Henry Thomas Fowler (1882-1947) - a Life

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Contents

Childhood and family

Henry Thomas Fowler's birth certificate shows him to have been born on 9 December 1882 at Boro' Green, Wrotham. His birth was registered, as Harry Thomas, by his mother Francis Jane Fowler, formerly Packham, on the 8th January 1883. His father Harry Draper Fowler was a grocer's foreman.

The 1881 census shows the 27 year old Harry Draper Fowler, born c1854 in Boughton, Kent, and his 26 year old wife Francis Jane, born c1855 at Boughton under Blean, Kent, to be living in a private house, 137 Spencers Cottage, Wrotham. No one else was registered at that address. 139 Spencers cottages was the 'Fox and Hounds'. Directories of the 1880s show the Fox and Hounds to have been in Borough Green. This part of Borough Green was in the parish of Wrotham.

In April 1891 the family was living at 77 High Street, Wrotham. Harry D. Fowler is shown as a Sub postmaster and Francis J. his wife, as a postal clerk. Their family consisted of three sons Thomas W. who is 9 years old, Harry T. who is 8, and William, 7. Sub postmaster/mistresses were not Post Office employees but usually people in business who took on postal work. Trade directories of the 1890s show Harry Draper Fowler as sub-postmaster at Wrotham and show that the post office handled money orders and telegrams.

Harry Draper Fowler's death was registered between April and June in 1891. The photo of the three boys and their mother outside the Post Office in Wrotham probably dates from after his death. Frances Jane Fowler is recorded as being the sub-postmaster/mistress of the Wrotham Post Office between 15 July 1891 and 23 May 1895[1]. The second photo shows Frances Jane's postal establishment which includes a smart young lady who may be a postal clerk, four uniformed letter carriers/postmen and the two elder Fowler sons. Henry Thomas, the younger, who is seated, may be wearing a Post Office brassard on his right arm.

Harry T, 18 appears in the 1901 census at the home of his mother, 42 Kingsley Road, Maidstone, St Philip's parish. He was single and working and his occupation is shown as 'Valet Dom'. His mother Frances J, a widow, was working on her own account at home as a dressmaker. Also resident at this address are two boarders; Wm. W Harrison, 69, widower, a retired farmer born at West Farleigh, and George Jessop, single, 45, born at

[1] A Donald, *The Posts of Sevenoaks in Kent* (Tenterden, Kent: Woodvale Press, 1992) p425

Wrotham, who was 'living on own means'. Harry's elder brother Thomas appears in this census as a grocer's warehouseman, living in the house of William Prat in Wellesborough. Younger brother, William Fowler, 18, is a baker journeyman/breadmaker living in the home of Henry Samson, a Bakery Manager/Breadmaker and his wife and baby son, at 147 Longley Road, Rainham. Henry Samson was born in Crouch (3-4 miles south of Wrotham).

There is an undated photo' of Henry Thomas taken by Hayman & Son of Launceston, Cornwall, showing him in a tail suit.

Army

On 31 December 1902, at the age of 20, Henry Thomas enlisted in the army at Chatham, joining the Rifle Brigade. He signed on for 'Short Service' (3 years with colours, 9 years with Reserve). His Army Service Record shows the following details:

Trade: Servant
Age: 20 years 0 months
NoK: Mother – Francis Fowler, 75 Mote Road, Maidstone & brother – Thomas
Height: 5' 5"; weight: 121lbs.; chest: 32"- 34.5"; complexion: fair; eyes: brown; hair: dark brown
Religion: C of E
No: 9505

The Rifle Brigade Depot in Winchester, the old royal palace of Charles II, had been destroyed by fire in 1893. For the next eleven years the Depot was accommodated in temporary quarters at Gosport. The rebuilt barracks in Winchester were ready for occupation in March 1904.[2]

A peace treaty had been signed 30 May 1902 bringing the Boer war to an end. Much was made of the returning victorious troops. The Army's standing was high with the general public although a booming economy and low unemployment meant army recruitment was difficult. To address this problem William St John Broderick, Secretary of State for War, had in 1902 introduced a short term enlistment for infantrymen, three years with the colours and nine on the reserve, previously this had been seven with the colours and five with the reserve. Short term enlistments were popular but only 25% of these volunteers chose to sign on for an additional term, despite financial incentives for them to do so. This created serious problems keeping overseas battalions supplied with drafts. In 1905 the Army Council scrapped the short term enlistment scheme and introduced terms of nine years with the colours and three years with the reserve. This in turn was changed by Lord Haldane in 1906 back to seven years with the colours and five years on the reserve.[3]

Within two months of joining up Henry Thomas was awarded the Army's 2nd class certificate of education (24/02/1903)[4] and on 13 May 1903 he was posted to the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade. At the end of that month the 1st battalion was posted to Parkhouse camp on Salisbury Plain for Battalion training. This was followed by Brigade and Divisional training. At the end of July the battalion returned to Cambridge Barracks in Portsmouth. On 28 August they went to Tidworth for army manoeuvres. It is recorded that the first three days were made very uncomfortable by the incessant rain and sodden ground. The manoeuvres themselves were 'rather good fun', with the exception of the night of 19 September which was spent 'vainly endeavouring to recover our tents and to save our belongings, including the kitchen range, from the fury of the hurricane.' On returning to Portsmouth

[2] A. Bryant, *Jackets of Green* (London: Collins, 1972), p209
[3] C. Messenger, *For Love of Regiment: a History of British Infantry, Volume One 1660 – 1914* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994), p231
[4] Rifle Brigade Chronicle for 1903 shows that 101 members of the battalion held a 2nd class education certificate, 31 of them being awarded that year.

the battalion took over the Victoria Barracks. There was a Battalion Rifle Meeting at Browndown on 23 November. Battalion members took part in various polo, cricket, football, hockey and athletics competitions.[5]

On 2 January 1904 the 1st battalion Rifle Brigade received orders to be ready to proceed to Malta about the end of March for a short foreign tour.[6] The British army had garrisoned Malta since the 1850s, providing a defensive force for the capital and its harbour areas. Further fortifications later in the century meant a larger Army presence. It was stated in Parliament in 1895 that the value of Malta to England lies in its being a fort-base for the Navy, and a main link in the chain of command with India by the Suez Canal, and a base of operations for any service the government may require of the Navy in the central or eastern Mediterranean.[7]

The main part of the battalion, which included Henry Thomas Fowler, embarked on the transport SS *Plassy* on the 12 April 1904, disembarking on Malta on 20 April. This group included 55 women and 63 children. The battalion took over quarters in Fort Manuel from the 2nd battalion Cameron Highlanders. The remainder of the battalion embarked on the SS *Seti* on 19 April and arrived on the 29 April. The quarters at the Fort consisted of barracks, huts and tents. The Battalion was inspected by the island's Governor on the 30th. They took part in athletics competitions with other units stationed on Malta. On 3 May they went into camp at Pembroke for the annual course of Musketry. They went on to Mellieha on 18 May for field firing and battalion training, returning to the fort on 27 May. On that date the battalion was split into two, half being sent to Bahar-i-Chagak, a seaside camp on the north coast of the island about seven miles from Valletta. Everyone liked this camp as the bathing was good and it was much cooler and healthier than Fort Manoel. The half battalions swapped quarters on 31 July. During this period an officer recorded that 'June was supposed to have been the hottest in the memory of man. August and September usually reckoned unhealthy and disagreeable months were quite the reverse. In spite of the Battalion being composed almost entirely of very young soldiers our sick roll during the hot months never assumed very large dimensions, it seldom much exceeded fifty.' The detachment returned to the Fort on 18 October. Swimming, boating, polo, and football continued to form part of the battalion's activities. During the summer 194 NCOs and men joined the battalion from the 4th battalion. The Rifle Meeting took place during 10 - 12 October. On 31 October 4 officers and 180 NCOs and men went to Ghain Tuffieha for a three month course of Mounted Infantry duties.[8]

After two years' service Henry Thomas was granted a Good Conduct Badge, but forfeited it five months later after appearing in the Defaulters Book on a charge of being drunk on the rifle range at about 5.15pm on 27 May 1905. He also received a punishment of 8 days confined to barracks.[9]

1905 proved to be a similar experience to that of the previous year for the members of 1st bn Rifle Brigade in Malta.
Henry Thomas' service record shows him to have left Malta on 13 September 1905, being posted to the 4th battalion Rifle Brigade. On 23 October he was posted to the 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade and on 30 December 1905 he left the Army having been transferred to the Reserve. [10]

Civilian & Reservist

The 1911 census shows that Harry Thomas Fowler, 28, was living at home with his mother at 75 Mote Road, Maidstone. His occupation is given as Assurance Agent. However, later army documents show his trade or calling before enlistment to have been Butler on a 1921 Conduct Sheet and Butcher on a 1922 Employment

[5] Letters to the Editor – 1st battalion, The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1903
[6] Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[7] P. Elliott, *The Cross and the Ensign: A Naval History of Malta 1798-1979* (London: Granada, 1982)
[8] Letters to the Editor – 1st battalion, The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1904
[9] army service record
[10] army service record

sheet. The later document most likely contains an error, the mistake being made when copying data from the earlier form.[11]

Mobilized - The First World War

At 11pm on 4 August 1914 Britain was at war with Germany. Henry Thomas, whose time as an Army Reservist would have come to an end on 31 December 1914, was mobilized at the Rifle Brigade depot at Winchester on 5 August and he was posted to the 3rd battalion on 8 August.[12] The 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade was stationed in Cork, Ireland at that time. It had received the order to mobilize at 5.45pm on 4 August. Mobilization of the 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade is recorded as having been completed by 11.59pm on 9 August. Between 10 -16 August the battalion undertook 'route marches, etc. to get the reservists fit'.[13]

In August 1914 the regular British army in Britain amounted to six divisions. The 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade formed part of 17th Brigade, 6th Division. At this time the 6th Division consisted of the 16th, 17th and 18th Brigades; the 19th joined them for a period on 12 October 1914. The 17th Brigade consisted of 1st battalion Royal Fusiliers, 1st battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, 2nd battalion Leinster Regiment as well as 3rd battalion the Rifle Brigade.

On 17 August 1914 members of 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade left Ireland embarking on the SS *Patriotic* for Holyhead and then travelling by train to Cambridge where they arrived about 4pm on the 19 August. [14] Lieutenant W Congreve, a young officer with the battalion, records in his diary that the train carrying the troops from Holyhead to Cambridge was 'cheered all the way. The men never seemed to tire of looking out of the windows and waving handkerchiefs and flags.'[15] In Cambridge, they camped on Midsummer common, 50 yards from a main road. Throughout their stay there they found themselves to be objects of curiosity to crowds of local people. They were moved to a camp in Newmarket on the 31 August.

The British Expeditionary Force, BEF, sent to France in August 1914 consisted of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Divisions. The bulk of these troops disembarked either at Boulogne or Le Havre between 9 and 14 August.[16] The 4th and 6th divisions were held back in England because the cabinet felt there was both a threat of civil unrest and of a German invasion. Following the actions at Mons and Le Cateau and the retreat of the BEF to a position to the south east of Paris, more troops were required in France. III Corps was formed when Lt General Pulteney arrived in France on 30 August 1914. It was to consist of 4th division and 19th infantry brigade, and the 6th division which was to be dispatched soon. On 4 September the first four divisions in France (1, 2, 3 & 5) had received their first reinforcements.

Men sent abroad as part of the BEF had the following advice from Lord Kitchener, the Minister for War, pasted into their Pay Books:[17]

"You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common Enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends upon your individual conduct. It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most

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[11] army service record - Conduct Sheet/Employment Sheet
[12] army service record
[13] War Record of 3rd Battalion in the 1916 Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[14] 3rd Battalion the Rifle Brigade in Ray Westlake, *British Battalions in France and Belgium 1914*, p333
[15] B Congreve & T Norman (ed) *Armageddon Road: A VC's diary 1914-1916 (*London: William Kimber & Co.Ltd.19820 p22
[16] J M Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914 – 1918*, (London: Edward Arnold, reprint 1991)
[17] Sir G Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1920) pp 26-7

part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.
Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted; your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust. Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.
Do your duty bravely. Fear God. Honour the King.
Kitchener, Field-Marshal"

At 5pm on the 7 September 3rd bn Rifle Brigade entrained for Southampton, arriving at 12 midnight. They embarked on the SS *Lake Michigan* at 3pm on the 8th, arriving off St Nazaire on the 10 September. The 6th division (under Major-General J L Keir) landed at St Nazaire between 10 and 12 September. Several ships carrying units of the division, including the *Lake Michigan*, couldn't land their troops until 10pm on the 12th as they had to ride out a storm in the Bay of Biscay.[18] The German advances in France and Flanders were seen as a potential threat to the British Army's supply lines and the northern supply bases had been closed (Boulogne on 27 August, Rouen on 3 September and Le Havre on 5 September). All stores from these northern bases were transferred to St Nazaire, at the mouth of the River Loire, which for a time became the main supply port for the British.

In France the 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade entrained at 06.30 on 13th for Coulommiers, arriving at 3am the next day. They marched about nine miles to billets at St. Ouen. On 15 September, with the rest of the 17th infantry brigade, they marched fifteen miles via Nanteuil-sur-Marne and Romeny bivouacking near Azy. On the 16th they marched twenty miles via Chateau Thierry to billets in Visigneux near Hartennes. On the 17th they marched four miles via Taux to billets in Villablain. On the 19th they marched thirteen and a half miles and were billeted in Paars. On the 20th they marched three miles and bivouacked just south of Dhuizel.[19]

During the night of 12/13 September the German armies had ended their retreat from the Marne and dug in along the high ground above the river Aisne, occupying the line of an escarpment high above the north bank. This was the end of the war of movement in this region. 13 September saw the opening of the battle of the Aisne. During 13 to 15 September the Allies launched attempts to cross the river. There were supply shortages especially artillery ammunition. German heavy artillery arrived and the British soldiers had their first experience of 'Jack Johnsons' – eight inch howitzers. This marked a change of balance on the battlefield from an all arms battle involving a combination of artillery, infantry and cavalry. Now artillery began to dominate and the response to shell fire was entrenchment. On 16 September Field Marshal Sir John French, Commander-in- Chief BEF, ordered his men to dig in and hold their positions against German counter-attacks and increasing shell fire, no operational order was then issued until 1 October. During this action both II and III Corps had reached the lip of the escarpment (up to 5 miles north of the river).[20]

On 21 September the 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade moved into Dhuizel and in the afternoon went forward, crossed the river Aisne and relieved the 1st battalion Royal Berkshire regiment in trenches 2 miles north of Soupir. 'These trenches were only a series of isolated lengths and holes and the battalion set to work to dig proper ones. They ran at the top of the slope running up from the Aisne and the German trenches were across a little level plateau, 200-300 yards away.'[21]
Between 20 and 23 September 3rd bn Rifle Brigade casualties were reported as 7 OR (Other Ranks) killed, 1 officer and 21 OR wounded, 1 missing.

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[18] L Macdonald, *1914:The Days of Hope* (London; Penguin, 1987) p307
[19] 3rd Battalion the Rifle Brigade in Ray Westlake, *British Battalions in France and Belgium 1914*, p333
[20] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005)
[21] War Record of 3rd Battalion in the 1916 Rifle Brigade Chronicle

On 25 September C and D companies attacked the enemy line at 04.15 resulting in 3 OR killed, 1 officer and 26 OR wounded, 2 officers and 23 OR missing.
Between 26 and 30 September 3rd bn Rifle Brigade casualties were reported as 5 OR killed, 20 OR wounded. On 1 October they were relieved by 2nd bn South Staffordshire, thence marching 3 miles to billets at Bourg[22]. This brought to an end 13 days of fighting on the Aisne. Reinforcements arrived, 1 officer and 104 NCOs and men.[23]

On 1 October Field Marshal Sir John French told General Joffre that he was going to move the BEF from their position on the Aisne to a position north of La Bassee to defend the Channel ports and be in a better position to act in cooperation with the Royal Navy. The movement began on the night of 1/2 October. They left in great secrecy, the enemy unaware that they had gone. 2nd Cavalry division went first, by road, then II Corps, III Corps, and I Corps by rail, the latter reaching Hazebrouck on 19th October. As these British units came into line in Northern France so the Germans arrived from the East to oppose them.[24]

The 3rd bn Rifle Brigade left the Aisne battle area on 6th October for the railway at Compeigne. At 6pm on 6th October they marched thirteen and a half miles to Maast where they were billeted. A second reinforcement joined them there. At 7.05pm on 7th they started a seventeen mile march to Dampleux where they bivouacked. At 3pm on 8th they set off on a fifteen mile march to Gilocourt where they bivouacked. At 9pm on 9th they marched nine and a half miles to Compiegne where they bivouacked. At 4am on 10th they entrained for St Omer.[25]

Between 8 and 19 October the BEF extended the Allied line northwards to link up with the Belgians, arriving just in time to stave off a German thrust towards the west. As these attacks came in and the BEF line crept north towards Ypres, so the series of battles that became known as 'First Ypres' began. They began with the engagements at La Bassee , Messines and Armentieres, which were attempts by the BEF to turn the right flank of the German army. II Corps was towards the south, then III Corps, with I Corps furthest north. By 11 October the Allies formed a loose, (the front was still fluid) but continuous front from the Swiss frontier to the North Sea coast, a distance of 450 miles. The battle of La Bassee began on 12 October when troops of II Corps advancing slowly east engaged the Germans. The Germans started a series of night time counter-attacks. The British Army advance continued until 18 October, with II Corps loses at 3,000, when they were halted by massive German reinforcements. The first Indian troops arrived, the Jullundur Brigade of the Lahore Division, assisting II Corps to move back into a 'prepared' line.[26]

At 5.30am on 11 October the 3rd bn Rifle Brigade detrained at Blendecques (just south of St Omer) where they billeted and at 3.30pm they marched to Arques (to the west of St Omer) where they were billeted in a bottle factory. At 2pm on the 12th they travelled on lorries to Hazebrouck (approx 16 miles) where they billeted. The men received pay for the first time since crossing to France.[27]

Troops of III Corps were involved in two battles, Armentieres (13 October – 2 November) and Messines (12 October – 2 November). Lieutenant General Pulteney was asked to occupy the Armentieres- Wytschaete line, with Allenby's Cavalry Corps extending their left flank north to Ypres. The ground to the left of III corps' front posed a problem - there was a 400 foot high range of steep sided hills which offered enemy good artillery observation over most of the line of advance. The Cavalry Corps asked for infantry support on 13 October and Pulteney decided on a full III Corps assault against the Meteren position – both divisions on a five mile front. The Official History describes this as 'the first formal British attack of the war'. The advance began at 14.00 and rapidly developed into an infantry battle fought amongst hop fields and small woods in wet and misty weather,

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[22] 3rd Battalion the Rifle Brigade in Ray Westlake, *British Battalions in France and Belgium 1914*, p334
[23] War Record of 3rd Battalion in the 1916 Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[24] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) pp 235-6
[25] War Record of 3rd Battalion in the 1916 Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[26] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) pp 244-50
[27] War Record of 3rd Battalion in the 1916 Rifle Brigade Chronicle

with artillery not able to give much assistance. Progress was slow and costly. The Germans had excellent artillery observation and were well sited; concealed trenches were manned by cavalry troopers. III Corps sustained 708 casualties that day. German losses were estimated at around 1,000. The Royal Flying Corps, RFC, reported that a large German column was marching in the direction of Armentieres. Pulteney decided to push troops towards Bailleul and Messines before they could be occupied by Germans. The RFC was grounded on the morning of 14 October because of thick mist and steady rain, but cavalry patrols reported that the Germans had withdrawn from Meteren and Bailleul. II Corps requested assistance from III Corps on the night of 13/14. Pulteney thought the best way to assist was to push on as planned, entering Bailleul late in the afternoon of the14th.[28]

At 8am on 13 October 3rd bn Rifle Brigade moved forward from Hazebrouk and by 9am took part in action around Strazeele. At 1.30pm an attack on Bailleul ridge commenced, all four companies engaged along the Bailleul Ridge. Casualties – 11 OR killed, 3 officers, including the Colonel, and 65 OR wounded. The war record for the battalion records that it was a very wet day and night. During the night the enemy evacuated their positions. At 5.30am on 14 October the battalion moved up and dug trenches during the morning. At 1.30pm they received orders to move, concentrating at Outtersteene, then marching to Note Boom, and at 7pm they took up positions along the road running on eastern side of Blanche Maison.[29]

At 12.00 on 15 October Field Marshal French at a conference at Hazebrouck ordered Pulteney to occupy Armentieres, clear and if necessary repair the bridges over the river Lys and push on north and east towards Lille. Orders were issued that afternoon and the advance began that night when the 6th division secured two of the Lys bridges. FM French found the recent actions and advance of III Corps very gratifying, he now wanted to move east with all his power, attacking the enemy wherever met. The Cavalry Corps, on the left, were to cross the Lys and screen the left flank of the advance. III Corps was to move north-east astride the Lys. The push east started at 6am on 16 October and quickly ran into trouble. The river was only passable at the bridges, which had been destroyed by the Germans. The ground in front of Armentieres was marshy, and dykes, streams, fences and hedges hindered the cavalry. The enemy fell back fighting with artillery and machine-gun fire. The infantry had to force a passage over the Lys at nightfall. By midday on the 17th III Corps had a brigade of the 4th division in Armentieres and units of the 6th and 4th divisions occupied a line from Bois Grenier south of Armentieres, north to Houplines. The 17th was spent consolidating positions. [30]

15 October 1914 - moved to Steenwercke then at 19.15 to bivouacs near Croix du Bac.
16 October 1914 - to billets on Rue Bataille.
17 October 1914 - moved forward to La Chapelle d'Armentieres.[31]

FM French issued orders on the 18 October for a renewal of the advance; III Corps was to push along the Lys. To do this they would have to clear the Perenchies Ridge (to the south west) and secure the village of Frelinghien, three miles east of Armentieres where there was a bridge. The 6th Division attacked at 6.30am, it quickly ran into stiff opposition on the ridge and in nearby villages of Premesques and Perenchies. 'It was held up here by heavy fire, but by mid-morning III Corps HQ had convinced itself that there was little opposition in front of the 6th Division and ordered Major General Keir to push on, over the ridge to the Deule stream, driving the enemy before him.' Keir tried; indeed he and his men kept on trying for most of the day, without success. Losses mounted. By 8pm on the 18 October III Corps was ordered to hold any ground already gained and dig in; when night fell the 6th Division was only two miles east of Armentieres. RFC reconnaissance was invaluable but morning mists which often didn't clear until 11am hampered observation. Some roads to the east seemed to be full of long columns of marching men, artillery and wagons all heading west towards the front. The second crisis of the 1914 campaign was at hand (the first being the retreat from Mons and the battle of the Marne).[32]

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[28] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) pp 251-5
[29] War Record of 3rd Battalion in the 1916 Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[30] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) pp 255-7
[31] 3rd Battalion the Rifle Brigade in Ray Westlake, *British Battalions in France and Belgium 1914*, p334
[32] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) pp 257-60

On 18 October the 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade took part in attack on Perenchies. At 9am after an advance across the open the attack was held up in front of a prepared position, pretty strongly held. The situation remained much the same all day. The 4th division came up on the left preventing a flanking movement by the Germans. Later the Royal Fusiliers came up on the right. Casualties – 1 officer and 13 OR killed, 2 officers and 51 OR wounded, 2 missing.[33]

FM French was unaware of the very large German forces that had arrived on his front and wanted I Corps (commanded by General Haig) to push north from Ypres towards Ghent, whilst II and III corps continued to push against the Germans in the east, preventing the Germans from sending reserves from these area up to Ypres area. On 20 October the German forces launched a massive attack at Ypres (First battle of Ypres) with attacks on each of the other corps fronts. Early on 20th Pulteney realized that III Corps advance at Armentieres had been checked and anticipating a violent counter-attack ordered his men to dig in and prepare to hold on. The attack came later that day, 6th Division positions being pounded by artillery and then attacked by infantry covered by heavy machine-gun fire. 'It was noticeable that the Germans had now become wary of British rifle fire and were advancing in short rushes, - basic fire and movement tactic of trained infantry in an advance. The German attacks continued after dark. By dawn on the 21st Pulteney realized his single corps was opposed by two full corps attacking on a 12 mile front and after the losses of recent weeks III Corps no longer had sufficient men to hold such a front against heavy attacks. 'A new hazard now appeared, as well as a chronic shortage of artillery ammunition the infantry now discovered that the cartridges they were being issued with were a fraction too large for the breeches of their rifles. While the rifles were cool this was not a problem, but as the breeches heated up the cartridge cases began to jam. The soldiers could not flick open the bolt to eject the spent cartridges and reload; it was necessary to kick the bolt open and feed in rounds by hand. Somehow the infantry fire was maintained and the enemy attacks halted.' Across the BEF front the battalions were being pushed back or pinned down but they were fighting hard for every metre of ground.[34]

During 19 and 20 October 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade held their position under shell and rifle fire. It was noted that German reinforcements were arriving by armoured train. Casualties – 12 killed, 31 wounded and 1 missing.[35]

Realization that German attacks all along the British front meant plans for further advances would not be possible, FM French issued an order at 8.30pm on the 21 October placing the BEF on the defensive – 'Action against the enemy will be continued on general line now held, which will be strongly entrenched.' The troops had to dig trenches and prepare to hold them. Although General Joffre assured FM French that a French corps would be sent to Ypres to assist the only help came from the Lahore division detraining at Hazebrouck. The problem was a lack of artillery. The BEF had 93 heavy guns in France, 54 of which were deployed along the 35 mile front at Ypres. This was not nearly enough, but worse was the shortage of ammunition. Limits were imposed until those batteries still in action were restricted to firing one shell every half hour or eight shells per gun per day. The defence of Ypres would depend almost entirely on the infantry.[36]

At 1am on 21 October 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade withdrew to a new line near Porte Egal Farm. Trenches had already been half dug by others but were very badly sited and disconnected. There was very little artillery support.
At 1.30am on 22 October there was a strong German attack. The attacks continued all day but all were repulsed. 23 October a strong attack and shelling caused high casualties – 1 officer and 17 OR killed, 43 wounded and 1 missing.[37]

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[33] Record of 3rd Battalion in the 1916 Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[34] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) pp 271-5
[35] 3rd Battalion the Rifle Brigade in Ray Westlake, *British Battalions in France and Belgium 1914*, p334
[36] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) p 277
[37] 3rd Battalion the Rifle Brigade in Ray Westlake, *British Battalions in France and Belgium 1914*, p334

At 1am on 24 October the battalion was relieved by 2nd bn Essex regiment and at 7am they went into billets at Fleurbaix. At 7.45pm the same day they marched to Bois Grenier, billeted and were attached to 18th Brigade. At 7am on 25 October they took over various portions of a new line east of La Guernerie and dug trenches until 7pm, they then marched to Flamangerie Farm to relieve 2nd bn York and Lancaster regiment in the front line.[38] It was raining and the battalion's casualties were 2 officers wounded.
On 26 October the battalion's Medical Officer was killed and one officer was reported to be shell-shocked.
On both 27 and 30 October the war diary records German shelling and 'demonstrations'.
Until mid November 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade continued to hold this part of the line then rejoined 17th brigade and took over new portion of trenches near Chapelle d'Armentieres. The trenches were gradually improved but water was the great difficulty throughout the winter; 'we had very few pumping appliances and at times the men were standing in water day and night, which naturally caused a lot of sickness'.[39]

'October 31 was a day of triumph and disaster for the BEF. They had held their lines but at a terrible cost, a further reduction of the shrinking ranks of the rifle battalions. The BEF as a whole was now down to between a half and quarter of its original strength.'[40]

'Pulteney's III Corps, battling around Armentieres, were outnumbered and under unceasing attack, but here again the line held and the Battle of Armentieres ended – at least officially – on 2 November.'[41]

The 1st Battalion the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) was part of 19th Brigade, at times part of III Corps. The diary of an officer in that unit has been published and contains a first hand account of his unit's actions.[42] The 2nd bn Royal Welsh Fusiliers were also part of 19th Brigade and an account of this time written by a regular/reservist soldier can be found in his published book.[43]

The Official History records that in the area of Wytschaete the 2 November was fine and sunny, with only a little mist after 8am.[44]

Prisoner of War

02/11/1914 – missing
02/11/1914 - prisoner [45]

As the 3rd battalion Rifle Brigade's records don't show any of its members going missing on the 2nd November it is possible that this date is that recorded by the International Red Cross and passed to the War Office using information supplied by the Germans. If this is the case then Henry Thomas may have been one of the missing OR's recorded in the battalion's war diary during late October, the last being mentioned on 23 October.

The International Red Cross in Geneva have a record showing that Henry Thomas was held at Güstrow camp in Mecklenburg, Northern Germany,[46] in the German IXth Army Corps area. A typical prisoner of war experience, if there can be such a thing, could involve being moved between a number of different camps. But Güstrow camp was used to accommodate Other Rank (OR) prisoners from early in the war so it is possible that he spent a full

[38] 2nd Bn York and Lancaster were part of 16th Brigade. Had they also been attached to the 18th Brigade?
[39] The Rifle Brigade Chronicle pp94/5
[40] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) pp 304-5
[41] R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London: John Murray, 2005) p 284
[42] Terraine John (ed), *General Jack's Diary 1914-1918* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964)
[43] Private Frank Richards DCM MM, *Old Soldiers Never Die* (Uckfield East Sussex: Naval & Military Press Ltd.)
[44] Edmonds, Sir James E, *Military Operations: France and Belgium 1914* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1925)
[45] army record
[46] information from International Red Cross

four years associated with this camp. Members of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) who were captured in late October and who were taken to Güstrow camp have described both the journey there and the camp itself.[47]

Conditions in Güstrow camp during the first winter were severe and overcrowded. Lack of adequate food was also a major concern. CSM Rush 2nd bn Duke of Wellington's Regiment, who spent the period from the end of September 1914 to the beginning of January 1918 in Güstrow camp has left an account of the way British pows were treated there.[48] He writes of his experience there in 1914:
'Between the dates of 28th September and the end of December, I witnessed two Englishmen being stabbed with a bayonet by a furious sentry….. these were only two of the numerous ones who were stabbed by German soldiers during this early period of captivity, and I can only remember one German soldier being tried by court martial…. in the early part of 1915. The number of prisoners in camp varied up to about 11 or 12 thousand by the end of 1914. The English prisoners numbered about 1500 or 2000, many cases of stabbing, with bayonet, hitting with the butt end of the rifle took place (none severely except Pte Mann [who was killed]) for no reason whatever.'
'The tents we were living in from September 1914 to 31st Jan 1915, always let the water in, many cases tops were blown away, there was only one opening, the tent door, to tents which were long narrow things, which held 97 prisoners. We only had one blanket and just bare straw to lie on, naturally everyone was pested with vermin. We had our 1st bath in the first week of February 1915, and I think it was our good constitutions which enabled us to pull through this awful period without many more deaths due to starvation and harsh treatment, and I go so far as to say that even now if it was not for the food which is sent out from England we would have many prisoners die of starvation.'
'The treatment since 1915 as [sic] improved inside the lager but I know for a fact that English Prisoners on some of the farms in the Güstrow Command get treated badly according to their letters which arrive in camp, by Russian prisoners who return to Güstrow sick.'
He ends his statement by saying the treatment of the pows in camp by the German guards towards the end of his stay there was much improved, although the food was no better. The only pows physically in the camp at this time were NCOs and men who were unfit for work, the rest were in work commandos. Rush's report on the conditions in Güstrow which was written in 1918 when he had been taken to Holland is supported by another pow who had spent some time in Güstrow, and on one its work commandos. He wrote of very basic huts in the camp which were condemned by the Neutral Commission, and of guards who were proud to speak of hundreds of dead prisoners, beaten and starved.[49]

In 1915 the Germans first started using their prisoners of war as a labour resource and many prisoners were administratively associated with a camp, a stammlager, whilst they were elsewhere on work commandos. NCOs and officers were not forced to work. The work commandos could be of various sizes and men would usually be accommodated near their work, be it a factory, a mine, or a farm. The prisoner experience of a work commando could be very variable. Many men in other German camps were sent to work in factories and in coal or salt mines, but Güstrow was a small town in a rural area of northern Germany and it is probable that most of its 53 work commandos involved rural activities such as working on drainage schemes and on farms. Sgt Painting records how a group of 370 British pows were taken in February 1915 from Güstrow to a smaller camp in Bajstrup, near Tingleff[50]. Initially the conditions here were very severe and 8 British pows died of starvation within the first few weeks.[51] The food they were given by the Germans was totally inadequate and food parcels from relatives were infrequent at best. Food that was received from home was often inedible die to the length of time it had taken for it to arrive. Regimental help committees and the Red Cross had not yet become properly organised in the provision of food parcels.

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[47] The sound recordings of Sgt Painting's reminiscences can be heard at www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000211
[48] IWM 05/4/1. CSM J P Rush was captured on 14 September 1914 and was released under the transfer scheme in 1918. After a short stay in a German Red Cross facility he arrived in Güstrow camp 28 September 1914.
[49] IWM misc153(2356) Anon – a personal account written in 1919
[50] IWM interview recorded in 1974 – www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000211
[51] D Jones's article on Tinglev camp can be found on the Danish Scheme's website – www.

We know that Henry Thomas was at Tingleff camp on 3 June 1915 as his name appears on a list of the British pows held there.[52] Painting states that this group of British pows worked on drainage schemes in the area and were later moved to Kaltenkircken and then after a few weeks, to a new camp at Oster Terp . These three camps were all in Schleswig-Holstein and were satellite camps of the stammlager at Güstrow. Tingleff and Oster Terp are to the north of the Kiel canal, in that part of Germany which was returned to Denmark after the plebiscite in 1920. Kaltenkirken to the south remained in Germany. We do not know where Henry Thomas was after 1915. He is likely to have been moved between the satellite camps and work commandoes of Güstrow, being used wherever his labour was required. Henry Thomas told his daughter that he had seen men scrambling for potato peelings from the waste, so hungry were they, also that he had worked on a farm, and became fluent in German.[53] To read of the experience of a British pow assigned to work on a farm in Germany see M Hall's book.[54]

Being away from the stammlager did have the drawback of delaying the delivery of food, bread and clothing parcels. One anonymous account of life on a Güstrow work commando records that about 250 British and 170 Russian pows were accommodated in a very small hutted camp in Schleswig Holstein, each hut containing 120 men in triple layer bunks. The pows worked on the construction of a light railway for which they each received payment of 38 pfennigs a day. They worked throughout the winter of 1917/18 when snow drifts of up to 6 feet were experienced. This British pow had to wait from mid November 1917 to mid-February 1918 for his regimental Red Cross parcels to start arriving. Later his work was the getting of wood, which would then be sold by the Germans to the pows in their canteen.[55]

The Rifle Brigade's Prisoner of War Help fund was started by Mrs Tom Morris in March 1915 when she began collecting money for clothing and food. By the end of 1914 all four regular Rifle Brigade battalions were in France/Flanders. She was informed that there were 213 prisoners held at Döberitz camp and a few elsewhere, but the names of these prisoners were not known to her. In time an NCO at Döberitz supplied her with a list of names. At first Mrs Morris and several assistants packed and despatched the parcels themselves. A scheme whereby people adopted particular prisoners was suggested by Mrs Dorrien Smith and was working fully by July 1915. Each adopter undertook to send at least one parcel, minimum value of 3 shillings, each week to their designated prisoner. Communication between adopted and adopter was encouraged so that the prisoner could indicate what they required. Mrs Morris communicated with the prisoner's next of kin and in this way discovered when prisoners were moved between camps. In the autumn of 1915, when the service battalions (Kitchener's volunteers) were sent to the front, further assistance was required. Mrs Morris remained secretary responsible for the men of the regular battalions and Mrs Maclachlan and Mrs Arthur Somerset each became secretary to four service battalions. The Rifle Brigade had no territorial battalions. All packaging and dispatching of clothes, boots and other items was done by these three ladies. In the spring of 1916 it was decided to start a bread fund, to send every man each week 4lbs of bread from Berne. Fund raising for this began with an entertainment which was attended by several royal ladies.

In October 1916 the Central Prisoners of War Committee was formed by the Red Cross Society to regularize the ad hoc arrangements that had developed for the supply of food and other necessities to British prisoners of war. There had been too much overlapping, some pows were receiving too much, some too little and it was felt that articles and information useful to the enemy were being sent. It was agreed that three parcels of properly selected food weighing 10lbs and 13lbs of bread should be sent to each prisoner each fortnight. From December 1916 no parcels were allowed to be sent out other than from the Central Committee or from regimental associations licensed by them. For the Rifle Brigade to fulfil these requirements it was discovered that £14,700 would be required each year. In view of the increasing shortage of food in Britain, and doubts as to whether the

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[52] NA FO 383/18 contains a list of 403 British pows at Tingleff camp Tingleff or Tingliff is the German spelling, Tinglev the Danish.
[53] A. Betty
[54] M Hall, *In Enemy Hands: A British Territorial Soldier in Germany 1915-1919* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd. 2002
[55] IWM misc153(2356) Anon – a personal account written in 1919

association would be able to obtain sufficient supplies, it was decided to let the Central Committee pack the food parcels. Each parcel however bore a label with the name of the adopter who had paid for it. The secretaries' task now was to find a sufficient number of new adopters to ensure all Rifle Brigade prisoners were supplied with the new standard amounts. The secretaries retained responsibility to pack and dispatch parcels containing clothing, boots, and 'such small necessaries that the government permits the relations to send and for which they forward the money'.

In 1917 a Joint Parliamentary Committee was set up to look into the question of private provision of food and clothing to pows as relatives were unhappy with the situation. From this time 'personal parcels' were allowed. They could contain such items as toiletries, stationery, smoking items, buttons, braces, belts, cap badges, shoulder titles, badges of rank, sweets, chocolates, chess, draughts and domino sets, mittens, socks or mufflers, up to a maximum weight of 11lb. In the autumn of 1917 the numbers of known Rifle Brigade prisoners were: 443 from the four regular battalions and 240 from the eight service battalions; 67 were known to have died in captivity.[56]

Within the Rush file at the Imperial War Museum is a report on the work of the British Post Office in Güstrow, which was written in June 1917[57]. It was started in November 1914 to handle and distribute the letters and parcels which arrived in the camp for British pows. It states that on average 14,000 parcels were received each month, 11,000 of which had to be re-addressed and despatched. From March 1917 the workload was increased when the German authorities ordered that each parcel be opened and the contents 'censored'. Parcels and letters were then sent on each week to between 200 and 300 addresses. *'Men working outside the lager on farms etc., are never settled in one place for any length of time, as a rule, but are moved about from one village to another, thus entailing, constant changing of address, as a notification of a change of address is never given until the man or men have actually moved, this causes a great number of parcels to be returned from the old address, to Güstrow to be re-addressed, parcels never being sent on from the old address to the new one.'* What chance was there of the bread from Berne arriving in a state fit to eat for those pows on a work commando?

It wasn't unusual for pows to have their photos taken whilst in Germany, many thousands can be seen in various collections. Enterprising German photographers were allowed into camps and many pows paid to have photos of themselves taken either singly or in groups. The two picture postcards that exist showing Henry Thomas as a prisoner of war are quite unusual. Although the men are all wearing pow uniforms, some the 'new style' uniform – black with broad brown inserts sewn into the arm and leg, and some like Henry Thomas wearing the 'old style' – dark blue, or black, with yellow piping, all seem to be trying to make themselves look as if they are wearing civilian clothes. They have turned back the collars of their jackets to make them look like revers, most are wearing collar and tie and are showing off waistcoats, cardigans and watch chains when they have them. Also none are wearing any headwear and hair is neatly brushed. They look well fed and cared for. The only jarring note is the intense far-away look and the clenched fists of some of the men. Henry Thomas can be seen in the group of seven as the man seated on the left and in the group of nine as the man seated on the right. It appears that his trousers have been 'pressed' to produce a 'knife edge' crease. Maybe they are a group of British pows in a small work commando. The background shows no features that relate to a pow camp. It has been suggested by IWM staff that this composition may have been designed to reassure relatives, to show them how well they were faring. The pow uniforms were sent from Britain. The new uniform was first used in 1916, so the photo was taken during the latter part of Henry Thomas's imprisonment.

During the Great War more than 173,000 British service personnel were held as Prisoners of War by the Germans. At the Armistice, 11 November 1918, those held close behind the German front line were allowed to make their own way to the Allies front line. These men, often those captured during the German Spring Offensives of 1918 had usually not been placed in a POW camp or have been made known to the Red Cross from whom they would have received food and clothing. They were usually in a dreadful condition, having been worked hard on starvation rations. They were collected by the army and passed back down the lines of

[56] Rifle Brigade Chronicles
[57] IWM 05/4/1 J P Rush. The report is signed David B Pryde Pte London Scottish Regt Chief of English Post 1915-1917

communication, crossing to Dover and being sent to a reception camp at Canterbury. The prisoners held in camps in Germany in the main obeyed requests that they stay in the prison camps until their repatriation to Britain could be organized. These were brought out through Holland, Switzerland and Denmark. Their transports landed them at Hull, Dover and Leith. They were taken to reception camps in Canterbury and Ripon from where they were sent home on two months leave after they were fed, cleaned, clothed and given a medical check-up. The men were also given the opportunity to make written complaints about their treatment at the hands of their captors. Very few did, probably because they feared it would delay their journey back to their families. Some may have wanted to leave their experiences behind and make a fresh start.[58]

Most of the British pows in camps to the east of the Elbe were repatriated under the auspices of the Danish Scheme, which was devised by the British naval attaché in Copenhagen, Captain C C Dix. This meant that men from the northern and eastern parts of Germany were taken to the Baltic ports and thence to Denmark in chartered Danish steamers where they were transhipped onto larger ships for the journey across the North Sea. Some men were accommodated in camps in Denmark as the system to remove men from Germany to Denmark was moving more men from Germany than there were berths on ships to take them back to the UK. Some men travelled across the North Sea in the chartered Danish ships but later the British Ministry of Shipping was able to put more troop ships on the route. The men were taken to either Leith or Hull from whence they were transported by rail to the reception camp at Ripon before being sent home on leave. The Danish scheme had completed its work by mid-January 1919.[59]

Henry Thomas sent one of his photo postcards to his mother with the message 'Am in Denmark on my way home still well'. It is post marked Jan 7 19. We know therefore that he was repatriated to Britain under the auspices of the Danish scheme. It is probable however that he got home before this postcard arrived. Henry Thomas's army service record shows the date he was posted to the Rifle Brigade depot as the 2 January 1919 that is the date on which he became known to the army again. Following the known repatriation dates of a number of officers both from Cox's list[60] and from their memoirs it is likely that the 2 January 1919 is the date that Henry Thomas arrived back on British soil and in the reception camp at Ripon. Two ships arrived back in Leith from Denmark on that date, both were troop ships, the *Porto* and the *Huntsend*. Of these it is more likely that he was on the *Huntsend* because the majority of the ORs on the *Porto* were ones who had been accommodated for a while in a Swedish army camp. Most or the ORs who travelled aboard the *Huntsend* had been accommodated in the Danish camps, at Greve, Barfredshoj and Sandholm. The relatively late date of repatriation despite being associated with a camp fairly near the Baltic coast was due to his being on a work commando. Because the stammlagers couldn't accommodate all of the pows listed as being in that camp, these camps had to be repeatedly cleared and men from the commandos brought into the camp before they too were moved to the Baltic ports. From a German war office document found in Danish Red Cross archives we can see that there were more than 66,000 pows on Güstrow's books in October 1918, 18,653 of whom were British. The pow we quoted earlier who was on a Güstrow work commando records that by 18 November they were ready to return to Güstrow for repatriation. They arrived on the following day but found it difficult to find shelter as the camp was so full with others returning from working camps. He didn't leave the camp until a month later by which time the camp was taken in charge by British officers.[61] These would have been officer pows who were helping with the repatriation effort under the direction of the Danish scheme personnel working in Berlin. During this time in camp the pows could take advantage of their 'freedom' to visit the local town.

Each camp contained pows of several nationalities and at first it was only the British POWs who were being removed for repatriation. In time the French asked to be allowed to use the facilities that the Danish scheme had

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[58] The National Archives. Interviews with British prisoners of war conducted by the Committee on the Treatment of British Prisoners of War are held in the WO 161 series

[59] see my dissertation from MA in First World War Studies from Birmingham University 2009 which describes the repatriation of British Prisoners of War from Germany via Denmark, 1918-19.

[60] Messrs. Cox and Co. *List of British Officers taken prisoner in the various Theatres of War between August, 1914, and November, 1918* (reprinted in Uckfield, East Sussex by The Naval and Military Press Ltd.)

[61] IWM misc153(2356) Anon – a personal account written in 1919

set up, later developing their own routes and systems. Travel to the Baltic ports from the camps in Germany was usually by train. We have an account from Keith Harris, an Australian merchant sailor who travelled from Warnemünde to Copenhagen on the *Niels Ebbesen* earlier in December. He describes being accommodated in 'barracks inside Germany's largest test flying station' in Warnemünde for four nights whilst awaiting transport to Denmark. He had travelled by rail from Parchim camp in a cattle truck. He writes in his diary 'we got underway for Copenhagen (Denmark) and I cannot explain our feelings to see the coast of Germany slowly fade away and to think that we are free men once again. We could not realise it for some time.'[62] We know that this voyage was delayed by a severe snowstorm, which he doesn't mention, probably because prisoners who were held in the north of Germany were used to the severe wintery conditions.

It is most likely that Henry Thomas was transported from Warnemünde, the port of Rostock, on the 27 December on one of the four Danish boats which arrived in Copenhagen from there on that date, *CPA Koch*, *Cimbria*, *Neils Ebbesen* and *Malmo*. The first three were ships of the United Steamships company with carrying capacities of 500, 400 and 300 respectively. The *Malmo* with a capacity of 550 was a ship of the Oresund company. Sergeant Summers memoirs contains an account of his repatriation journey home from Parchim camp. He also arrived in Copenhagen on 27 December. From this we know he must also have travelled from Warnemünde on one of the four boats mentioned above. He writes 'We had everything we wanted on board, plenty of good food and anything we liked to drink.'[63] This may not have been everyone's experience of the short trip from Warnemünde to Copenhagen as the sergeant had 'jumped the queue' at Warnemünde and prevailed on the Danish captain to carry him and his companion unofficially.

On arrival at Copenhagen docks Sgt Summers writes 'saw our first British warship in the docks there. A cheer went up. There were thousands waiting for our ship coming in, and we had a very fine reception.' Summers was less pleased when told that the troops were to sleep in large warehouses on the dock that evening before being taken to a Danish army camp the next morning. He and his companion took themselves off to town to find their own accommodation for the night. They returned to the warehouse in the morning and travelled with the other returning pows to a camp which he doesn't identify. When Sgt Summers arrived in the Danish army camp he 'dined with the sergeants of the Danish regiment who were stationed there, and dined well. There was everything you could have wished for in the way of eatables and drink. In fact they could not do enough to oblige us. We had a bath and a change of clothing. We were treated so well at these barracks, I could easily have stayed for a twelve month, but we had to go.'

K Harris a few days earlier in December describes arriving in Copenhagen at 3.45pm, where they boarded a waiting train. 'We arrived at Laastrup [Taastrup] at 4.30p.m. and then began a march of six miles to a camp named 'Grevelejren'.' On our arrival we were served with what we needed mostly, a good meal, and we did it full justice. We were then put into barracks, and found our beds all ready for us with white sheets and white pillow slip and good warm blankets. I think I had the best sleep I have ever had that night, and I think most of the others did too.' After a good breakfast the next morning the returning pows were told by the Danish camp commander that they were no longer prisoners but guests of Denmark and that following two days quarantine they would be allowed to visit the local town.[64]

Corporal C E Green of the Scots Guards, who on arrival at Copenhagen was sent to Sandholm camp in north Zealand, travelled back to Leith from Copenhagen on the *Huntsend* and he records that they had a hearty send off from the Danes when they left frihavn at 4pm on 30 January.[65] Sergeant Summers also travelled back from Copenhagen on the *Huntsend*, he remembers that they 'left Denmark in the afternoon amidst cheering from thousands of people' and that there were '1500 of us crammed on board, but there were only lifeboats to hold 500. There were so many on board that it was standing room only inside and we had to sleep on deck.' He adds that 'All the way over we passed mines galore, and at night , some of the crew told us, we had passed within ten

[62] Keith Harris Mitchell Library of New South Wales MLMSS1295
[63] IWM 05/8/1 Sgt W M Summers
[64] Keith Harris Mitchell Library of New South Wales MLMSS1295
[65] Cpl Green IWM 83/50/1

feet of them, Through the day we could see them about fifty feet away. Everyman had to have a life belt on for the duration of the journey.'[66] Corporal Green corroborates this, mentioning the care that had to be taken to avoid mines during the voyage. Through the Skaggerak, the Kattegat and the North sea, several were seen close to the boat and the men were told to wear life jackets during the voyage. On 01 January Green adds that a terrible gale made most on board seasick. Ships could only berth at Leith when the tide was right and the *Huntsend* anchored outside the harbour on the morning of 2 January. It was able to dock at 2pm. The men were disembarked at 4pm.

The reception in Leith must have been heartening, although naturally much more fuss had been made of the earlier arrivals. Between 28 November 1918 and 2 January 1919 the people of Leith and Edinburgh had greeted at least 30 Danish Scheme ships packed with returning pows. On each occasion the returning prisoners were greeted by local civic dignitaries, a senior army officer and often a pipe band. A letter from the king was read out to them and they were given their own copy to keep:
'1918. The Queen joins me in welcoming you on your release from the miseries & hardships, which you have endured with so much patience & courage. During these many months of trial, the early rescue of our gallant Officers & Men from the cruelties of their captivity has been uppermost in our thoughts. We are thankful that this longed for day has arrived, & that back in the old Country you will be able once more to enjoy the happiness of a home & to see good days among those who anxiously look for your return.
George R.I.'[67]

Ladies of Leith and Edinburgh prepared hot meals for all the men which were served to them in two large warehouses on the dockside and they were then allowed facilities to send messages to their homes. They were given packages of food, newspapers, cigarettes and tobacco and placed in trains which departed from the docks in Leith taking them to Ripon. The reception at Leith on 18 December involved 2 Scottish bands and 'hundreds of school children and lots of other people. We didn't get the chance to cheer, we had to be content to listen to them.'[68] Sgt Summers who travelled back on the *Huntsend* arriving in Leith on 02 January seemed to be disappointed with the reception he received in Leith writing that 'There were about fifty people waiting to welcome about fifteen hundred of us at Leith.'[69] Several returning prisoners report that people flocked to the railway lines to cheer on the returning prisoners. Those who travelled back to Leith on the first two boats were taken through the streets from the docks to Leith Central station, to catch a train to their destination. But the returning prisoners arriving on subsequent boats were, following their reception, despatched by train from the railway station within the docks, the dock gates being locked. The local populace was kept out and they complained bitterly but the decision remained. Not to be daunted they lined the railway lines and cheered the returning forces from a distance. After a couple of days in the reception camp in Ripon where they were issued small kit, pay and given a medical inspection the returning soldiers were given two months leave and sent to their homes.

Rejoins Army

At the end of the war more than two million men were serving in the army abroad and more than 1.5 million at home. More than 800,000 had been killed or died in service. By September 1920 demobilization was practically complete. By 1921 the regular army numbered 296,948. This was cut to 217,477 in 1922. Recruits were few after the war and pay was increased to attract better-educated troops. Between 1919 and 1922 there were

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[66] IWM 05/8/1 Sgt W M Summers
[67] copy of letter shown in M Hall, *In Enemy Hands: A British Territorial Soldier in Germany 1915-1919* (Stroud, Tempus, 2002)
[68] Keith Harris Mitchell Library of New South Wales MLMSS1295
[69] Sgt Summers IWM 05/8/1

several expeditions, campaigns and small wars involving the British Army; North Russia, Waziristan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Ireland and Egypt.[70]

Henry Thomas would have had to report to the Rifle Brigade depot in Winchester on the completion of his two months leave. On 14 March 1919, at the age of 36, Henry Thomas re-engaged in the Rifle Brigade 'for such term as shall complete 21 years Army service'. As he had joined the army on 1 January 1903 this meant he would have just less than five years more to serve. Would he have been expecting a pension at the completion of 21 years' service? For signing on again he was awarded a bounty of £20. He was given a new army number – 6905100 and on 20 April he was posted to 1st bn in Aldershot.[71] What remained of the 1st battalion left France for Aldershot on 23 April where it was reformed. On 30 April Colonel Paley took over command. All members of the Battalion had leave to take and groups from the battalion took part in many parades. Until the end of August there was an expectation that they would sail for India in October but instead they were warned for Mesopotamia.[72]

06/05/1919 – received the first instalment of the £20 bounty - £6 5s19d
25/06/1919 – to Aldershot
15/09/1919 – to Mesopotamia[73]

1st battalion Rifle Brigade sailed from Tilbury on 15 September 1919 in the SS *Karoa*, calling at Gibraltar, Malta and Port Said, reaching Bombay on 5 October. They immediately transferred to the HT *Swakopmund* (a German passenger ship) bound for Basrah. They had to transfer again, to the *Vita* to cross the bar. On 13 October 1919 they reached Basrah and marched to Makina that night. After one week in camp they moved up the river Tigris to Baghdad by barge, touching Amarah and Kut, reaching Baghdad on 31 October. Leaving the same night they reached Baiji the next day. They stayed in this camp until July 1920. The weather in Baji made life uncomfortable with up to a 60 degree variation in temperature between dawn and mid-day and the nights always cool or cold. Up to twenty men at a time were able to spend a week's leave at the YMCA in Baghdad.

As part of the 53rd Infantry Brigade the battalion was moved at the end of July 1920 by rail to Baghdad because of an Arab rising. Again the mid-day heat was intense. Between 10 and 14 August the battalion was sent to Bagubah by rail but didn't take part in the fighting. In September 1920 part of the battalion were sent out to relieve a train of Assyrian refugees, cut off by damaged railway lines about 60 miles north of Baghdad. Early in October 1920 the battalion was inspected by Lt General Sir Aylmer Haldane. They then left for Hillah. On 11 October they were tasked with pacifying an area around Tuwairij, a centre of insurrection. The 13th Rajputs saw some fighting during this period but the Rifle Brigade was there to show force, impose payment of fines and collect rifles. In 66 days, 14 spent at rest, the battalion had marched 420 miles. There were few roads and the tracks were bad.

On 2 November they entered Kerbala, they were there to enforce peace terms and this involved erecting barricades, destroying certain houses and imposing certain restrictions. Then they returned to Hillah, via Kifl, Kufa, Najaf. By the end of November they were again on the move, to Diwaniyah and Rumaithah. They followed the route of the railway which had been completely destroyed by Arabs in July, August and September (every sleeper had been removed, rails twisted, telegraph poles destroyed), arriving at the Rumaithah railhead on 15 December 1920. Here they heard that they would proceed to India shortly. On 20 December they reached Samawah by train and camped in a palm grove. The advanced guard sailed for India on 27 December. On 7 January 1921 the main party reached Basra[74]

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[70] J Laffin, *Tommy Atkins: The Story of the English Soldier*, (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2003), pp223-4
[71] army record
[72] Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[73] army record
[74] Rifle Brigade Chronicle

08/01/1921 – 'In the field' Conduct Sheet - Absent from roll call 20.50 till 21.30 - punishment: deprived 7 days' pay
12/01/1921 – to India[75]

At 02.00 on 12 January 1921 the remainder of the battalion was ordered to embark at 06.30 for Zubair, 10miles south west of Basra because an Arab raid on the town had been reported. When the battalion arrived all was clear so they returned to Basra where at 16.00 they embarked on the SS *Chakdara*. They arrived in Bombay on the 17 January and troops were disembarked on 20th. Between 20 and 24 January they travelled by train from Bombay to Cawnpore. [76]

21/01/1921 – Cawnpore 1. disobedience of orders i.e. leaving train on wrong side. 2. bringing beer on to train
punishment: 14 days confined to barracks[77]

General Lord Rawlinson inspected the battalion on 1 February 1921. He presented 1914 and 1915 stars to the men of the battalion who were entitled to them. During a hot summer in Cawnpore five men died of heatstroke and during rains between the end of July and September five more died during a Cholera outbreak.[78]

08/09/1921 1st bn Rifle Brigade permanent pass – 'permission to be absent from his quarters from after duty till 23.59 hours each day until further orders, except when on duty.'

01/12/1922 – Employment Sheet
Trade before enlistment: Butcher - but Conduct Sheet says Butler
Rank: Acting Corporal
Nature of employment since last assessment: Range Warden
Character from a civil employment point of view: A very good worker with plenty of self-confidence. Is very cheerful and willing and is intelligent. Lt Taylor

06/12/1922 – acting Corporal – Cawnpore – improper conduct on the range at 14.00hrs
punishment: revert to private rifleman

It may have been this event which was the last straw for Henry Thomas, or that he found conditions in India too trying. At the age of forty he now realised he could not wait another 12 months to complete the 21 years' service in the army he had signed up for in 1919. In January 1923 whilst in Cawnpore he applied for his discharge from the army.

28/02/1923 – posted to depot
01/03/1923 – returned to England
14/03/1923 – discharged para. 392(XVIII) King's Regulations (at own request after 18 years' service)
"Character 'Good' . Has served in the Army for over 18 years. He has been employed as a waiter in the Officers mess, as an officers' servant, and for the last 2 years as Range Warden. He is a hardworking man who runs his own show extremely well." signed A Paley Col 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade.
Home address 60 Mote Road, Maidstone
Total service at date of discharge – 20 years 74 days
Total service toward pension – 11 years 222 days

[75] army service record
[76] Rifle Brigade Chronicle
[77] army service record
[78] Rifle Brigade Chronicle

The application for discharge amongst his army service records shows that he had served 20 years and 18 days "service towards limited engagement" and "service for fixing rate of pension". However it was determined that the "Total service towards Pension" was 11 years and 222 days. He was thus not awarded a pension.

Medals:
1914 star with clasp and roses
British War
Victory[79]
General Service Medal with bar "IRAQ" [80]

1914 Star - with clasp and roses
"The star was awarded to those who served in France and Flanders with an active unit between 5 August 1914 (the day the BEF landed)[81] and 22 November 1914 (a date during the First Battle of Ypres, when the BEF was relieved by the French). The ribbon of this campaign medal was awarded while the war was in progress, and was worn by some during the closing months of the war. In October 1919, a further distinction was made; if the recipient of the 1914 star had been under fire, he was entitled to attach a bar to the medal ribbon bearing the dates of entitlement, and a rosette when the ribbon bar alone was worn."[82]
Although it's hard to interpret, it looks like Harry may have been sent his Star in May 1919 and his clasp in June 1920.[83]

6,500,000 British War medals were issued to those who had served between 1914 and 1920. 1919 to 1920 service would have covered men performing mine clearance in the North Sea and British involvement in the campaigns in Russia.

5,725,000 Victory medals were awarded. Similar medals were issued to all Allied nations.

The General Service Medal was a campaign medal awarded for service during the time the Rifle brigade spent in Mesopotamia 1920 to 1922.

It is not clear when Harry received his Princess Mary's gift box. The boxes were intended as Christmas gifts for "all those 'wearing the King's uniform on Christmas Day 1914'". Boxes for Class A recipients, which included men and nurses at the front and those wounded, captured or interned, were ready for distribution by 12 December, and those at the front did receive them on Christmas Day.[84] It is believed that the boxes for those in captivity were not sent directly to the pows themselves but to their next of kin.

Life after the Army

After leaving the Army Henry Thomas is said to have worked as an insurance salesman and on a farm at East Peckham, Kent.[85]

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[79] army service record
[80] The four medals are in A betty's possession, held within the Princess Mary's gift box
[81] Advance parties maybe but the first four infantry divisions didn't start to disembark in France until the 14th August.
[82] P Doyle, Tommy's War: British Military Memorabilia 1914-1918 (Marlborough, Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2008) p197
[83] Army service record
[84] P Doyle, Tommy's War: British Military Memorabilia 1914-1918 (Marlborough, Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2008) p159
[85] A Betty

He married Edith Florence Naylor in 1924 and two children were born; Betty Patience on 08 December 1927 and Constance Ellen on 12 August 1930. Edith died in 1942.

Henry Thomas was head gardener at Oakwood Hospital (Kent County Mental Hospital)..

Died 15 June 1947 in the hospital Barming Heath (cardio-vascular degeneration).[86]

Glossary

BEF	British Expeditionary Force
bn	battalion
C of E	Church of England
Col	Colonel
CSM	Company (or Colour) Sergeant Major
FM	Field Marshal
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
NoK	Next of Kin
OR	Other Ranks - soldiers of any rank other than commissioned officers
POW	Prisoner of War
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
Sgt	Sergeant
W.O.	Warrant Officer – senior non-commissioned officer

Sources

Oral – Aunt Betty
copies of Birth and Death certificates
census from 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911
Army Service Record held by Army Personnel Centre Glasgow
International Red Cross, Geneva
Photo postcard from Harry - 'postmark Jan 7 19' "Am in Denmark on my way home still well"
The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1903, 1904, 1905 Letters to the Editor – 1st battalion
The Rifle Brigade Chronicle 1916 - War Record of 3rd Battalion
Various IWM files containing POW accounts
M A Jones's dissertation from MA in First World War Studies from Birmingham University 2009 which describes the repatriation of British Prisoners of War from Germany via Denmark, 1918-19.
Messrs. Cox and Co. *List of British Officers taken prisoner in the various Theatres of War between August, 1914, and November, 1918* First printed in 1919 (reprinted in Uckfield, East Sussex by The Naval and Military Press Ltd.)

[86] Death certificate

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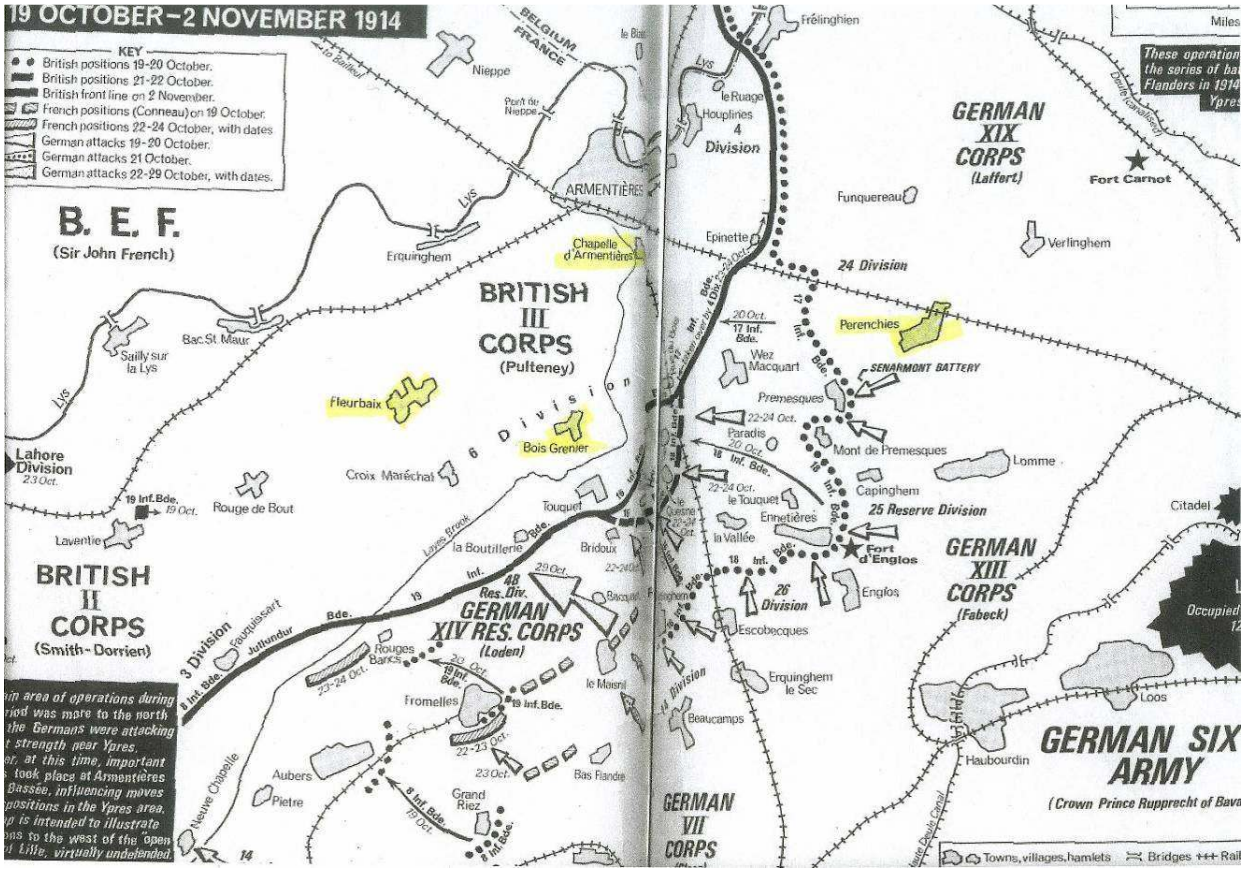
Photos and maps

The 3 postboys

The 2 postboys

Harry Thomas Fowler young man

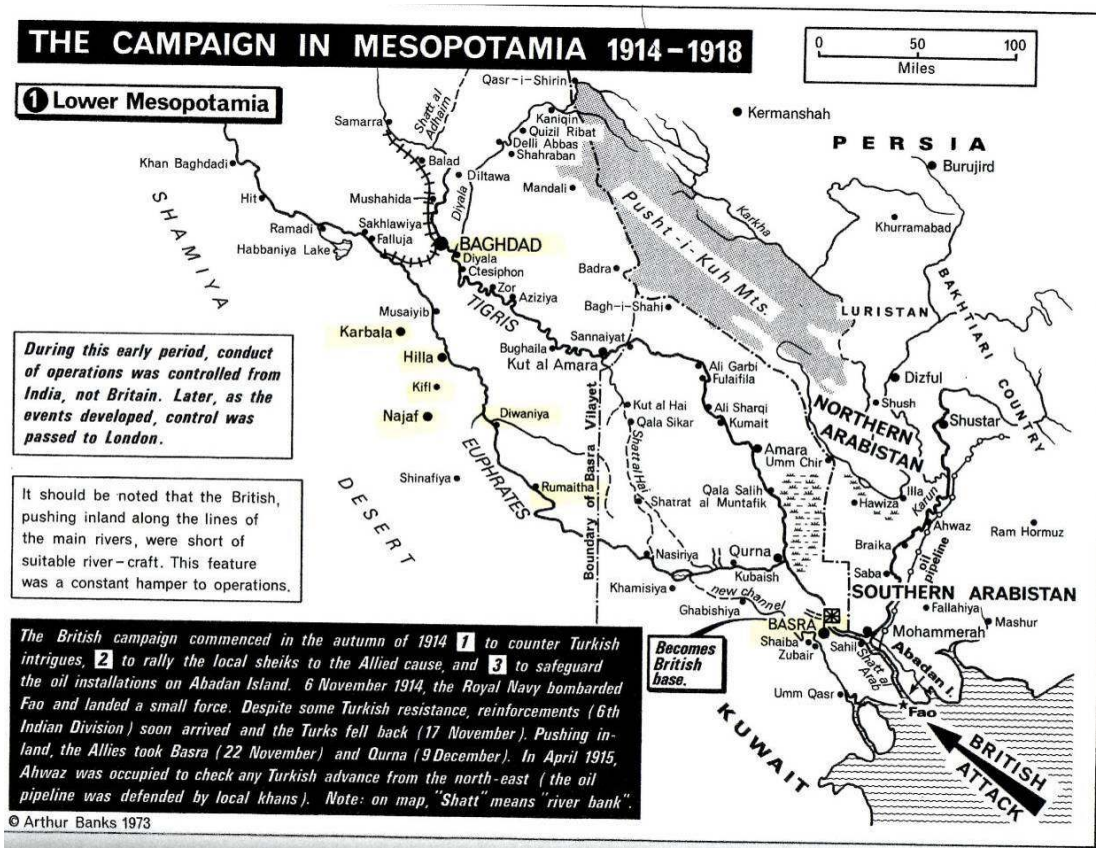


The battle of Armentiéres – 19 October – 2 November 1914

Harry's "Princess Mary Christmas gift 1914" including some of contents; a Christmas card, a picture of Princess Mary and a pencil.

PoW postcards


LONDON E.S.
PAID
JAN 7 19
LONDON E.S.
PAID
JAN 7 19
Mrs Fowler
75 Mote Rd
Maidstone
England
M93



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Harry's permit

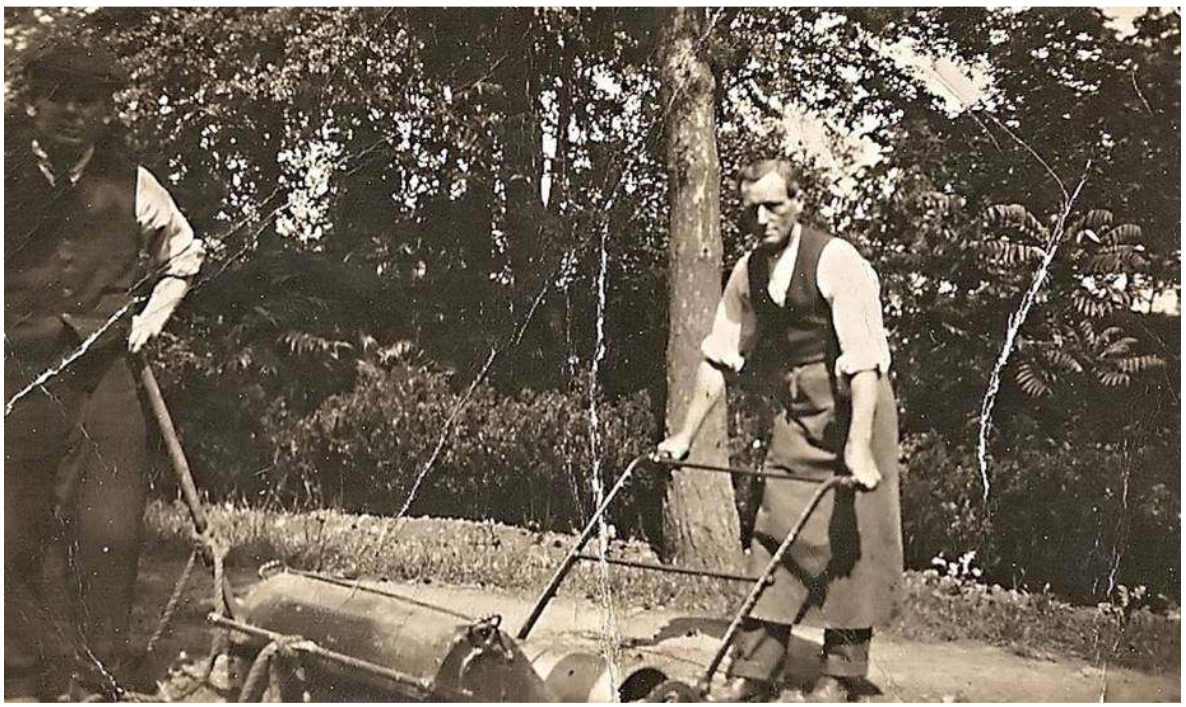
Harry Thomas Fowler's medals

Edith Florence Naylor

Edith's mother Ann Elizabeth

Fowler family, Harry, Connie, Betty and Edith in Maidstone. 1931

Connie and Betty in Maidstone 2014



Harry at work as gardener at Oakwood hospital.