

# From Dänholm to repatriation and home – Appendix C

## - leaving Stralsund on 14th and 15th December 1918

01.11.18 & 21.04.20

It is very fortunate that both Captain Henry Wilkinson, Durham Light Infantry (DLI) and Lieut. Arthur Witherington, RFA wrote detailed diaries while they were pows at Dänholm and continued doing so right up until they finally arrived home. Wilkinson's diary<sup>1</sup> and sketchbook are now in the Durham County Records Office (DRO) while Witherington's diaries and memoirs are in the archive at Beamish Museum and his pow memorabilia is in the Liddle Collection at Leeds University. DRO has transcribed Wilkinson's diary and put it on their website together with the artwork in his sketchbook. Mike Christopher bought Witherington's diaries in an auction and published his story in 2008 as "Whizz-Bangs, Boche and Woolley Bears", but only 100 books were printed. Not having been able to access this publication I don't know whether it is solely based on Witherington's diaries or a combination of diary entries and his memoirs which he called "Ripon Return 1916 -1918".

These two officers' contemporary accounts of their repatriation journey speak for themselves and seen together give a wonderful insight into how the last two weeks of 1918 were for some of the former officer pows on their way home. I quote both diaries extensively so have chosen to give them each a colour. **Wilkinson blue**, **Witherington green**.

Both officers had been taken prisoner on 27 May 1918. Both came from the North East of England. 23-year-old Wilkinson was from Gateshead while 28-year-old Witherington lived in Sunderland. Captain Henry Wilkinson was in the large group that left Dänholm on the 14<sup>th</sup> December. Lieutenant Arthur Witherington left on the 15<sup>th</sup>.



Lieut. Arthur Simpson Witherington

---

<sup>1</sup> Re-written in 1920

## **Dänholm camp 13<sup>th</sup> December**

We pick up the story at Dänholm;

### **Friday 13th December**

“News came that 500 will go so that I just came in! Also that we were to parade at 1am. Our heavy luggage left at 6pm and Burrell and I went to the Canteen to get “warm” on much wine at 12 marks per bottle. They rumoured that our boat would go straight to England, but that was too much to believe! After a late meal at 11pm we smashed up all our crockery etc. in a barbarous fashion, took our light luggage over to the gym, and “fell in” outside the hut at 12.30am. – thus began our journey home”.

### **Saturday 14th December**

“Moving up to the gym, we finally marched off from there, after a speech by the Commandant, at 1.30am and proceeded to the Harbour Station. There was considerable delay at the ferry. In the train we were fortunate to obtain a third-class carriage for 5 of us (The Hun still wouldn’t treat us as gentlemen!) and eventually we moved at 3.45am. Leaving the town station at 5am, we passed through Ribitz, halting there for an hour at 7am, and reached Rostock, a country town at 9.15am. The Port of Warnemunde greeted us at 10.35am and after much shunting and shouting, we finally came alongside the “Malmo”.

There was of course much delay, but the welcome of the Danish Red Cross people was worth much, and their lunch at 12.45, consisting of soup, meat, apples and beer, was worth more! During lunch – at 12.55pm to be exact – we left Germany, our hearts lighter and everybody happy. The ship was small (248 net, 1500 gross) and there were no cabins, but though crowded we were comfortable. We were quickly out of sight of the land; and the rest of the day passed quietly. One Danish boat we passed dipped her flag – an inspiring sight. Tea was at 7pm (meat, jam, butter, and bread, in 3 sittings) and at 8pm Sarson paid us the balance of pay from the Hun – thank God! At about 8.30pm we anchored, it being too foggy to carry on through the narrow channel of the mine-fields”.

### **Sunday 15th December**

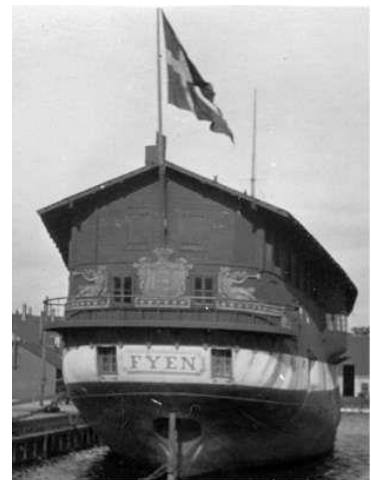
“At 2am it was so beastly hot on the Saloon floor that Burrell and I got up and walked round the deck until breakfast (eggs and tea) at 6. Each of us had received during the night a lucky bag containing chocolate, apples, cigarettes, a cigar, etc. – mine I found when we awoke at 2am. At 8.30 the anchor was weighed and we carefully threaded our way through the mile wide channel, the mine-field on either side looking extremely dangerous, though we passed several Danish steamers and three destroyers. At this stage it became very foggy, so that our siren was going continually, and we moved at half speed only, but we soon picked up the Pilot and eventually sighted the outer Copenhagen lighthouses, after passing two British cruisers. The Dock was reached at 10.45am but we were unexpected, and it was not until 12.45pm that those belonging to B, C, D, E and F Huts left the ship. A walk of about a mile, during which my kit bag became damnably heavy, brought us to an old training ship called the Fyne, which was to be our temporary quarters – comfortable enough – and where we washed and rested for an hour or so.”

And the journey as described by the Denton twin brothers.

tion of fighting.  
The Lieutenants **Denton**, with 500 other officers, were taken on a vessel en route for Denmark, but the ship got into a mine-field and had to anchor all night, as a boat had struck a mine and foundered only an hour previously. A blizzard was blowing, and the passengers had to walk the decks all the time to keep from freezing. Next day, the bearings having been ascertained, the journey was resumed, and when they arrived at **Copenhagen** the prisoners found that splendid arrangements had been already made for their reception.

## Denmark 15<sup>th</sup> December

252 of the officers and 114 OR were billeted on the "Fynen" on the 15<sup>th</sup> December. The Fynen was a "barracks-ship" moored at the Navy dock in Copenhagen with billet for 650 other ranks i.e. not suitable for officers. The commandant was Captain Wessel who wrote his memoirs a few years later. *"As well as ordinary soldiers, many officers had a short stay on the 'Fynen'. One evening the ship unexpectedly billeted 250 officers, that arrived by steam-ship from Germany; and as there were only 20 cabins available, the rest had to use hammocks, which did not please the officers; but the next day better quarters were found for them in the hotels in the city."*

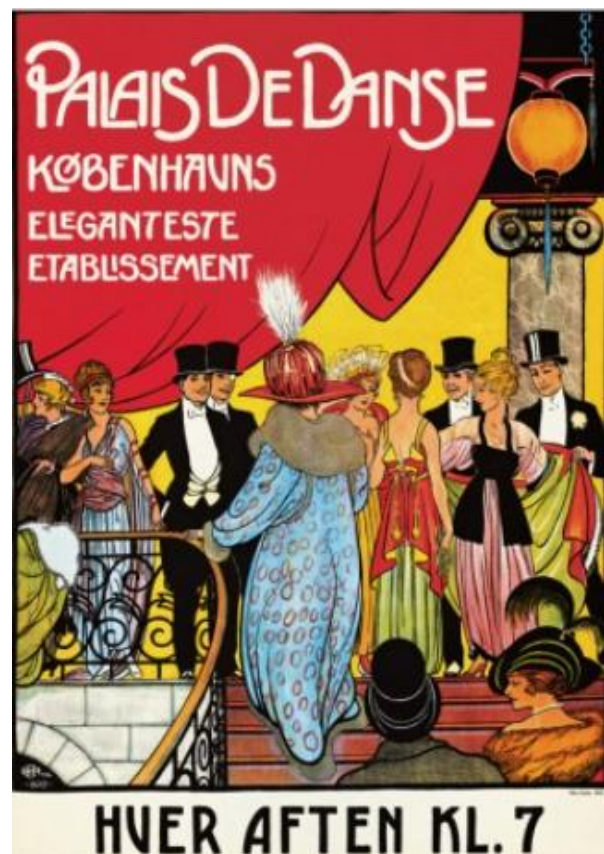


The remaining 200 Dänholm officers were billeted in one of the hotels/guest houses in the exclusive seaside resorts on the so called “Strandvejen” “Beach Road” which runs from Copenhagen to Helsingør. They had been opened up a few days earlier to provide accommodation for the officers.

A front-page story in the Danish newspapers on the 15<sup>th</sup> was about the torpedo ship “Sværdfisken”. The ship had hit a mine the previous morning while taking up mines in the Langland belt. 7 of the crew were killed and 4 were injured. Henry Wilkinson must have had some interest in ships, for he describes the ferry “Malmo” spot on! They were lucky to have been on this journey on the “Malmo”. After leaving the Dänholm group in Copenhagen the ferry sailed back and forth to Warnemunde picking up other loads of passengers. On arrival at Copenhagen on the 19<sup>th</sup> 13 OR had to be taken to the Oeresundshospital. They must have been suffering from stomach pains for after an investigation it was confirmed they had food poisoning. They had been served cabbage soup and meat. The meat had been delivered to the ferry 10 days earlier and there was still 500 lbs. of it left, slimy and in places green! It was made clear that this was totally unacceptable and that food given to the men had to be of a good standard. It was also pointed out that the “Malmo” only had space and facilities for a maximum of 550 passengers on short journeys. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, i.e. with the Dänholm group, there were 563 passengers and it had been reported as being a very uncomfortable journey for them. Overcrowding had been registered on several ships and in future numbers had to be controlled better.

#### 15<sup>th</sup> December continued;

To visit the town was our next thought, and how great was our joy when we were able to cash a cheque, buy real Capstans [cigarettes], and drink real Whisky and soda! They were beyond words. We walked round for some time buying sticks, gloves etc. and then discovered that a dinner awaited us at the “Palads” Hotel – the best hotel in the city. It was not missed, and after the finest meal since Paris, we sat in the lounge refreshing ourselves and discussing this wonderful return to civilization. Visits to the Bodega, The Palais de Danse, and other places, reduced us to the “merry” condition and I think we really could not be blamed – it all meant so much to us. However, I managed to cable the Pater from the “Angleterre” at about 1am; and afterwards we wandered down to the ship, tumbled into a hammock and slept the sleep of the just! Copenhagen seemed to be of considerable size, and in many respects worth seeing. The people were quiet, well dressed, and above all, imbued with a sense of hospitality. At every turn we found someone with a kind word and a “Come and have a drink” spirit – the contrast to the Hun methods could not be missed.



Picture found on “ Dansk Plakat Kunst”





The Palads Hotel is on Rådhuspladsen one of the two main squares in Copenhagen. This beautiful hotel, now known as the Scandic Palace Hotel, had been designed by one of the period's leading architects Anton Rosen in 1909 for owner Anders Jensen. Master butcher Anders Jensen, son of a farmer, was a very successful businessman owning two hotels in Copenhagen and the Marienlyst Badehotel in Helsingør. He had immediately seen the potential in Copenhagen being a stopover spot for the soldiers on their journey home from internment, including utilizing the seaside hotels otherwise closed for the season, as quarters for the officers. He co-ordinated the hotels used in the scheme and was their contact with the repatriation headquarters. His company also catered for the men who stayed in the sheds at Free Harbour and he appears to have, to some extent, supplied the foodstuff for the seaside hotels used in the scheme, his own hotel Marienlyst being one of them.

It was something of a luxury "pub crawl" Wilkinson and his friends went on after their fantastic meal at the Palads Hotel. The two establishments he names the Bodega and the Palais du Danse had opened in 1918. One can quite imagine this bunch of "merry" British officers then wandering down, what is known today at Stroeget, to the Hotel D'Angleterre. And what a service he found here - to come in off the street at 1 o'clock in the morning and be able to send a cable home to Gateshead to his father! One wonders how quiet they were when they finally arrived back at the Fynen and their hammock beds!

## Back at Dänholm

Meanwhile back at Dänholm Lt. Arthur Witherington had noted in his diary that he was reading "The Importance of being Ernest", and had a vain attempt to sleep. After having a square meal at 11 pm with Young, Pike, Urry and Digby he spent the hours 1am to 3am talking to the "Col." who was to stay behind with the few being left at Dänholm.

### Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December

4 am paraded in the gym – 40 officers and 40 odd orderlies. German Commandt and Adj' there. March to main station 6.45 left Stralsund – slow train 3rd class carriages – very cold. Reached Rostock 10 am proceeded to Wäternmunde. 10.35 arrived Wäternmunde alongside quay sun shining. Met by Red Cross representatives who were delighted to see us. German guards left us and we immediately boarded "Princess Alexandrine" the Danish ferry boat, we were under the Danish flag and free. One of the best moments in my life. Crew very enthusiastic. Brit destroyers been in port on previous day. Crew couldn't do more for us. Good wash, splendid lunch room – first cut off the joint for months! Changed money 69 mrks = 29.69 kr. Most worth very little.

1.45 left Wäternmunde. Slept most of way. Calm passage.

3.45 arrived Gedser. Commandant and guards presented arms. Tremendous welcome, free beer, 1st. class carriages in train awaiting us, soldiers insisted on carrying luggage. - 4.40 left Gedser - 5.20 Had crossed island on train and boarded another ferry steamer "Alexandra". Many civilians welcomed us. - 5.55 pm arrived Vordingborg.

6.20 pm left Vordingborg by train. Good carriages slow train. At every stop hundreds of civilians on platform insisted on you opening windows, upon which they showered you with apples, Danish flags, cigars, cigarettes and were delighted if you could spare a souvenir. I thus lost all spare handkerchiefs etc. Crowds composed of all ages and classes and insisted on shaking hands "God bless you". Cheered as we left them despite it being a wet night.

11 pm arrived Copenhagen. Met by Danish officers and conducted through streets to magnificent Palads Hotel – people in street cheered and shook hands. Midnight splendid dinner. Danish officers gave us a great welcome in English (tremendous number speak English well, especially young)

1 am Cab from hotel to ferry. Then to large training ship, where hundreds British officers – we all slept in hammocks.

So Witherington in the small group of 48 officers and 29 OR joined Wilkinson and half of the large group on the Fynen in the middle of the night after both had had a good dinner at the Palads Hotel. They must all have been exhausted when they finally laid in their hammocks, happy they were finally out of Germany and on their way home.

## Moved on to seaside hotels

### 16<sup>th</sup> December - Monday

I awoke at 7.30, washed, shaved, had breakfast, and moved with the rest, in a motor-boat to the other side of the Harbour. Another mile-tramp, with kit-bag, brought us to the Station – We'd had a great send-off by the Danish warships in the Harbour and by the O.C. Fyne. At 10am we entrained, destination Helsingør, but this time in 2nd class carriage (again note the difference!) and dropped a party of 50 at a station on the way. At Helsingør a great reception awaited us – ladies gave us small Danish Flags, and we were all loudly cheered by the people! We changed on to a small light railway, and journeyed 8 kilometres Northwards to Hornbæk, where most of us were billeted in the Hornbæk Kro Hotel; a small hotel in this seaside resort and fishing village. Turnbull, Burrell, Johnson and I obtained a room for four. Lunch, a good show, was at 2.30pm and then we walked round the village buying cigarettes, chocolates, postcards, etc. – two of the latter went to Dolly and the Pater. The place was small and dull, but it was good to be comfortable, though dinner at 7pm wasn't wonderful. Being free, we decided that a visit to Copenhagen would be interesting.

Dolly was Henry's fiancée.

## Arrival at the seaside hotels

As Wilkinson mentions a small group left the train en route to Helsingør. These officers were billeted at Skodsborg. When the others arrived at Helsingør station they were officially welcomed by Count Moltke and as reported in the local newspapers greeted by a small "committee", including some young women who handed them flowers and Danish flags. Townspeople were there too to cheer but there

was no music. The newspapers described the officers as looking handsome and fit dressed in their flattering and practical khaki uniforms.

Helsingør had already received a number of French on their way home from internment. These OR were billeted at Horseroed camp not far from Helsingør while the French officers were billeted in some of the seaside hotels alongside British officers. The “Malmø” had docked in Helsingør on 10<sup>th</sup> December with the first large group of French officers who were billeted at Marienlyst Hotel and they had been given a fantastic welcome, with a band playing etc. The streets were filled with OR from Horseroed visiting Helsingør too and it appears that the town had gone all in to make the French feel “at home”. 61 of the Dänholm officers stayed in Helsingør at the Marienlyst Hotel. Their names are on a list together with 13 OR from Dänholm who joined them on the 19<sup>th</sup>.



Wilkinson was in the group of 157<sup>2</sup> officers who were billeted at Hornbæk further along the coast. While he was in the group of 73 staying at the Hornbæk Kro there were 3 other “guest houses” in the village which housed the others. 54 stayed at Bondegården, 15 at Solhøj and 15 at Hornbækhus. They too were joined by a number of Dänholm orderlies on the 19<sup>th</sup>. We leave them for a while to concentrate on Lt. Witherington.

Arthur Witherington was in the group billeted at Skodsborg, where they joined the 202 Dänholm officers who had gone straight to the hotels on arrival on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Just as in Hornbæk there were a number of hotels/guest houses<sup>3</sup> in and near this village that housed the officers. Arthur was apparently first taken to BelleVue Hotel but then within hours billeted at Skodsborg Badehotel instead. This was a sanatorium which had opened in 1898, the owner being inspired by John Harvey Kellogg’s ideas. It had proved to be a great success with its alternative health treatments and vegetarian food and was very popular amongst the wealthy Scandinavians. While the others were staying further up the coast, with a longer and two step train journey to Copenhagen it was easy for the Skodsborg group to whiz back and forth to Copenhagen. Which is exactly what Arthur Witherington did!

---

<sup>2</sup> 3 arrived at Hornbæk on the 17<sup>th</sup>. A small number of officers not at Hornbæk, Helsingør and Skodsborg were billeted at the other seaside hotels on this coastline that were used by British officers e.g. Rungsted Badehotel and Aalsgaard.

<sup>3</sup> Hotel Oeresund, Tåstrup Pension, Aagaard Pension, Vedbæk Hotel and Villa Tertie

## Arthur Simpson Witherington's experiences in Denmark



### Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December

10.15. am train took us 18 km to Skodsborg. Hutchinson's party went further on. Seen nothing of BKB<sup>4</sup> etc. Put in BelleVue Hotel changed to Bade Hotel. Absolute freedom.

Noon good dejeuner – Hotel carried on just as usual. On water's edge. Danes here opened all summer hotels in neighbourhood of Copenhagen to accommodate officers and OR (who are equally well treated). Senior Danish officer accompanies us everywhere. Utmost courtesy and enthusiasm shown everywhere. Good deal of rain.

Caught 3.16 pm train to Copenhagen. Met Robertson, Cave and Boosey in train. Asked way of gentleman to American Express Agency to cash cheque. He insisted on conducting us himself, took us into Hotel Angleterre for coffee and cakes. There we met BKB, Abey etc.

6.30 pm Dinner at Hotel Angleterre, BKB, Stevenson, Mercer, Montgomery, Patton, Stewart, Russell, Abey, Pike and myself.

9 pm Carried on to "Palais de Danse"

10.49 pm train to Skodsborg. Midnight bed. In Copenhagen wired B and father at office of arrival and prospects getting home. Rain most of day – finer towards night.

---

<sup>4</sup> Captain Basil Kelsey Barton



## Officers having fun

Arthur Simpson Witherington and his chums had an amazing time in Denmark and it wasn't because they were relaxing at the sanatorium and eating veggie food. 29-year-old Arthur was the son of a Sunderland shipowner. After attending the Methodist Leys Boarding School he had read law at Cambridge University, worked for his father's company and married in 1915. He joined the army shortly after and became an officer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Northumbria RFA. He was taken prisoner in May 1918.

After depositing his luggage at the hotel and eating lunch Arthur was off to Copenhagen as it seems his friends quartered in other hotels also were. What luck to be invited for coffee and cake by a stranger at the top notch exclusive Hotel D'Angleterre and find the guys there. And it was raining so why not stay on for a delicious dinner before going on to party at the "Palais du Danse". But he can only have been moderately tipsy as he did manage to get the train back to Skodsborg. And this was pretty much Arthur's pattern for the following days, train to Copenhagen, meeting friends, wining and dining at all the best restaurants and going to the theatres and various entertainments.



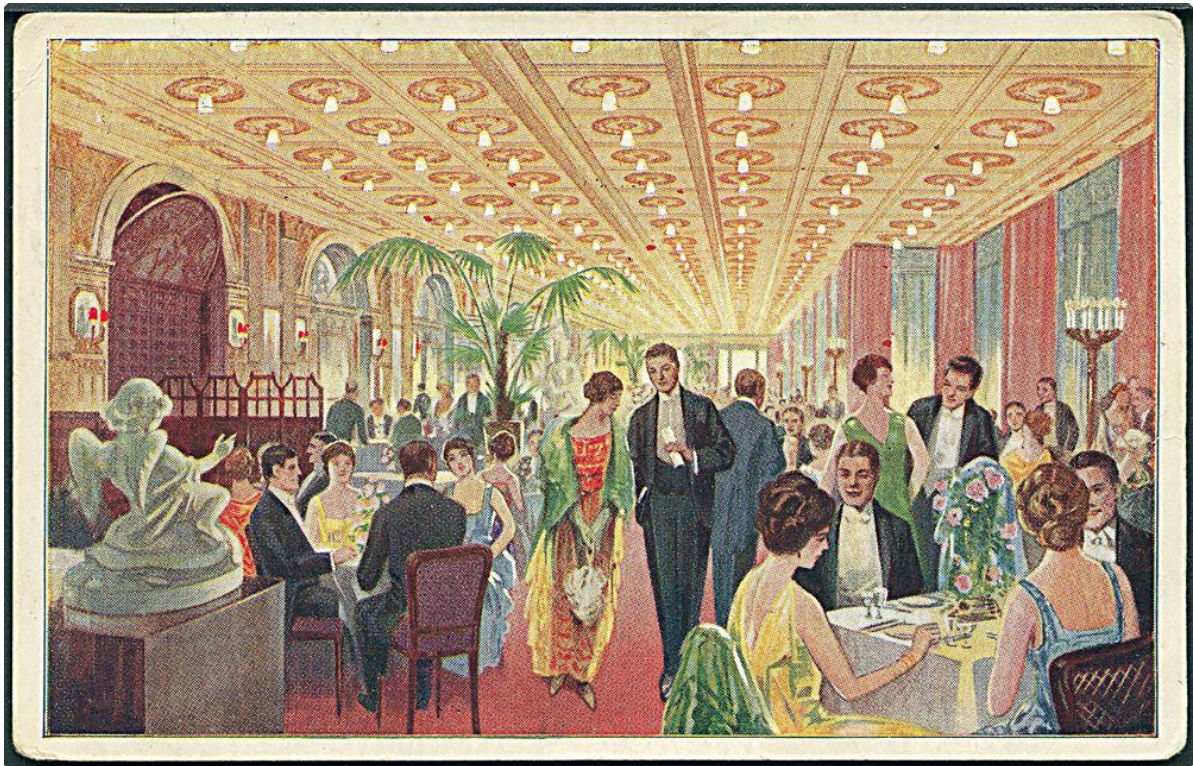
Hotel D' Angleterre

### Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> December

Rain. Quiet morning. D came round to see if all right.

3.16 pm train to Copenhagen. Met Patton and Mercer. Picture house. Chocolate shop. Cashed cheque for £ 20 (345 kr.) at bank. Dinner at Hotel Wivel.

9pm circus. – quite a good show. Thence Angleterre where dinner being held. A thoroughly good evening and so that forgot to go for last train (10.49 pm). Crowd there – British officers made welcome – streamers – supper, songs and special dances by leading lights of chief opera company. Auction sale – all proceeds for poor of Copenhagen. Everybody out for fun. A splendid night.



The Wivel

And what a fun way for Arthur to celebrate his birthday although he doesn't mention that he turned 29. The Wivel was on the corner of the Tivoli gardens complex. It was another high-class place to eat and Witherington and his friends weren't the only British officers having dinner there.

For that same day a Danish journalist sent out to get material for a good British officer "our heroes of the day" story introduced himself to an, unfortunately for us, anonymous 20-year-old Lt. from Royal Dublin Fusiliers also billeted at Skodsborg. The journalist invited him to dinner at Wivels and as the young man, who had previously been studying at Durham, obviously was up for it, extended his invitation and took him on to the theatre after their meal. Earlier that day in the morning when he had just arrived in Copenhagen with some friends, the young officers had been stopped by an elderly lady. She had then taken them on a sightseeing tour, one of the places visited being the Town Hall, and she had completely overloaded them with information and been impossible to get away from. Being able to talk about himself, eating at a fancy restaurant and a good show was obviously more to his liking. The lengthy newspaper article the next day started with "I met him on Stroegget. He came walking towards me a magnificent example of "the darlings of Copenhagen" with long, energetic, triumphant strides stylishly swinging his thin walking stick." And so on! Witherington who the previous day had written in his diary of being invited out for coffee and cake by a stranger, the man who by the way had left his wife and son so as to be their guide, concluded in his memoirs *"So overwhelmed were we by everybody's kindness that we began to hesitate before we accosted anybody in the street when wishing to find our way to any particular destination."* Perhaps it might have helped if they had known about "Danish hygge"<sup>5</sup> and understood that the Danes including the elderly lady were just indulging in that.

<sup>5</sup> Danish hygge - enjoying yourself, whether it being alone or with company, doing whatever you are doing, be it eating out somewhere fancy and going on to a show or indeed just showing your city's sights off to some tourists.



However it has to be said that if you happened to be in a Scottish regiment and wearing a kilt then it must have been impossible to go anywhere without becoming the centre of attention and being fought over by Danes wanting to be hospitable.



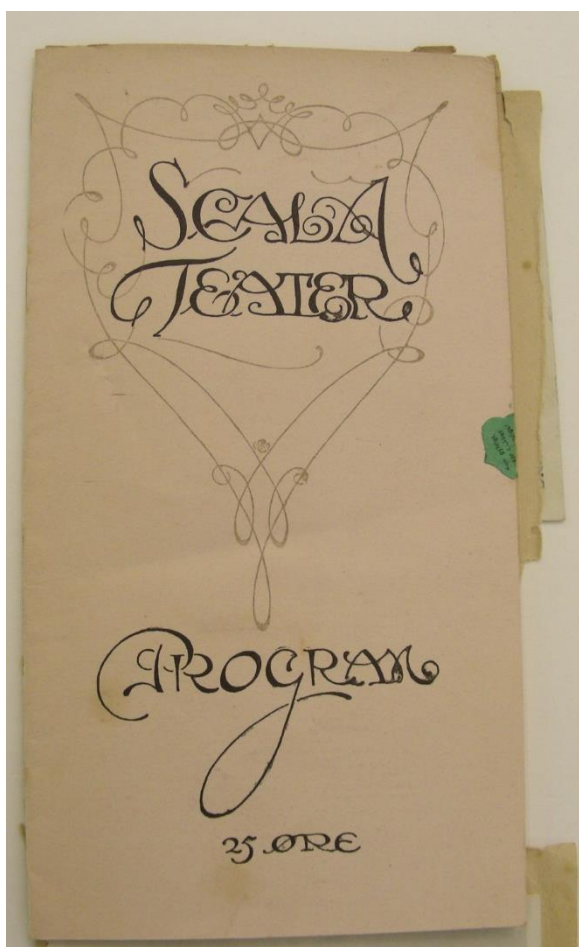
### Wednesday 18th December

2 am went out to look for rooms. Patton and Mercer managed but Russell and I tried without success until 4 am. Station closed, so sat in shelter until 5.30 am. Train at 6.5 am. Bed at 7 am until 1.30 pm

Very fine cold day – rain towards night. Russell, Pike and I caught 3.16 pm train and met BKB, Stevenson etc. Good hot bath and shampoo. Dinner with Pike at Angleterre. Thence Scala Theatre where opera *Kejserinden* (Marie Theresa) shown. An excellent show.

10.49 pm train home. As always large number missed train. ? as always numerous gifts again, chocolate etc from Danes – welcome everywhere. Found fire in bedroom on return.

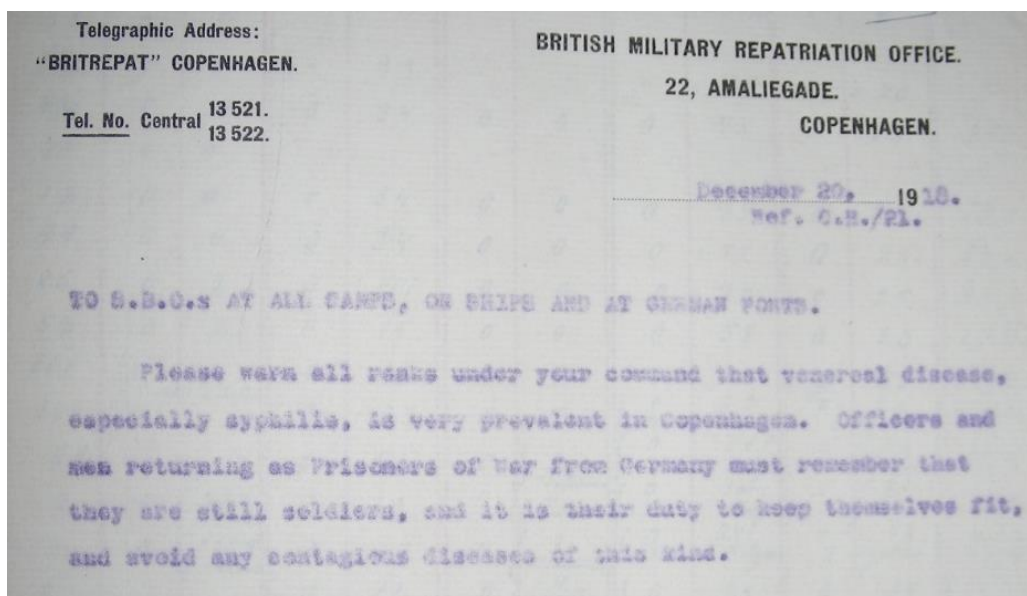
Arthur took the program from the “*Kejserinden*” home with him, kept with his other pow memorabilia.



The Denton twins topped Arthur by going to the Royal Opera, next door to the Hotel D' Angleterre on Kongens Nytorv, with the added "treat" of King Christian, Queen Alexandrine and Crown Prince Frederik also being in the audience.

### Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December

Rain cold 1 pm walked to Klampenborg thence by car to Copenhagen. Lunch Wivel. Dinner Angleterre – thence Tivoli. Haircut, shampoo and bath. Stayed in Copenhagen.



This cannot have been an issue for Arthur Witherington who was married or Henry Wilkinson who had his girlfriend Dolly waiting for him!

### Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December

Rain. Lunch Angleterre. Thence visit to minesweepers to see if we could board passage. Their departures uncertain. Cashed cheque for £10. Dinner Angleterre. Russell and I "carried" out 9.30 pm.

In his memoirs, which are more or less his diary notes written up, he remembers *"During our week in Copenhagen we had a lot of rain and sleet, but nothing like that was able in the least to damp our exuberant spirits."*

### Captain G.H.G. Anderson

They weren't the only ones hoping to get lucky and manage to get berth on a Navy ship docked in Copenhagen that was sailing back to the UK.

Light cruisers HMS Coventry and HMS Centaur had been assisting the "Danish Scheme" spending some time in Copenhagen and then off to the German embarkation harbours to help speed things up. While in Copenhagen they had opened up for the very interested Danes who flocked to Langelinje to see the ships. *'.... moored by Langelinnie Mole, and was visited by Danes, who were most friendly and seemed delighted that the coming of British cruisers had frightened Bolshevik intriguers out of their capital.'*





Assistant Paymaster on HMS Coventry E. G Palmer wrote in his diary on 18th December *“Dined ashore with Pilot & Commander – NIMB excellent dinner & cost. Tivoli – bored – ‘the place was half full of Army officers returning prisoners’. ‘The number of Br Army off in Copenhagen is surprising; at all the restaurants and hotels one meets more English people than Danes!!’”*

On receiving orders to return home the captain volunteered to take some British soldiers waiting for repatriation home with them. HMS Coventry left Copenhagen on 20<sup>th</sup> and sailed to Stettin where though not suitable for the transport of passengers, took on 498 OR and 2 officers<sup>6</sup>. This explains why the Danish Navy later were refunded for the 1000 woollen blankets they had delivered to the “Coventry”. The next morning they sailed to Copenhagen where they were docked for three hours.

It was 22-year-old Captain George Anderson, Rifle Brigade and another’s lucky day. For they got passage on HMS Coventry. Not that it was the easiest of crossings. *“Each sailors mess had an equal number of soldiers, and gift cigarettes from Glasgow were voted to the guests, who were entertained to kinematograph shows and in all ways possible in the very restricted circumstances.’ next evening – very rough weather.” “Soldiers most abominably sick”*. On 23th December HMS Coventry arrived at Hull and disembarked 501 troops and 1 officer!

In a piece in the Cambridge Daily News on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> Captain Anderson tells his story. What a shame he doesn’t explain why he, of all these Dänholm officers, and not the “we” used in the article, was home for Christmas.

*“Finally, however, we left the town by train on December 14th, and went to Warnemunde, where we found a Swedish steamer that took us to Copenhagen. We were a week there. The people were very good to us; they took us to theatres and entertained us in great style. We then came over to England on the light cruiser Coventry, landing at Hull on December 23rd. I arrived in Cambridge on the morning of Christmas Eve.”*

<sup>6</sup> From Chemnitz

## Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> December

Sleet all day. Ground white.

11.6 am train to Copenhagen. Bought gloves and china. Lunch Angleterre. Caught 4.30 train to Skodsborg. Wired B. Received wire from B. and one from father. About 9 pm names of 7 offs. wanted to leave at midday tomorrow. Those "on the spot" got preference. We "tossed" in our room and I won. No scheme or organization about repatriation and senior offs. have hopped it and left us to our fate. Much grouching.

Station: SKODSBORG.  
den 21/12 1918  
Modt. fra St.  
App. Nr. 222

Kir. J. B. Nr.  
DEN DANSKE STATSTELEGRAF  
Kir. J. A. Nr.  
Løbe-Nr. B. 16  
Løbe-Nr. A.  
Sendt St. ved App.  
d. Kl. T. M.  
af

TELEGRAM fra Witherington Bade Hotel  
Adress: Rieck Arthur  
Witherington Bade Hotel  
SKODSBORG

D Telegram (tilføjet urgent)  
RP Svar betalt (réponse payée)  
RFD Brev - 1 - urgent

Vedtagne Fortsættelse (siges conventionelle)  
1c. Afsendt Telegram (tilføjet conventionelle)  
Aahent (convent): Udlæveres såvel fremtidige svar  
MP egenhændigt (main propre)

PS Eftermodtagelse svarer  
PC Afsendelsesbet. (local reception)  
SD Brev betalt (expres post)

Excellently remembering you  
all well I wish best wishes  
for happy time and safe voyage  
cheerio  
Witherington

No. 18-4-1918.

## Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December

Beautiful clear and sunny. Swedish coast very clear. Breakfast 11 am. Left Skodsborg 1 pm by special train bringing all officers from further up the line.

3 pm boarded HMT "Porto" (formerly German ship taken by Portuguese and handed over to us). Hundreds of men and officers on board. MLO said too many officers were down and some would have to go ashore. Reported 50 had to go. Russell and I lay very low till ship sailed. (I in a room for 6). Danish bands on quay playing English airs (as they have done in all hotels and concert halls during our stay). Crowds to see us off. Mine is room No. 222 berth no. 4. Great excitement. Gave Abey 2 wires to send off to B and father.

4 pm cast away. Many thousands on every quay, pier etc. a band kept playing "Auld lang syne". Tremendous cheering. One of the most gratifying features was the tremendous cheering by our men (who put on board first) when officers appeared on the quay.

7 pm Good dinner. 11 pm bed. Beautiful night – calm.

MOVEMENT ORDER NO. 5.

1. Allotment of accommodation on board S/S Porto leaving Copenhagen for U. K. on date to be notified later is in accordance with following table "A".

CAMP	OFFICERS	O.R.s
Barfredshøj	10	
Amager	2	660
Aalsgaard	50	5
Greve		1000
Hornbeck	60	8
Marienlyst	62	14
Wedbæk	19	
Skodsborg	28	8
Fyen	7	199

On Movement Order no. 5, which was for this journey of the "Porto", they expected the ship to take 238 officers and 1894 OR. 219 of the officers were to come from the hotels, of them 28 officers and 8 OR from Skodsborg and 62 officers and 14 OR from Marienlyst. It is interesting that at Skodsborg that they apparently "tossed" to find which of them that were to be repatriated first. From the list with the names of 61 Dänholm officers at Marienlyst, 54 of them travelled home on the "Porto" together with all the 13 named OR. Perhaps the 7 that didn't make it were off partying in Copenhagen unaware that they had had the opportunity to leave.

Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> was a busy day at Free Harbour with ships coming and going and on Langelinje the HMS "Cardiff" was open for visitors for a couple of hours. After days of rain and snow the weather was beautiful. Just before the "Porto" set sail a fantastic scene was playing out between the Danes and the British soldiers on deck. As Arthur mentions there was a tremendous amount of cheering going on. The soldiers delighting the crowds by loudly asking themselves "Are we downhearted?" Then answering in chorus with a thundering "NO!".

Arthur writes in his memoirs "We had a wonderful send off. A Danish Military band playing English Aires was on the quay, which was packed with a dense crowd. Every pier and vantage point in the vicinity was crowded and all the people cheered and sang whilst the band played Auld Lang Syne. Copenhagen has a wonderful harbour. As we steamed out the City was lighted up by the setting sun, below were the masses of people and then the water in which were reflected the sun's golden rays. The only sounds were the cheering and the strains of the music gradually becoming fainter. Our hearts were full of gratitude for the hospitality which had been lavished on us by friendly and appreciative people.

Whilst looking upon this wonderful scene I pulled out of my pocket and read over again a Poem of Welcome, written in English, of which the author was Valdemar Roerdam, which I had cut out of the issue of the Berlingske Tidende on December 18<sup>th</sup>. It read as follows "Salute to the brown Brethren" ....". See more about this poem on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

### Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> December

Dull, some sleet. 8 am saw last of Danish coast. 8.30 am Breakfast (2nd sitting)

10 am parade in lifebelts. Sun rising.

1 pm lunch. Ship rolling considerably. Several ill and poor attendance at tea and dinner. About 11 am passed very close to mine on starboard side. Saw HMS "Plassey" but very little traffic. Destination apparently Leith. Trying to reach tomorrow night. Col. Christian senior officer on ship. Received a telegram from Queen Alexandra saying how delighted she was that we were en route home and wishing us good voyage etc. 4 civilians on board. Husband and wife arrived in Germany on honeymoon day war was declared. Interned in separate camps til now! Reading short stories in book entitled "The



Room in the Tower" ghost stories. Men ill all over the ship so that dozens OR have to sleep on deck. Wind mostly following.

## Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> December

Fine – heavy swell – didn't eat much breakfast. Sea gradually calmer. much wind but land wind.

10 am lifebelt parade. - 6 pm alternating red and white light, Bell Rock, - very powerful on starboard bow – boats slung. - 8 am good salt water bath. Numbers at meals slowly on the rise! Clock put back 20 min daily. Discovered Cuthbert (S.C. 14th)

7 pm dinner. Menu soup, fish, turkey, plum pudding, mince pies, cheese, whiskey, port

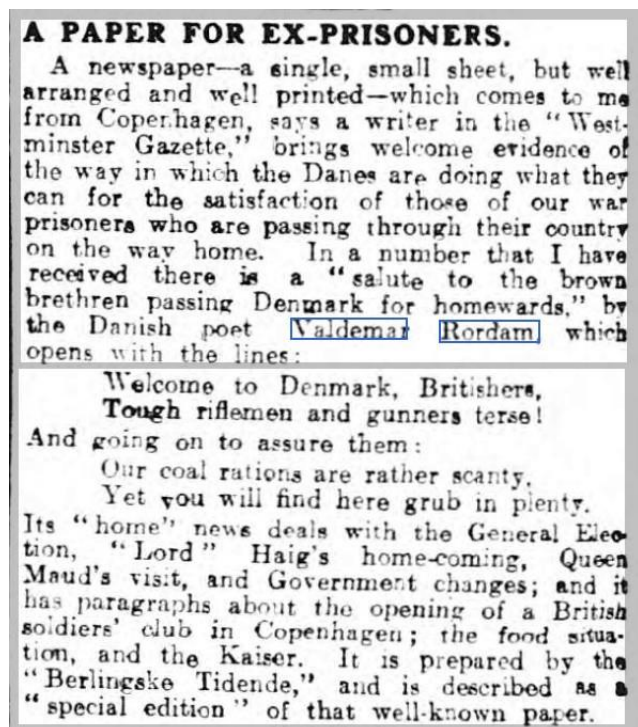
Salute to the Brown Brethren by Valdemar Roerdam

Message of welcome received from King read out at dinner – King's health. Nat. Ant. Impromptus band (flute) brought to mess. Songs etc. by Boosey, Wood, others recitations, highland fling by Major etc. etc. - Abt. 10 pm anchored off Inchkeith. - 11 pm bed after thoroughly good evening. Fortunately calmer which allowed all to enjoy good Xmas Eve dinner. Discovered 6th member of room Lance Foster. Lt. Bastow, L. Foster, Hodder, Mitchell, Russell self.

## "Salute to the Brown Brethren" by Valdemar Roerdam

Here on Christmas Eve Arthur Witherington wrote in his diary the poem which had been in a special edition in English on 18<sup>th</sup> December of the Danish newspaper the "Berlingske Tidende". Valdemar Roerdam was a well-known, successful Danish poet who was a known Allied-sympathizer. He had translated Patrick McGill's "The Brown Brethren" in 1917, perhaps that is where he got the term from. He also published his translation into Danish of "Poems from the World War" in two volumes in 1918 and 1919. Arthur must have been taken by Valdemar Roerdam<sup>7</sup>'s poem, writing it in both his diary and his memoirs.

The English Berlingske Tidende was mentioned in English newspapers and the poem referred to. And the poem itself found its way to a newspaper in Tasmania in April 1919 where it was printed in full even though they seem to have found it's language quaint!



<sup>7</sup> Valdemar Roerdam was a candidate for the Nobel prize in literature in 1937 and 1938.



## "BROWN BRETHREN."

### DANE'S QUAIN'T WELCOME.

British prisoners of war passing through Denmark will ever cherish grateful memories of the kindly welcome which was extended to them by the Danes (says the London "Daily Chronicle"). An illustration of the spirit in which they were received is furnished by "A Salute to the Brown Brethren Passing Denmark for Homewards," which the well-known Danish author, Valdemar Roerdm, wrote for the "Berlingske Tidende." It was printed in English, and couched in quaint language, as follows:

Welcome to Denmark, Britishers,  
tough riflemen and gunners terse!  
Bill would prefer old London's fog,  
Jack his brown moors, and Pat his  
bog.

Whatever each might so desire,  
he'll not weep for he sees no wire.  
Our coal rations are rather scanty,  
yet you will find here grub more  
plenty,  
a cosier hearth, a healthier air  
than you've found mostly over there.  
You'll find it possible to pass  
a fortnight washing, eating, sleeping,  
and smoking, goodly far from gas,  
and boiled beasts, and vermin creep-  
ing.

You are in Denmark. You are free,  
and welcomed here most heartily,  
by a free country, till you may  
go home and see your own some day,  
your old folks, wives and children—  
all

for whom you drove home this big  
hail—  
worked, fought, bled, suffered in the  
damp,  
and blooming filthy prisoners' camp.  
You're carried on, you've fought it  
through.

Here is a Danish cheer to you!

Welcome you are, and shall remain,  
with your good gifts of common  
grain.

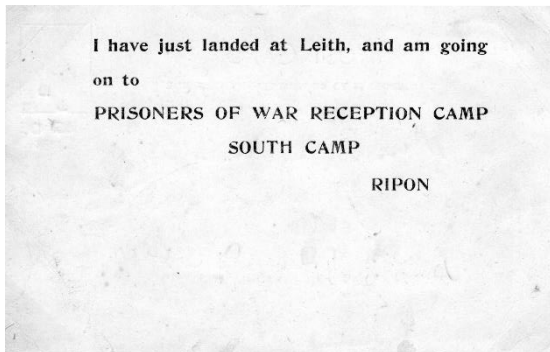
You are in Denmark: you are free,  
A happy Christmas then to ye—  
Brown Brotherhood of Liberty!

## Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> December

At 5.30 am shifted from anchorage with aid of 2 tugs.

8.30 Imperial dock, Leith. Red X ship no. 6 from Danzig arrived just before us.

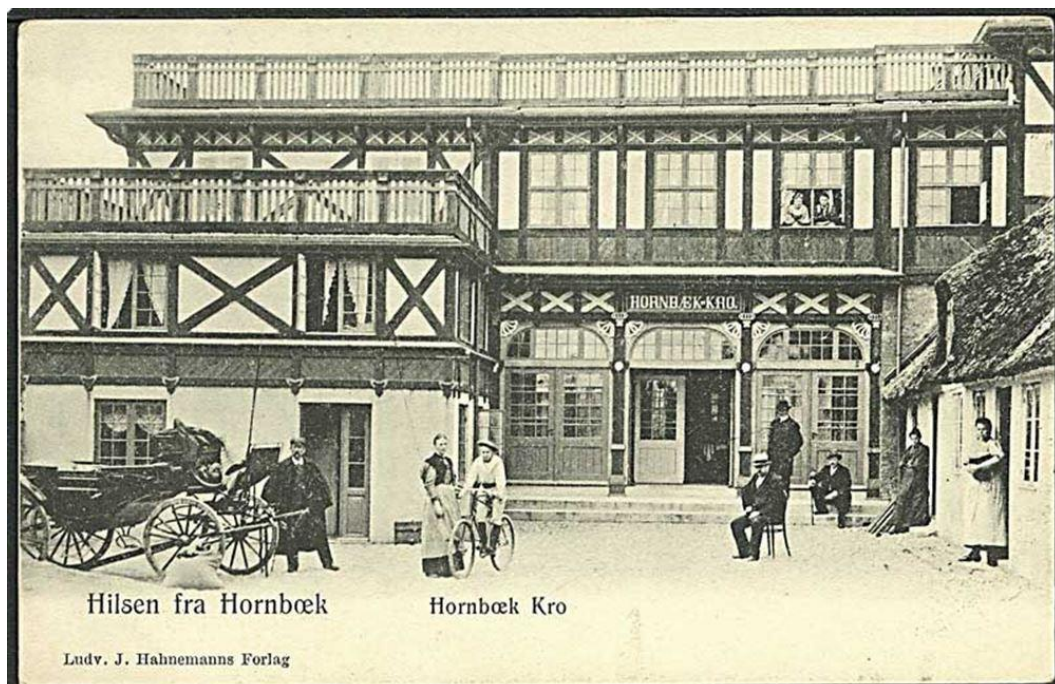
12.30 all ashore into huge shed where given lunch – highland pipes played to us. Sent free wires to B and father. Given bag of food, handkerchief enclosing cigs, soap, stamped pc which posted to B at Leith etc. Daily Sketch nov 27th. Spirits not high. Left dock by special express at 2.20 pm



Lt. Witherington was quickly through the formalities in the camp at Ripon the next morning, met with his wife in Harrogate and they got the train together to Sunderland "Home Sweet Home". In Cox's list of officers he is only registered with a repatriation date of -12.18 while others known to be on the "Porto" are given the date of 25.12.18.

## Billeted in Hornbaek

Having left Captain Wilkinson and the others settling in at their billets on the 16<sup>th</sup> in order to follow Lt. Witherington we can return and pick up their story. Henry Wilkinson was billeted in Hornbaek at the Hornbaek Kro. Hornbaek was a very popular seaside resort. Many middleclass families living in Copenhagen had their own cottages here and husbands working in the city visited their families here at weekends during the summer months. There were a couple of hotels as well as guest houses and the cafés and visiting entertainment did a roaring trade during the season. The rest of the year Hornbaek was a quiet fishing village.



## Henry Wilkinson's experiences in Denmark

Tuesday 17th December



We rose at 9am and after breakfast, I walked alone along the shore to do a 10 minute sketch. Frank and I later walked round the village again, making sundry purchases until lunch at 12. We caught the little one horse train at 1.15pm and after changing at Helsingør we reached the hovedbanegaarden [central station] at 4pm. An enquiry for rooms at the Palads was unsuccessful, but two double bedded rooms at the Belvedere, next door, proved quite decent, so we booked them. A walk round, during which we booked seats at the Tivoli, was followed by a top-hole dinner at the Palads – the waiter spoke good English. The Tivoli was good – a revue called “Hatten A” (Hats off). The songs seemed to be much the same type as ours, and although we didn’t understand a word, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Later on we visited a dance at the “Angleterre” and drank much wine. Bed about 1am.

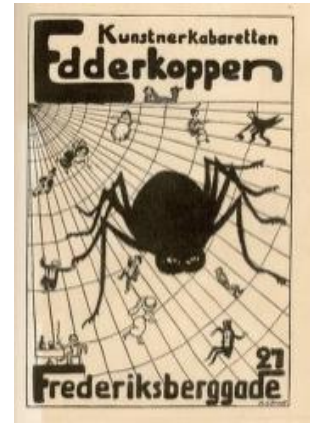
The Tivoli Gardens weren’t open, it being winter, but the Tivoli Varieté Kabaretteater was open with a variety show all year round. Witherington and Wilkinson’s paths crossed at the event held at the Hotel D’Angleterre. Henry and his friends lucky with beds to sleep in at the Belvedere Hotel, Arthur and his friend missing the last train back to Skodsborg and spending the rest of the night in a shelter.

Back in Hornbæk 3 new officers joined those billeted at Hornbæk Kro. A handful of officers and 15 or so OR had been left on Dänholm when Witherington and his group left on the 16th. Lieut. Robert Spiers Robertson wrote in his memoirs of sailing to Denmark on 17<sup>th</sup> December. None were registered as having taken the “ordinary ferry and train route” to Copenhagen that day, in which case they could have been on the “Malmoe” which carried French OR and possibly had them as passengers too.



### Wednesday 18th December

I woke about 8.30am, and leaving Burrell asleep, had a hot bath, a cold spray, shaved and returned to bed much refreshed! Burrell and I had breakfast in bed at 10.30am and I then wrote to the Pater and Dolly. After paying our bills and walking round again, we returned to the Palads for lunch, only to find that we weren't likely to leave before Sunday, so we decided to stay another night. Unfortunately we could not get our rooms again, and after visiting the Central and Dagmar's, got rooms by telephoning at the Temperance. A cab took us there and we found it to be nothing more or less than a doss-house – still, we had to stay. Afterwards I bought stockings for Dolly, dined once more at the Palads, and then three of us went to the Edderkoppen, where we'd booked seats – Turnbull preferred a Symphony concert. The show was poor; a fat Hun sang many songs in a deep Contralto, and two Huns did a thought reading stunt, which wasn't bad. A bolster supper at the Palads nerved us for the Temperance, which we reached at 1am.



Henry wasn't the only one doing some shopping. The well-stocked shops in central Copenhagen otherwise busy selling Christmas presents were happy for the extra sales. While Henry bought stockings for his finance Dolly others were buying items to take home as souvenirs of their stay in Denmark. The bookshops too reported that they had sold out on their books and magazines in English and French!

At the "Edderkoppen", "The Spider", they put on avantgarde variety shows, certainly not to everyone's taste. One of the artists heavily involved in this alternative creative entertainment was Robert Storm



Petersen, also famous in Denmark as the cartoonist "Storm P". The Temperance Hotel was obviously not up to the standard of the 5-star hotels they otherwise were frequenting in Copenhagen but was after all better than spending the night sitting in a shelter!

#### Thursday 19th December

Arose at 10am and had coffee, leaving the hotel at 11 – Burrell and John Willy had left before us. Frank and I had lunch with Duff-Taylor at the Palads, where we also met Burrell and John Willy once more. Then Burrell and I visited a Sculpture Gallery, but finding it closed, went for a haircut and shampoo instead. Turnbull and Johnson left for Hornbaek at 4pm. but Burrell and I stayed on to have tea at the Industrie, visit a picture show, and dine at The Wivel. We had found it impossible to deposit our things at the station, so they went with us! An invitation from the Countess Chiel to take oysters and whisky with her was declined – the combination being rather too fearsome! The dinner at the Wivel was the best we'd had, and the waiter perfect. The 9pm train took us to Helsingor (I slept all the way) and eventually we reached Hornbaek at 11.45, had a drink with Cuthbert, and retired to bed about 1am.

Another full day's sightseeing, entertainment and eating well for Henry and his friends. And another annoying Danish person wanting to hygge with them, this time Countess Scheel, hopefully she found some other British officers that would partake of oysters and whisky with her! Before the Danish Scheme was up and running in full there was some talk of finding private accommodation for the officers. Count Scheel and his wife had offered to receive two officers in their home to stay over Christmas instead of them having a dull time in a camp. It was then decided to open the seaside hotels instead.



### Friday 20th December

The morning after our Copenhagen activities, was spent in bed, and we only rose in time for lunch and the usual coffee and liqueurs in the lounge. The others went out walking, but I stayed indoors, packing and re-packing my belongings, and writing to the Pater – after posting I discovered that the letters would be 14 days on the journey! After dinner, we were all invited to service in the little church, addressed and conducted by Archdeacon Petersen, who showed an excellent grasp of idiomatic English in his splendid sermon. The models of sailing ships hung from the roof of the church were extremely well-made, and picturesque. To bed rather earlier – at 10pm in fact.



It was Archdeacon Johannes Petersen from the church at Tikoeb who held the evening service in Hornbaek church. About 60 of the British officers billeted in Hornbaek turned up, the other 90 odd weren't in the village at the time obviously in Helsingør or Copenhagen.

### Saturday 21st December

Arose early, at 6am, and after breakfast of coffee and bread and butter, a party of 40 of us left by the 7am train for Hillerød, our guide being a Dane. I slept most of the way, after we'd changed at Helsingør. At Hillerød we left our belongings in a hotel, walked round the town, and then returned for an excellent breakfast – lunch at 11am, the room being decorated with Danish American and British flags etc. Our tour of the Frederiksborg Slot then commenced – it was an old castle of the Kings of Denmark, now mainly used as a museum. The pictures, ceilings, friezes and antiquities were well worth seeing, particularly the Knights Hall and the Royal Chapel. Unfortunately we had only an hour there, when two or three could have been well spent, and at 1pm we got the train back to Helsingør, where John Willie, Frank and myself bought postcards and indulged in really excellent chocolate, cream and cakes. We reached Hornbaek at 3.30, and just before dinner were told the 60 were to go the next day, the list going up to H of May 27th. A picture show (Charlie Chaplin) filled in the time after dinner, and afterwards we visited Arkless and Harrison in their digs, staying with them until 11pm. Returning to the Kro, I wrote to Dolly and so to bed – the letter to Dolly to go via Burrell.

The wonderful 17th century renaissance castle at Hillerød, Frederiksborg Slot, houses a national history museum with many portraits of national importance. Other groups billeted in camps were also on organized trips to visit Hillerød and the castle.



Henry notes that a name list going up to H of May 27th was made ready with the 60 who were to leave the next day i.e. on the transport Witherington was on. Maybe they too ended up having a couple of vacancies due to the named officers being out of reach in Copenhagen. On "Movement Order 5" 60 officers and 8 OR were to leave, on the head count for 4 o'clock on 22nd they were 94 officers and 13 OR left at Hornbaek.

### Sunday 22nd December

Burrell left us at 9am, before I was up, and after breakfast at 9.30, I walked along to the first point with Frank, returning by the road – a good walk. The afternoon I spent sketching in the Harbour, to the admiration of all the local fishermen and children, until tea, which John Willie, Frank and I had in a local tea shop – complete with beautiful damsel! Bridge filled in the evening, after a poor dinner.



### Monday 23rd December

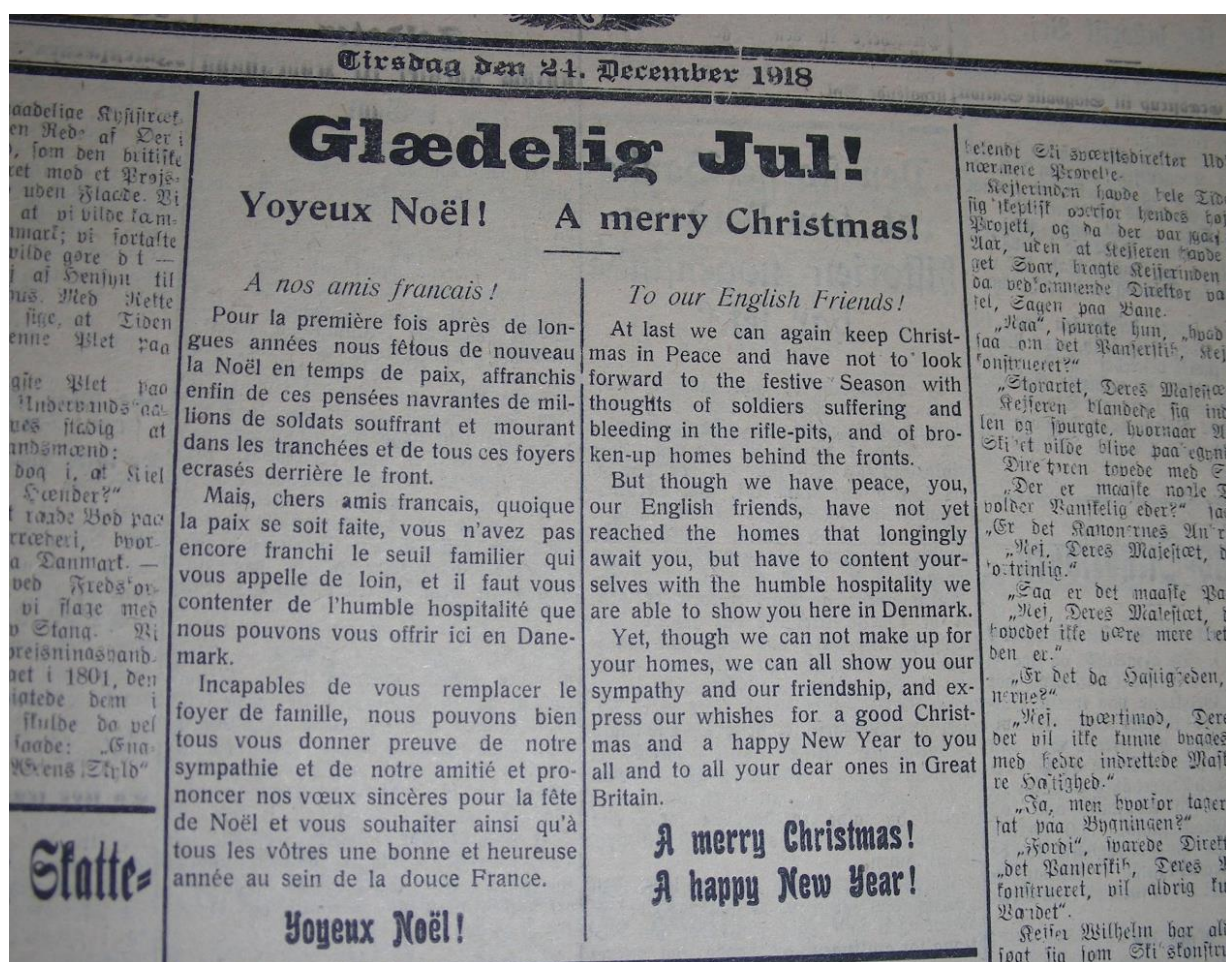
There was still no definite news of a boat for us, but Thursday seemed a likely date. The morning I spent quietly, but Frank and I went to Marienlyst on the 1.15 to indulge in a top hole bath. Returning at 3.30, I cabled home again, and as it was snowing hard, spent the rest of the day very quietly, deciding however, to visit Copenhagen once more on the morrow.

### Tuesday 24th December

I arose at 6am, and with Symes, caught the 7am to Helsingor arriving at Copenhagen at 9.15am. Our first visit was the bank, and afterwards we had a tophole Turkish Bath and shampoo. The Wivel

provided an excellent lunch, though the place was empty. In the afternoon, at the docks, we were unsuccessful in attempting to obtain a passage home on a destroyer, but a naval officer we met insisted on giving me all the "Three Castles" [cigarettes] in his possession – a great boon. I then bought underclothing, had tea at the Industrie and caught the 4.8 back to Helsingør. The Danish Christmas dinner awaited us, complete with Christmas Tree, wine, cigars and the rice the custom allows. To bed fairly early, amid the strains of much music and singing in the lounge.

So Henry was off to Copenhagen again, this time with Lieut. C.H. Symes also from DLI. It was Christmas Eve in the evening of which Danes have their main Christmas celebration. This can explain why the Wivel was empty, it's not a day you go out for lunch! The shops were open, busy selling last minute Christmas presents. See more of what was happening in Copenhagen for the other ranks on Christmas Eve in my "Quendlinburg men's camp - Christmas in Denmark".



Which of the seaside hotels 24-year-old Lieut. Robert Spiers Robertson, MGC, was billeted at isn't known. What is, is that he took the front page from the 24<sup>th</sup> December Helsingørers Avis home with him as a souvenir. Right smack in the middle is a Christmas greeting in both French and English to the soldiers. Local people had been making arrangements for seasonal entertainment for them too to take place over the next couple of days.



Anders Jensen had given some thought to the menu to be served for the officers billeted in the seaside hotels. A week before Christmas he priced a menu for them consisting of rice porridge<sup>8</sup> (traditional Danish Christmas speciality), roast goose with apple cake as desert. Each table setting would be decorated with a Danish flag and every officer given a ½ bottle of wine and a cigar.

Many foodstuffs in Denmark were rationed and food prices had gone up considerably, almost doubled, during the war. Some items were obviously difficult to get hold of. In December 1917 there had been a minor panic when the rumour spread that OE.K.'s "Christmas Ship" with fruit, spices and rice had been sunk. It would be a Christmas without risengroed! But it appears that people had put enough rice to one side for the holiday not to be spoiled and the "Fionia" docked safely in Copenhagen but not until the New Year.

It doesn't sound like Henry was much in the mood for celebrating Christmas or appreciative of the effort put into making it into a good evening for the officers. *"The Danish dinner awaited us, complete with Christmas tree, wine, cigars and the rice the custom allows."* Anders Jensen had tweaked his original suggested menu and the officers' Christmas Eve evening meal consisted of fish, roast goose and as dessert "ris a la mande". "Ris a la mande" is cold rice porridge mixed with whipped cream, chopped almonds and vanilla sugar served with warm cherry sauce. Then *"To bed fairly early, amid the strains of music and singing in the lounge"*. Henry was otherwise very social so it is a pity he wasn't up for Christmas Eve fun and so could have told us about it in more detail. Master butcher and hotel owner Anders Jensen was. Despite personally being incredibly busy with his involvement in the repatriation scheme on top of his usual very demanding schedule he found time to get married on Christmas Eve too!



### Wednesday 25th December

Christmas day and we were all pretty fed [up] 'cos we weren't in England – still it was better than Hunland! Arose about 11am in time for lunch and played bridge all afternoon, not going outside at all. At night the Christmas tree was all lit up, and we had several visitors for dinner. Then came the slips for the boat and I retired early to pack, for we were due to leave at 9am.

"Movement Order 6" for the "Frederik VIII" gave details of numbers and from which camps and seaside resorts the passengers would come from. This transport more or less emptied some of the hotels used in the scheme for British. They had had to send Anders Jensen weekly a daily headcount of how many and whether officer or orderly they accommodated. This had for one hotel owner caused some confusion. As he explained a couple of officers had arrived, left their luggage in a bedroom and then gone off to Copenhagen to stay! Exactly as we have read many but not all did. He hadn't counted them in his tally but was told to do so. Quite reasonable for the service he was providing. Anders Jensen sent the bill straight on to the British Military Repatriation office which lay next to the Amalienborg Palace.

---

<sup>8</sup> Rice porridge was eaten by the working classes, to fill tummies before the Christmas roast was served. "Rice a la mande" had become popular amongst the middle class as desert Christmas Eve.

There doesn't appear to have been any complaints from the British about their quarters in these seaside hotels and guest houses. The French officers however found them far too cold, as many only otherwise in use in the summer were without heating that could cope with December temperatures. As one could expect there was talk in the newspapers of Anders Jensen having overpriced his services, taking advantage of the situation. After an internal enquiry he explained his prices including the small profit margin he worked on, and it would appear that no more was said.

### The "Frederik VIII"

They were lucky to be on the "Frederik VIII" a new top modern liner that had sailed the Copenhagen – New York route since February 1914. This ship was the first within the Danish Scheme to sail former POWs to the UK. The first passengers being civilians from Ruhleben leaving Copenhagen on 24th November. Fortunately, Cecilie Lutken, matron on the "Frederik VIII", wrote a diary which she later used for the chapter in her memoirs about her participation in the Danish Scheme. After disembarking her second lot of passengers the ship left Hull on 18th December. Many of the ship's crew and the medical staff on board had fallen ill with the Spanish flu. Their journey back to Copenhagen was tough with very bad weather and Cecilie, not feeling too well herself, had been very busy looking after all the patients. They wired for ambulances to pick up the worst cases when they arrived at Copenhagen on 22nd. and arrangements were made for the ship to be disinfected during their Christmas holiday. Cecilie went to stay with her family and was joined by 2 British officers serving on the ship for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. *"These two men's delight at spending Christmas with a family and under peaceful circumstances is moving. They were both married, and one, who had children back home in South Africa where he was from, was a man in his late thirties. But they were like two big boys that were on holiday. They played with the children on the floor, and the whole house echoed with their happy laughter. Already on the evening of Christmas day we three had to break up the party and go back to 'Frederik VIII' that was to sail next morning."*



Cecilie Lutken

It appears that a "drama" had unfolded at Free Harbor while they were celebrating Christmas and the "Frederik VIII" was reported in the newspapers to have been involved. The German ferry "Mecklenburg" with 1400 French turned up unexpectedly at Free harbor in the early evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> after a rough journey. Panic stations there were no empty camps to send the men on too. Later that night another unexpected ferry from Warnemunde turned up, the "Frederic Frans" with 800 French. It went on to ground on Saltholm! Nightmare!

The newspapers turned this into a "Christmas story" full of goodwill describing the wet and weary downhearted Frenchmen on the "Mecklenburg" and how DFDS had given permission for them to stay the night on the luxurious "Frederik VIII" with all the trimmings as it was - a band playing, good food and comfortable beds. No other source corroborates that they spent then night on the "Frederik VIII" but the 1400 on the "Mecklenburg" were given a good dinner which had been rustled up for them at the Palads Hotel kitchen. Even more dramatically after several attempts during the night to get the men off the stranded ferry the Danish navy came to the rescue and ferried the men off the "Frederic Franz" in torpedo boats over to the "Oribiza". The "Oribiza" with space for 3000 passengers which was

anchored in the Outer Harbour was waiting for its next load of French POW's to take home. The Frenchmen who had been on the "Mecklenburg" and others from camps then embarked on the "Oribiza" which sailed for Cherbourg later that day the 24<sup>th</sup>. The happenings on this unfortunate night seem to have been the catalyst for them to take over a couple of the sheds at Free harbour to have as a handy shelter if there was any other prolonged waiting on arrival or departure. The sheds were already needed and in use on Boxing Day. Within a day or two they were equipped with a kitchen, dining area with tables and chairs and primitive sleeping arrangements.

## **On the "Frederik VIII" - 26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> December - Copenhagen – Hull**

Boxing day and back to work. Except there was a problem getting enough Danish stokers to coal the ships, which of course according to the newspapers was something of a scandal considering the numbers of unemployed receiving benefits. However Frederik VIII left Free harbour as planned on 26 December with 1500 passengers both officers and OR.

### **Thursday 26th December**

Arose at 8am, breakfasted at 8.30 and were cheered on our way to the 9 train by a fair gathering of the population. At Helsingør we had a wait of an hour and a half, spent in having a cutlet and chocolate at a hotel – it was still snowing heavily. Leaving Helsingør at 11.30, we stopped at several stations to pick up people and finally arrived at the docks at 1pm. The ship was the "Frederik VIII" an awfully comfortable liner of 12,600 tons, built for the Danish – American Service; Symes, Howell and I shared a cabin. Some hundreds of Tommies came on board during the afternoon and a Danish Military Band played popular British airs at intervals, being supported by a huge crowd of well-wishers. At 4.30pm we left the Quay, amid enthusiastic cheering from ship and Quay – a hearty send-off. The fog had now lifted, and after tea at 5, I sat in the smoking room until dinner at 7. The sea was perfectly calm, and at 9 I retired, dropping into a deep sleep, and thankful that we were at last on the way home.

From **Cecilie Lütken** memoirs -

*This time we had approx. 150 officers, 7 diplomat-families and 1200 soldiers onboard. The first night we had to stay anchored by Skagen. There was a violent hurricane and snowstorm. I have seldom seen anything worse. Strong winds whipped up waves and blew the scum around. The pilot was not too happy to guide the ship past Skagen and the minefields in this terrible weather, so we stayed put until lunch-time. But then the situation became critical. The ship was blown in towards the beach; the anchors couldn't hold it anymore.*

*The soldiers were given orders to put life-jackets on. Under these circumstances it was preferred to sail around Skagen and avoid the mines as well as could be done with such low visibility. With great difficulty it was managed to get the great ship against the wind and out into open sea. Then it started to roll terribly and almost everyone onboard was seasick. We were finally only 4 left in the salon in the evening, where we played a game of bridge, with the cards quite often close to gliding off the table when the ship rolled strongly.*

### **Friday 27th December**

At about 4am we anchored in the Kattegat, and didn't move again until 12.30pm – meanwhile I breakfasted and smoked in the smoking room. It was awfully rough, and the ship, despite her size, rolled considerably. After lunch we passed the coast of Jutland, and land now being out of sight, I played Bridge with John Willie, Symes and Watson. Then at 4.30pm while Iles and I were walking the



Promenade Deck, we spotted a ship 3 miles to Port, firing distress rockets. Immediately we turned, and on reaching her, found her to be a small Dutch Ketch, all sails except two jib sails, blown away. After some manoeuvring in the heavy sea, we eventually dropped a boat, and took off her crew of 6, who apparently left their ship to sink. This delayed us until about 6pm; dinner over, I retired to bed about 8pm.

#### **Cecilie - 27 December**

*Still hurricane and rough seas. The planned concert had to be cancelled. One of our musicians, who had been ill when we left Copenhagen, died in the night. At dusk we had the interesting experience of saving some shipwrecked seamen from a small Dutch schooner, which was thrown about in the storm without sails or rudder. A light had been noticed, it popped up and down at some distance and pierced the darkness. The captain moved us as close as we could get and saw a vessel which was burning an emergency flame. But how could they be saved in this storm, when just getting near to them was dangerous?*

*Rumor of what was happening spread, all the seasick crawled on to the promenade decks and from there all the British witnessed a beautiful achievement in Danish seamanship. The lifeboat with its strong-armed crew was swung out and hoisted down into the rough sea. It was important to act quickly and skillfully or they would be crushed against the side of the ship or be tipped over. With bated breath whether they would succeed, we watched the boat disappeared into darkness. Everyone stretched their necks.*

*Could it find the shipwrecked and get them in the lifeboat? After a while we saw a small black ship, driven by the storm, pass by 'Frederik VIII's' front. Then the lifeboat turned up, and by clever maneuvering managed the waves that hit the ship's side. Everyone watching shouted an immense hurray for the brave seamen as 6 exhausted and stiff Dutch seamen were saved in this action. They had burned their emergency flame for 48 hours.*

#### **Saturday 28th December**

Arose, as I thought, at 7.15am and after a bath and a shave discovered that the clock had been retarded one hour, so that it was still only 7am! So I walked the deck and smoked until breakfast at 8am. The ship was pitching quite a lot and very few people were sticking it – most noticeable at breakfast. The day passed quietly, and without incident, except for an issue of tobacco and cigarettes at 4pm. At 11pm we reached May Island, off the Forth, and stopped for half an hour to pick up a pilot.

#### **Cecile - 28 December**

*The storm finally slackened and the planned show was performed in the evening. It was obviously well rehearsed and was great entertainment for the soldiers. It was with things like this they had passed time and made life tolerable during their many years in prison-camp.*

*In the evening our usual Scottish pilot came onboard off May Island and we greeted him welcome. He was an exceptionally nice and pleasant man. He was admiralty pilot and had for the last 4 years guided British war-ships up and down the coast. The effect of doing this in jet-black, stormy nights with blinded lanterns along a dangerous coast and among drifting mines could be seen and heard on him. He had snow-white hair on his young head. The responsibility had whitened his hair but not taken his wonderful sense of humor. Mr. Flockhard stayed with us after completing his duties and the next pilot had taken*

*over at Spurnhead and was our valued entertaining comrade on all the trips to Hull and once over and back across the North Sea.*

### **Sunday 29th December**

I slept well until 7.30am and then rose for breakfast. It was too foggy to see land, but at 9.30 we passed Flamborough Head, about 2 miles away. Our next sight of land was Spurn Head at 11.45am; the mist now cleared, and we steamed up the Humber Estuary between booms and lines of ships – every ship cheering and blowing it's siren in welcome! At 1pm, after passing Immingham Dock, we anchored in mid-channel, and someone said that we were there until the next day. An impromptu dance on deck after tea was rather a success but the ship's band was truly awful. Dinner bridge and an impromptu concert filled in the evening until bunk-time at 10pm.

### **Cecilie- 30<sup>th</sup> December**

*We arrived at the Humber Sunday morning, but we could not sail up to Hull until the next day, so the British had to all stay onboard. To pass the time there was music and dancing all afternoon and evening. Officers and privates danced alongside each other and that there were so few ladies didn't seem to matter. They danced just as happily and gaily with each other. The tone between officers and privates was absolutely strait forward and plain and always characterized by tact and good-manners. And their tone towards the nurses was on all the trips polite and respectful. If one had to go through a crowd of soldiers, one never needed to say anything. The first person that saw one always said " Please make a gangway" and there was immediately space no matter how crowded they stood.*

*The British never liked to talk about the war or what they had experienced but one could feel that they hated the Germans right from the heart.*

### **Monday 30th December**

Arose at 7.30am, breakfasted and packed once more. At 9am a paddle steamer arrived alongside to take us off, and amid the strains of the ship's band we unshipped. At 10am we left, sirens blowing, and were greeted by cheering crowds and blowing sirens all the way up the river to the quay at Hull, reached at 11.30am. A train awaited us – good old British train once more – and after refreshment, consisting of coffee and sandwiches, and as many De Reszkes [cigarettes] as we wanted, we left for Ripon at 12.45pm. I had wired to the Pater at Ripon, where we arrived 3pm. We were taken to South Camp in buses, and went through the process of medical board, filling in various forms, getting railway warrants etc. in remarkably quick time. I just caught the 7.2 out of Ripon, after wiring home once more, but had to wait an hour and a half at Darlington, spent in having supper. Eventually I arrived at the Central [Newcastle], but found nobody to meet me – a disappointment! However, I walked over home, a man carrying my bag, to find all in bed! Dolly, thank God, was there, and after talking awhile we retired at 2.30am, to discuss much on the morrow and succeeding days.

One of the orderlies from Dänholm Pte. Robinson, Royal Engineers could have been on the same train as Witherington but his wasn't such a snappy check-up at the camp at Ripon. His medical took place the next day on 31st. 22-year-old Charles Edwin, who was a joiner by trade, had been shot in the right shoulder in connection with been taken prisoner on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1918, the investigating officer accepted his claim, and he was presumably given a pension. Part of Charles pay went as an allowance to his mother. He cannot have had much "pocket money" to spend but he too must have had an enjoyable and interesting few days in Denmark. Charles left Ripon on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1919 and when he arrived at Darlington he was almost home, there was only four miles to Brafferton where his mother must have

been eagerly awaiting him. Charles was a guest at the “Welcome Home Dinner, Concert and Dance” which was given by the Darlington Committee for the Entertainment of Wounded Soldiers in May 1919.<sup>9</sup>

Capt. H. Wilkinson, DLI and Lieut. L. Foster, are only noted with -/12.18 as their repatriation date<sup>10</sup>. While the others they shared a cabin with Lieut. Symes and 2/Lt. Howell both are registered on 31.12.18. Almost all of the officers who had been interned at Dänholm were back in the UK only those who had volunteered for repatriation duties were still in Germany and Denmark.

### Back home

On returning to his family in Sunderland in December 1918, Arthur Witherington went back to his post at Witherington and Everett, serving as a Methodist lay preacher in his free time. Henry Wilkinson could celebrate New Year’s Eve in Gateshead with his Pater and fiancé Dolly. They married in December 1920, Henry worked as a civil servant for the Post Office and later for the Metropolitan Police. Robert S. Robertson won an essay competition in 1967 with “*My memoirs from the First World War*”. He ends his essay with “*Spent nine pleasant days in Denmark where the people were most kind to us. After that we embarked for England and I arrived in Scotland on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1918 – just in time to begin “a Guid New Year”*”. What a wonderful day for him to arrive home to his family in Glasgow.

27-year-old Capt. Francis James Slattery, R.E. had, as many of the other Dänholm officers, been taken prisoner on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1918. One hopes that he too had a good time while quartered in one of the seaside hotels and visited Copenhagen. He has a repatriation date of 31.12.18 and so was also on the “Frederik VIII”. Not feeling too well he went straight to London from Ripon. Francis died of the Spanish flu on 9<sup>th</sup> January. His body was taken home to Ireland where he was interned in the family grave at Ballynacally Church.

### The hotels today

Many of the hotels where the officers were quartered and stayed at in Copenhagen are still going strong. The Skodsborg Sanatorium which promotes itself with “Your Nordic journey at Kurhotel Skodsborg – the luxury of simplicity” and Marienlyst Strandhotel are both still very up-market spa hotels. In Hornbaek the hotel where Wilkinson was billeted Hornbaek Kro was turned into a clinic specializing in training patients with back injuries. Former founder/owner of the international emporium “Flying Tiger” bought Hornbaekhus a couple of years ago and has up-dated it with 36 hotel-rooms and many in-house activities aimed at attracting participation and involvement by the local community.

Hornbaekhus today



<sup>9</sup> Aycliffe Village Local History Society

<sup>10</sup> A Hull newspaper wrote on the 30<sup>th</sup> of 4 local officers’ homecoming that day on the Frederik VIII. One has 30<sup>th</sup>, one has 31<sup>st</sup> and two have a ? for repat date. 2 Dänholm officers who left Marienlyst on 26<sup>th</sup> have 1<sup>st</sup> January as their repat date.



## Sources

### Archives

IWM P342 detailed manuscript diary of Commander E G Palmer (who was assistant paymaster on board)

Captain Henry Wilkinson – Durham County Records Office – D/DLI 7/773/1(18) and D/DLI 7/773/1(19) [www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk](http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk)

Lieut. Arthur Simpson Witherington – Beamish archives, Liddle Collection in Leeds University

Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen

### Other

Danish and British Newspapers

Cecilie Lütken: Livserindringer og Rejseoplevelser

Captain Emil Wessel: Orlovsminder

### Websites

Postcards of hotels etc. found on-line

Lieut. Robert Spiers Robertson - <http://robertson-gray.org.uk/world-war-one/essay-competition.php>

[www.dangleterre.com](http://www.dangleterre.com)

[www.scandic-palace.copenhagen-hotel.net](http://www.scandic-palace.copenhagen-hotel.net)

[www.hornbaekhus.com](http://www.hornbaekhus.com)

[www.skodsborg.dk](http://www.skodsborg.dk)

[www.marienlyst.dk](http://www.marienlyst.dk)

[www.navalhistory.dk](http://www.navalhistory.dk)

[www.danskplakatkunst.dk](http://www.danskplakatkunst.dk)