of people are visiting the cemetery. So when Patrick is busy with other visitors, the volunteer has the records in front of him and he's due to go that way anyway, why not take the visitor along to their relative's grave? Indeed, when you're hacking out a war headstone and wee Mrs McConnell comes up and asks you if you could please cut down the branches that are dripping green stuff over her husband's memorial it's impossible to refuse. After all, you're there as a volunteer ...

Access to the records solved some problems, such as the missing grave of Aircraftswoman Ivy Coleman who was buried in Y29 at the age of 23. We found Y29 all right, its number on the surround stone, but the name was Davidson. Patrick and I looked up the burial records to find that the Davidson grave is actually Y35 so you can't always trust a mason's numbering. We measured back to Y29 which was vandalised. A granite headstone face down some distance away matched the stone surround so groundsman Sean laid down his strimmer and we dragged the headstone back into place where he supported it while I took the photograph. We left it face up supported by a stone block.

The plots led me to other smashed-up graves but in most cases whole sections had been vandalised, with only a few bits of shattered stone among the faint grave depressions which are visible in the mown grass.



And after

At the end of our nine-month stint we were left with 55 missing headstones which I suppose isn't too bad considering the destruction of 30 years.

It's been a pleasure to work beside such an enthusiastic team who are doing a great job in sometimes difficult conditions and at last have something to show for it. My thanks to Maggie, Patrick and Louise.

Would I do it again? You bet I would. Next time we'll be prepared for the long haul. We shall be systematic from the outset; we'll have printouts sorted by grave numbers and sections as well as alphabetically and take clearance equipment on every visit - and I certainly won't promise Steve that he'll have a CD in a couple of months!

Wot, no graves?



After setting out to complete the remaining cemeteries at her base of Hong Kong, Sarah Chapman was a little disappointed in not finding a few more thousand Chinese headstones to photograph whilst visiting the Terracotta Army in Xi'an Province in China. This didn't stop her taking a photo opportunity for the Project shirt though!

Keen to help a good cause – David Milborrow

My Friday's post brought me an envelope which had needed £1.50 to send to me. This was answering my request for help with locating 8 graves and brought detailed sheets for each one, with full technical details of the grave, dimensions etc, who was in the grave, whether there was a stone, a picture of the relevant part of the detailed map, with notes of the names of who was in ALL the surrounding graves and the area marked on an overall cemetery plan. When I went back to give my profuse thanks, I was told - well, it's in a good cause, isn't it?

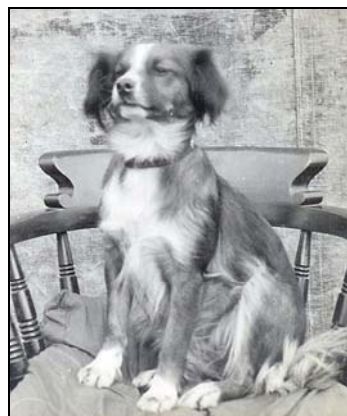
Then of course there was Ashton, where they just let me lose in their office with a computer, having shown me how to search...; compare this with, say, Bath where I wasn't allowed to look over the counter because what they had was highly confidential!

On another occasion I was in a pretty small municipal cemetery; I'd found five of the graves but the other two which had similar section references to each other just seemed nowhere to be found. A flat site, recently trimmed, where were they? There was just one other person in the cemetery, an old chap putting flowers on a grave. Was he local? Was it fair to disturb him?

He acknowledged me as I walked past, so I asked if I could interrupt him and if he could help. Well, he said, I've been retired for many years now but before I retired I was in charge of this here cemetery so, I can't promise, but as long as not too much has changed I can try. Thirty seconds later I had my last two pictures.

Seriously, one of the delights of this project is all the lovely people one meets - in person or telephonically - 99% can't do enough to help and all want to meet up when I go there; I'd never finish anywhere if I accepted half the invites I get. I still don't know if I regret not turning round at Weston Mill when I was sitting in the crematorium workers tearoom and they opened the incinerator door which was right behind my chair; the woosh and the heat were highly discouraging at the time - coward!

Joe the Dog – Pat Gariepy



Joe

We are used to seeing various different types of commemorative plaques and memorials but one that does appear to have been lost in time is this one to 'Joe the dog'

"Here lies the faithful Dog 'Joe', 1st The Buffs who joined the battalion in November 1915 in the camp and died in the same camp June 24th 1916 aged 2 years and 8 months service. Always accompanying the battalion in the trenches and took part in the following engagements: Ypres 1915, Hill 70, Somme 1916, Lens, Cambrai, Givenchy, Loos 1917."

Rescuing a reputation – Kay Lovell

Charles Bernard Hansen was born on 28th June 1889 in Riverstone, New South Wales, Australia. In 1911 he married Alice Unitt in Sydney. The next year their first child, Doris, was born. Alice arrived in 1914 followed by Charles in 1916 but after his father had already left home for war. What follows is a tragic tale.

At the age of 26½ yrs, on 18th January 1916 in Casula, Sydney, Charles enlisted as No. 5593 Private C B Hansen into the 20th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force. His service records tell us that he was not a particularly big man, being 5ft 10ins tall, weighing 126lbs, having a chest measurement of 32½-35ins, and was of dark complexion with grey eyes and brown hair. He was of Roman Catholic religious denomination and, before enlisting, his occupation had been that of “Coal Lumper”. The terms of enlistment required him to serve for the duration of the war and a further four months. Following about eight months’ initial training, he was amongst the troops who boarded the “Euripid” in Sydney on 9th September 1916, disembarking in Portsmouth, England, six weeks’ later, before transferring to France in December of that same year. He seems to have subsequently been backwards and forwards across The Channel on numerous occasions.



He remained a Private throughout his military service and died, allegedly by committing suicide, in France on 3rd December 1918. Ironically, he had survived the war itself yet, still in France following the Armistice, appears not to have been able to cope with his experiences or, perhaps, the thought of returning home to a “normal” life. His body was originally buried at Dury Hospital Military Cemetery, Amiens, but later exhumed and re-interred at Villers-Brettoneux Military Cemetery, the site of the Australian Memorial on the Somme in North-east France.

It appears that Charles was quite a character and often in trouble. His records are full of entries relating to either “crimes” and “offences” or sickness. Various, he was disciplined for being drunk in the “E” lines, possessing two bottles of beer in the “E” lines, neglecting duty when escorting a prisoner and going AWOL more than once! Depending on the gravity of his offence, he either spent time in detention or forfeited pay. The list of illnesses for which he was admitted to hospitals range from a long and nasty bout of influenza, to an ulcerated great toe, to scabies, to VD! What did he get up to?!!

The circumstances surrounding his death are unclear. Charles had been illegally absent from duty in France since 5th May 1918. A Court of Enquiry took place on 17th June and declared him still absent. Nothing appears to be known of his whereabouts until he was admitted dead to the 41st Stationary Hospital six months later. His throat had been cut and, according to the records, it was “believed suicide”. One wonders why?

He left his widow and their three little children who had had no idea of his exploits until the news of his death reached them by cable a fortnight after the event. It must have been a traumatic experience for Alice, seeing as the war was in fact over and, only the day before, she had received a letter written by her husband from France telling her about “the last big advance”. Dispassionately, the cable had not only informed her of Charles’s death but also of his absence from duty and the consequent stoppage of her financial allotment since the very day of his disappearance! In a letter she wrote to the “Officer in charge of Base Records” in Sydney, she requested more information surrounding her husband’s death and made it clear she had “gone through a great struggle with my three little children”. In August 1919, Alice received a small package containing Charles’s last effects – 1 razor in case, 1 shaving stick, 1 pocket wallet, 1 small comb, 1 metal ring, 7 coins (value 3 Francs, 60 centimes & 1d), photos, cards. Later still, in 1922, she eventually received his war medals – The British War Medal and The Victory Medal. Saddest of all, perhaps, is the fact that the rest of Charles’s family disowned his memory, feeling ashamed of what had happened; that is, till now.

Charles's memory is being revived by a great-great niece, Robyn Hand, researching the Hansen family history and through whom this story has come to light. In her words, the fact that Charles was a "bad boy" and took his own life does not matter. She says, "I don't care; he still did his best under the circumstances. Today they would have given him a medical discharge."

Imagine Robyn's delight at finding TWGPP's photographs, not only of Villers-Brettoneux Cemetery, but of her great-great uncle's grave as well! It just so happens that the photos have been taken either by my husband, Dave, or me! Robyn has requested that flowers are laid on the grave on her behalf and, as we fairly regularly visit that region of France, we shall do so next time we are that way. We could have done this last time we were there but for the fact that Robyn's email came a day too late! In the meantime, by reading this article, you and others are honouring and remembering Charles Bernard Hansen too.

In addition, Robyn's family in Australia now have a personal reason to attend the annual ANZAC Day Ceremony and next year, in honour of Charles, will place some flowers on the memorial at South West Rocks, New South Wales.

Great Uncle Grozik – Amelia Almon

Hi! My name is Amelia Almon. I live near Saint John in New Brunswick, Canada. I'm 8 years old, in grade 2 and I'm homeschooled. My homeschool group had a Canadian Heritage Fair and we had to do a speech on something Canadian. I talked about my great Uncle Mark Grozik. Thank you for sending the photos. Here is my speech:

"My Grandfather's family is from Manitoba. My great Uncle Mark Grozik was my Grandfather's brother. He was a private fighting for Canada during the war. Canada joined World War 2 in 1939. It lasted almost 6 years. Uncle Mark joined the Army in April 1943. He went overseas in February 1944. The Normandy Invasion was on June 6th 1944 and he died during that invasion on June 8th. He is buried in France at a war cemetery. To honour those killed during the war Manitoba renamed some of their lakes for their war heroes. Grozik Lake was named August 24th, 1984."



This speech was my daughters first time speaking in front of a group. We join up with 9 other families (28 children in total) and do activities together. This was the first year for a Canadian Heritage Fair and the first time we required the children to stand up in front of an audience and talk. We kept her speech short and she got right up in front of about 31 of us (kids ranging from 4 to 17 and their parents) and did it with no problems!

Amelia and her presentation board

Once Amelia decided on her topic we gathered some information from her grandfather. This led us to the website for the Bretteville Sur Laize Canadian War Cemetery where we were excited to find, according to the cemetery plans, that we could pick out Uncle Mark's grave marker in the photo on there. We got the idea to look for a photo of the marker and found The War Graves Photographic Project's website. It was overwhelming to get the email from Vernon with the photo of the grave marker and of the cemetery. This was something that has been missing from the information we have here. It meant a lot to have it. Uncle Mark would be the only brother of my father that we kids never got to meet. We've heard a few stories over the years but it's hard for my father to talk about him since this was one of his big brothers that went off to war and didn't come back. Amelia was very happy to get the photos in time to use on her presentation board and very proud to show it to everyone!

Thanks to all for the hard work you do in compiling these photos. It means so much to be able to have this service available, especially for those who may never be able to get there to see those grave markers in person. You are doing a wonderful thing by keeping alive the memory of all our war veterans.

The strange and sad story of Douglas Gordon Rayner Geddes - Tom Tribe

I am secretary of the Old Boys' Association of a now defunct Prep School called Beaumont House and last year a group of us toured the Somme battlefields. This was to see the area where a teacher from the school, Vernon Birds, went over the top on July 1st 1916 with the public schools battalion, the 16th Middlesex. He was badly wounded in his back and hip, and also received noticeable mental wounds from his ordeal.

This year we are planning to visit the battlefields in the Ypres area and to place a plaque in St George's Memorial Church in honour of the school casualties. This follows a suggestion from our chairman, Lord Faulkner of Worcester who was, at the time, chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary War Graves and Battlefields Heritage group and who had been involved in a similar plaque placement for the Old Boys of Merchant Taylors several years earlier.

There were nine casualties from Beaumont House in the First World War and, in preparation for this visit, I looked up each of these on the CWGC database. I found eight of the nine without difficulty but the ninth, D G R Geddes, wasn't there.



Previously we had had all the school magazines scanned onto a DVD and this has been invaluable in researching the history of the old boys. In the case of D G R Geddes it showed that he had been at the school from 1906 to 1910 and then had gone on to Aldenham Public School and that he came from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) where his family were tea planters.

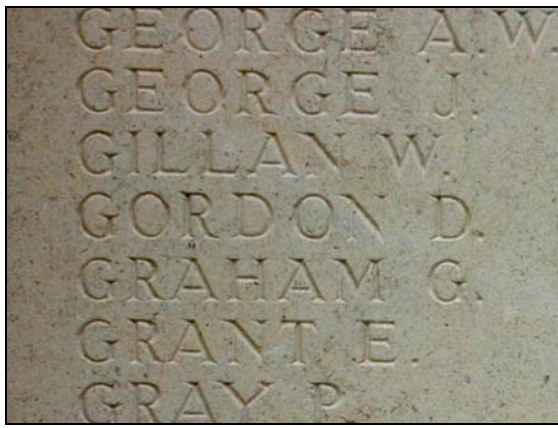
The school magazine stated that he returned from Ceylon at the outbreak of war and had enlisted in King Edward's Horse from where he had been commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery (RFA). Subsequent information said that he had been reported missing, presumed killed in action, while serving with the Gordon Highlanders in May 1915. I then checked with Aldenham School and they had had essentially the same information and he was commemorated on the memorial in their school chapel. The next thing I did was to visit the National Archives at Kew to get out his service record. What I found was quite astonishing.

The opening pages in the file were taken up with a report of how Geddes was in trouble for unpaid debts, falsified receipts and bounced cheques (totalling £214 including £60 for a motorcycle and a £30 mess bill). The National Archives currency converter calculates that £214 in 1915 was worth £9,215 in today's terms – a sizable sum, and the £30 mess bill would have been about £1300 so he had been living it up a bit. He had been arrested and his CO asked him to resign his commission. He was then released to consider this, after which, on April 23rd 1915, he went absent without leave and was never seen again. The file then showed various letters being exchanged about this, at the end of which, on June 1st 1915, Geddes was dismissed from the Army for being absent without leave. Since he held the King's commission and wasn't there to resign that commission, the papers showed that the King had had to approve this happening which he, or his representative, duly did.

At this point it was a complete mystery as to what had happened to Geddes. The file held no clue, nor made any mention of The Gordon Highlanders. It seemed unlikely that he could have left the country to return to Ceylon since he had no money and we were in wartime Britain. So a possibility was that he had re-enlisted in another name, but how could we check this out when we didn't know what the name was.

Eventually it was suggested that I search his first two names, and sure enough the CWGC database showed that a Lance Corporal Douglas Gordon had been reported killed in action on June 18th 1915 while serving with the 2nd Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders.

I then located the service record of Douglas Gordon which says he enlisted from an address given as The Great Western Hotel, Paddington on April 23rd 1915, (the day Geddes was reported missing from the RFA). His next of kin, his father and mother in Ceylon, and brother Eric M were set out with the surname Geddes, which confirmed that Gordon and Geddes was one and the same person. Also both service records had matching physical data – same height, blue eyes, brown hair and tattoos on his forearms.



Douglas's name on Le Touret memorial

The dates of his service are listed as follows:

Joined at Aberdeen April 26th - Appointed Lance Corporal May 17th - Posted to France May 25th - Embarked Southampton May 26th - Joined 2nd Battalion in France May 30th - Killed in action June 18th 1915.

While this explains what happened, and it all happened very quickly, it does leave a lingering question. How was it that the Gordon Highlanders could accept a fully trained soldier out of the blue, promote him to Lance Corporal in three weeks and send him to France a week later when normally a new recruit had to have eight months training before being sent overseas?

The file also showed a rather sad consequence of his enlistment in a false name. The notification of his death was sent to a Mr and Mrs Gordon in Ceylon; and was returned unknown. It wasn't until 1919 that the file shows correspondence with his parents, Mr and Mrs Geddes, so it seems that they would have lived wondering what had happened for all that time, and his fall from grace with the RFA would have added to their distress, assuming they learnt the full story.

Volunteer profile – Amy Thorne

"I have been a volunteer since last summer and I enjoy being involved. I am a 17year old pupil at Princethorpe College, near Rugby, Warwickshire and am in my final year at school.

At school I am studying English Literature, History and Music A levels. I have always had a great interest in the First World War and four years ago I travelled with my parents by Eurostar to France and Belgium. We stayed in Ypres for a few nights and travelled by bus to Passchendale and several other locations. We then travelled by train to stay at Arras, from where we visited Albert, and hired a car to tour the Somme, photographing graves and names on the Memorial at Thiepval.

My Mum has been tracing her family history for 25 years and wanted photographs of family war graves and my Dad is interested in military history. What chance did I have? I also recorded the names on my local War Memorial at Hillmorton, Rugby and took photographs of the graves of soldiers whose names appeared on the memorial. I then wrote an article to my local newspaper giving details to anyone who might be interested. We are checking to see if any of the photographs would be suitable for the Project as they were all pre- digital.

I was searching the CWGC site last year and followed the link to TWGPP. That's when I decided to become involved.

My grandparents Ron and Betty Smith live in Glasgow and we went as a family to the Glasgow Western Necropolis to photograph strays. This cemetery is almost derelict in parts and while the official CWGC stones are mostly in good order it is sad to see the state of many of the family graves, where men and women who had died as a result of wounds or illness were buried. Some had been killed during the Blitz at Clydebank.



Amy Thorne

We ended up cleaning the stones before they were fit to be photographed. Over the summer, also with my parents and grandparents, I visited and photographed war graves and family memorials in Lanark, Bigger and small Lanarkshire villages. Some were very remote but were still tended by family or by locals. We carried on again at Christmas when it was dry and very frosty.

Back home in Warwickshire, I photographed strays in Rugby and in Coventry London Road Cemetery with my mum and dad, Carol and Jerry Thorne. My minders! Coventry required several visits as it is very widespread and overgrown in sections. Once again my parents and I cleaned the stones before they were photographed and even took shears to trim back some of the growth. I think visitors to the Cemetery thought we were staff!

My maternal great grandfather Private Marshall Barrie Smith of the 6th Airborne Division, 13th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, was killed, aged 31, on 24th March 1945 at Hamminkeln at the Rhine Crossing, during Operation Varsity. He is buried in the Reichswald Forest Cemetery. His grave has been photographed by volunteers, as has the family gravestone in Dalbeattie Cemetery, Kirkcudbrightshire and they are on the TWGPP site. Although he has visited his father's grave on several occasions, my grandfather was pleased to see the photographs recorded on the Project site.

At Easter we are carrying on from where we left off and I really appreciate the help from Steve and Vernon, who keep me up to date with any sites or strays which still require to be photographed. As I am still at school I only have time during the school holidays.

I have been a member of Girl Guiding for over 10 years and have just completed my Queen's Guide Award. I decided to use my work as a volunteer with TWGPP for the "Community in Action" section of the Award. I will be doing a presentation about the work of the Project and have also involved the 1st Hillmorton Brownies in research about the Poppy Appeal. Every Remembrance Sunday we parade to Hillmorton War Memorial. I also help my mum as a Poppy Collector in the area.

At school I am now studying War Poetry for my forthcoming exams and have recently attended a lecture in Birmingham about Wilfred Owen, and have watched a performance of "The Accrington Pals" at a Theatre in Kenilworth. I am really pleased to be involved in the Project as I feel it is very worthwhile and it helps that I know about the World Wars.

I intend continuing to help with the Project, so if you see a car with a teenager, four adults, a camera or two, shears, cleaning material, sandwiches, a map, a list from Steve or Vernon and the dog, it is only me with my scouts and security!

I attach a photograph of myself in St John's Churchyard, Hillmorton with its sole War Grave which I have been keeping an eye on for years."

In From The Cold Project update – Terry Denham

Regular readers of this newsletter may remember that TWGPP kindly published an article on the In From the Cold Project (IFCP) a few editions ago and we have now been asked to provide an update on progress since that earlier piece.

Firstly, our thanks to TWGPP are due as both the earlier article and the presentation made at the annual get-together in November led to several new volunteers for the Project being recruited and those volunteers are now doing great work helping to push IFCP forwards.

IFCP has been set up to systematically search any surviving records to find servicemen and women from both the world wars who have been missed from the CWGC Debt of Honour and to obtain for them their due commemoration. When we last appeared in this newsletter, the Project had got underway but was going slowly due to lack of funding to purchase the death certificates required as evidence by the MoD before a casualty could be accepted.

Well, the big news is that IFCP secured a grant in March from the MoD's Veterans Challenge Fund to pay for all the estimated 4,000 certificates we would need to complete the first stage of our task (searching for missing names from the First World War). Since that day we have been ordering certificates and submitting cases to CWGC and MoD on virtually a daily basis. The grant has radically changed the speed of our activities and the last two months have been spent clearing the backlog of names which had built up whilst we were negotiating the funding.

At the time of writing IFCP has had 117 cases accepted by MoD and CWGC for commemoration and there are another 332 names awaiting confirmation from the authorities. Many more will be following them through the system.

Another piece of news is that IFCP now has its own website to explain the aims of the Project, to recruit new volunteers and to record the new names being added to the Debt of Honour. In addition, we hope that we can provide other assistance to people interested in war graves and so we have added a cemetery search feature to provide details not available in one place elsewhere. Additional features are planned.

You can visit IFCP at www.infromthecold.org

Points from the Post

Well what can I say but a huge Thank you for all your help, and for passing on my request to John Mitchell. My self and all my family are dumb stuck, in shock and totally overwhelmed. It`s a dream come true, and we never ever thought that we would have photo`s of my Grandad`s grave. But it has happened and we got some ! We cannot thank you enough for all that you have done. Sue Hurst

I cannot believe how quickly my request was actioned! As a child I adored my Uncle Len and for years have asked every family member who was going to Europe to visit his grave and take a photo if they were anywhere near the war cemeteries in Italy. Until now no one has been able to help me. TWGPP have done me a great service and I thank you most sincerely for it. Seeing that photo was strangely comforting and I was pleased to see that his grave is so well kept. With kind regards Mary Cussen

Thank you so much i have tears streaming down my face as I am the first person in our family to View Uncle Phillips grave. My dad never saw it or any of his immediate family will pass this on to all to view and hopefully I will get there one day to kneel beside it. Forever grateful Brenda Hawkins

Sorry about my delay in replying but we have been away and only got back today. It was such a wonderful surprise to come back to such brilliant photographs, my husband was delighted, though rather emotional as well. I would like to say a very big thank you to you and whoever took the photographs, it meant an awful lot to him. Good luck with the project in the future.

What a service :-) Many thanks. I'm sure my Dad's cousin will be delighted to see this. Until I found Charles' details on the CWGC site, she'd always thought that her brother was lost at sea. She's now in her late 70s and getting to the cemetery isn't an option, so a photo of her brother's resting place is the next best thing.

Thanks so much for the photos and for the speed with which you sent them. Thanks too for the wonderful job you are all doing. It is a long time ago now that my brother died but I still remember him with love and happy memories even though I was only 8 when he was killed in action.

Thank you, thank you, thank you! Donald

Hello ,I just wanted to say thank you so much for the pictures, and for the opportunity to be able to actually acquire them, they're great. My nan will be ever so pleased to finally see where her grandfather was laid to rest. Best wishes Elaine

I cannot thank you enough for this. My father in law was only 7 years old when his father died and doesn't remember him. He didn't even know until 2 /3 weeks ago where his father was buried. When we told him he became very emotional. 74 and not knowing anything. So on behalf of all the family I thank you so much. Shirley

I just realized that you have an ACTUAL photograph of my dear granddad's grave in Italy. I am amazed! What a truly wonderful service you provide. I have been contemplating going to Italy to see where my granddad is buried (at Foiano della Chiana) for the last 4 years ... and while casually surfing the internet this morning, found your site, and the photograph. All I can say is "WOW". And Thank You! This is really something special, even more so for people that maybe cannot travel for health or financial reasons, but whom still want to know where their loved ones are buried. Many many thanks.I'm still planning that visit to Italy in 2010.

Thanks to everyone involved in the Project

We are pleased to announce that Margaret Marks, the Senior Adviser to National Monuments and War Graves at the Ministry of Culture in New Zealand has been in touch and offered to present to TWGPP images of all the Graves of New Zealand forces situated in New Zealand. Margaret regularly visits the cemeteries in her role within Heritage Operations and updates their archive. This submission will be a welcome addition to the archive adding approx 3000 more names covering over 400 cemeteries.

Margaret has pointed out that not all images held are high resolution therefore there will still be a requirement for volunteers down under to visit the cemeteries to enable us to obtain high resolution pictures for hard copies where required.

It is good to know that we can now work closely with the New Zealand Government and department that maintain these graves on behalf of the CWGC.

Cherbourg Burial - Glenys Mundie



On the 9th January 1942 in the early hours of the morning, Wellington Bomber R1785 left Holme-on-Spalding-Moor in England on a mission to bomb Maupertus Airport in Cherbourg France. It was hit by flak and went down in Normandy killing all six crew

P/O Bernard Peter Hickey, SGT Victor William Johnstone, SGT Albert Sydney Austin, P/O Robert Birnie, SGT William Wallace Forgan and SGT Frederick Hinton.

Georges Dennebouy born in Normandy France began to research the identity of a British aeroplane, which crashed during World War II on his parent's farm situated between Colomby and Golleville.

During this time he met Claude Letellier and his daughter Claire and Mickael Simon who similarly shared a thirst for aviation history. Georges and Claude used metal detectors at the site of the crash and found several items; one small piece of plane had a number on it that confirmed the plane had been a Wellington Bomber. Another item of significance was a sterling silver ring with the initials LMM. After talking to an engraver expert they realised it should read WWF. Georges made contact with the first of the six families of a crew buried in the Old Cherbourg Cemetery that he thought may belong to the aircraft. The family of William Wallace Forgan of South Australia confirmed the identity of the ring, which is visible in a photo of the crew.

In March 2006, Georges and his wife Liliane visited each of the three Australian families of this crew and presented the ring to the family of William Wallace Forgan in Adelaide.

In May 2008 Georges contacted each of the families. The Memorial would be held on Saturday 11th October 2008 in Golleville France at 3pm.

It was a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky, which in itself is unusual for October in Normandy. Representatives of four families, three Australian along with the Hinton's of the UK were present, which started with paying our respects to our relatives at Cherbourg Old Communal Cemetery, where the Mayor of Golleville had organised flowers draped with French ribbon for each of the six graves.

Upon arriving at the Memorial site it was clearly evident that this small village of 180 French people had all arrived for the ceremony and some! There were people everywhere with Gendarmes organising the traffic, elderly veterans lined up carrying flags, local schoolchildren with their teachers. Chairs had been set up for the elderly and the relatives in front of the podium flying four flags; Australian, New Zealand, United Kingdom and French. The positioning of the Memorial is about a kilometre from Golleville at the intersection of several homes.

Continued...

