

MISSING BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The men commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial

Members may recall previous articles which mapped the progress of our project to record pictures and additional information in respect of the men who are recorded on the Thiepval Memorial. We continue to make steady progress and recently passed the milestone of the 8,000th record (the level of detail varies and about 6,700 have at least one photograph) so we now have just 64,000 to go.

Each record provides an insight, however small, into the man behind the name carved into the stonework of the Memorial. Whilst an individual's story may have been recorded within their own family the records provide a more public and permanent remembrance of each life lost. It has always been these personal stories, rather than the more collective military history, which strike a chord with us.

As an extension of the project we were asked by the *Historial de la Grande Guerre* in Péronne to help organise an exhibition with the theme of remembrance. The exhibition (in English and French) will be free and opens at the Historial on Thursday 19th April 2012 running until Sunday 25th November 2012. As well as being the 96th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, 2012 is also the 80th anniversary of the unveiling of the Memorial and the 20th anniversary of

the opening of the Historial.

The overall theme of remembrance will be illustrated by telling the stories of some of the men commemorated on the Memorial. Although the Memorial commemorates men who went missing during a longer period the major part of the exhibition will concentrate on the 141 days of the Battle of the Somme and the individuals who are recorded as missing during that time.

Whilst the database has records for 8,000 men an exhibition can only hope to display the personal stories of a few, so some selection was required. We considered a number of thematic approaches, such as education, professions, geography etc. but eventually settled on taking each of the 141 days separately and looking for an interesting personal story of a man commemorated on that day. This selection process has been completed so we now know which men will be featured in the exhibition. We hope visitors in 2012 will agree that we have provided an interesting and representative cross-section of stories.

The scale of the casualties on 1st July 1916, some 12,000 of whom are commemorated on the Memorial, is such that choosing a single individual's story would be inappropriate. We have dealt with this by selecting the stories of three men from each of the 14 Divisions

involved in the actions that day.

The numbers commemorated on the Memorial during the ensuing 140 days of the Battle vary from a low of 40 on 9th November to a peak of 3,500 on 15th September. Each selected story stands as the representative of all of those missing on that day. Using a daily average for the period, for every story told another 379 remain untold.

Some of the men to be featured in the exhibition are shown below.

Of the men selected there will be a few whose story is reasonably well-known. However, for the majority, like those shown above, their story will have been limited to the immediate family. For some of these that story will have been cherished and passed on to succeeding generations. For others the story will have been lost as families fragmented or declined, perhaps to be rediscovered only recently. Whatever the case each story, of what was once an "ordinary life," has now assumed a much greater importance as it helps to show both the diversity and individuality of the men who fought and died on the Somme. It also provides a small insight into the impact that each death had on the man's immediate family.

The selected individual stories, wherever possible, will be supplemented by personal objects, letters, memoirs



1st July. Charles David Waller, aged 22, a builder. Rifleman, 1st/16th Battalion, London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles). He had been recommended for a commission.



13th July. Walter Thompson, aged 21, a weaver. Private, 17652, 2nd Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment. Walter and two of his three brothers died within 45 days of each other.



17th August. Clifford John Foulsham, aged 22, a draper. Corporal, 18821, 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment. After his death his widowed mother produced a book of six of his poems entitled "For His Country's Sake."



2nd September. Herbert Thomas Bindoff, aged 21, a clerk. Private, G/9192, 2nd Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment, attached to the 22nd Battalion, Manchester Regiment. Herbert and his twin brother, Frank, did everything together and were killed by the same shell. Only Frank has a marked grave.



23rd October. Sidney Blythe, aged 20, a salesman. Private, 11746, 1st Battalion, Hampshire Regiment. He was one of only 34 men from his Battalion who were rescued when the Troopship Royal Edward was torpedoed on 13th August 1915 on its way to the Dardanelles.



7th November. Bernard Locker, aged 19, a bobbin turner. Private, 34252, 7th Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment. A member of the Silsden Brass Band, had been in France just short of four weeks.

etc. These have been made available by the men's families, a number have also provided their thoughts on what remembrance means to them.

To augment the personal items there will also be a range of other objects which illustrate a general remembrance theme. Remembrance started in the trenches and has continued to grow over time helped by the increased ease of access to military and civilian records for amateur genealogists. Most present-day visitors to the battlefields have no personal knowledge of the man, or men, they come to honour. Yet still they are drawn by the sense that each "belongs" to them whether or not there is a blood connection. It is this personal connection which drives the increasing level of battlefield tourism as people visit the places where these men fought, died and are commemorated. The exhibition

will also briefly explore how the fate of these men affected society for many years afterwards and why remembrance continues to be important today. In this context, it is the conclusion of a cycle of exhibitions which has already involved three other museums in France and Belgium.

As we have indicated the exhibition can only tell a few individual stories, the database at the Visitor Centre however holds the full record for each of the 8,000 men researched to date. During the period of the exhibition the database will be available to view at the Historial thus allowing visitors access to additional information. It is also our intention to incorporate, in some form, within the exhibition as many as possible of the other individual pictures held in the database.

As well as preparing for the exhibition we have continued with the work on the

database. Pictures and information from relatives and other researchers are still being received and we also undertake our own research in local newspapers/archives across the country. We intend to continue with the work for as long as new information comes to light. We want to ensure that although these men are still "missing" they will never be "forgotten".

New and updated records are added to the database as and when we return to Thiepval, usually three times a year.

If you have information on men commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial which you want added to the database, or you have any questions on these men, please contact us.

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