



Lexden History Group

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MC*

*Friends
Ambulance Unit*

Commemorative Issue to mark the outbreak of World War One



G.  R.

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Saffron Walden.	Drill Hall, Saffron Walden.
Shoeburyness.	Barrack, Shoebury.
Southend.	127, Salisbury Avenue.

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Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7.45pm in St Leonard's Church Hall, Lexden except August when there is no meeting. Entry £1 for members, £3 for non-members, refreshments included. Annual membership £15 for single person. £20 for a family living at the same address.

Renewal forms are on the Lexden History web site (www.lexdenhistory.org.uk)

MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN – DICK BARTON

Welcome to the September issue of our Newsletter. The end of the month, 27/28 Sept., will see the Group's commemorative 1st World War Exhibition in the Church Hall. Our indefatigable Secretary Liz has masterminded the planning and much of the research for this Exhibition and I thank her for her enthusiasm and hard work. I thank her also for many of the articles in recent issues of this Newsletter.

FORTHCOMING SPEAKERS

8th October - Ashley Cooper - 300 years of Countryfield History

12th November - Norman Jacobs - Essex Seaside Heritage

10th December - Christmas Party - Tickets available from our October meeting

If you have the names and contact details of possible speakers for the forthcoming programme I would be pleased to hear from you. Please email the details to jbowis@hotmail.com

PIGEONS IN WW1



French soldier with pigeons carried on his back

Man-made communication systems were still crude and unreliable in WW1 but pigeons could be found almost anywhere on the Western Front. Even in the heat and disorientation of battle, pigeons proved to be the best way of sending messages and over 100,000 were used with 95% reaching their destinations. Before being taken to the trenches in wicker baskets, the birds were kept in mobile lofts behind the front line. These could be horse drawn or mounted on lorries or London buses. Pigeons were particularly useful during battles, when field telephones could be disrupted, or once the men had advanced – or retreated – past their prepared lines of communication. Even during heavy bombardments the pigeons could be launched and use their homing ability to return to their distinctively patterned lofts, despite the constant relocation. They were, however, unable to take messages back to the Front as they were trained only to fly to their base. A pigeon was also useful in the taking of aerial photographs from a small camera fixed to its back. Such was their importance that, when released, pigeons often brought a hail of enemy fire to bring them down and stop their messages getting through. This was all but impossible because of their speed but trained hawks were also used to bring them down. On landing, risks to pigeons were considerable and while many perished, most returned with essential messages.

Messenger pigeons were also used to maintain contact with sympathisers and resistance movements in enemy-occupied territory. Batches of pigeons, each with its own body-harness and parachute, were released at intervals from an aeroplane by a clockwork mechanism. As pigeons were central to life in the trenches pigeon-fancying publications were censored. Under the Defence of the Realm Act (August 1914) anyone found interfering with a homing pigeon faced £100 fines or six months in jail. A pigeon is even used in the comedy series "Blackadder Goes Forth" when the title character eats one and is court martialled.



Pigeons also served on warships and even submarines, to back up other forms of communication. They were also launched from aircraft in mid air to report back on the progress of missions. One was said to have been launched from a "total wreck" 190 miles out to sea on a "dark, stormy December night" and despite a 30 knot headwind, the bird arrived back at his loft with the message the following morning.

Another important role was raising the alarm when an aircraft crashed or was forced to land. A memo from the Air Ministry shows that of 212 birds singled out for "meritorious service" at the end of the war, a quarter had performed this task, usually from aircraft which had ditched in the sea.

The birds were used on the Home Front and MI5 had what an internal document from the time called a "special hush-hush air station" at Milborne St Andrew, near Dorchester, where 1,000 birds were kept.

Pigeons were also used extensively by the Germans who were said to have commandeered up to a million birds from occupied Belgium. The British tried to capture or kill the enemy pigeons.

At the end of WW1, a special event was held to celebrate birds which had served and in 1943 the Dickin Medal was instituted and awarded to honour the contributions of animals in conflict.



A B-type bus from London converted into a pigeon loft for use in Northern France and Belgium during the Great

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF LEXDEN DURING THE GREAT WAR RATIONING - By PHILIP CARDY 1908-1996

In 1911 the Cardy family were living at Glen Farm, Lexden near Cut Throat Lane (Glen Avenue). It was owned by the Papillon family of Lexden Manor. Frederick Cardy was born in 1867 in Wormingford and his wife, Eliza Watkinson, in 1863 in Maidenhead. She bore him 14 children, 10 of whom survived and Philip was their last child. These are his memories of food shortages during the Great War.

"By early in 1914 the first rumours that we were heading for a war were beginning to make themselves heard and we knew Mother was worried about it. That year we had a heavy crop of plums and Mrs Bird asked Mother to send her some to make jam. Alice (*his sister born in 1901*) and I took a big basketful down to Malting Farm that night. When we got back we met Mother in the back yard and I clearly remember her saying, "Children, a dreadful thing has happened. We have declared war on Germany. I don't know whatever we shall do."

"The country was not ready and, as all imports were stopped, the shops soon began to empty - helped by those who could afford it grabbing everything they could lay their hands on. As it was August and we were on holiday we had to get up early, get breakfast and then set off to town so as to be there about half past seven to get into the queue. I used to go to the Maypole. (*A grocery shop in the High Street possibly near Pelham's Lane.*) Sometimes they did not open as they had no butter or margarine to sell. Other times you might get half a pound of margarine and that was a prize; or you might just get to the counter and the shutter would go down and that was the lot and we had had an hour's wait and got nothing. Then I went round the queues to see if I could find the other two. Sometimes Mother was in luck and had managed to get a little bit of meat.



"By January 1918 we had ration books so the queuing was finished and you knew when you drew your rations that you would get no more for that week. I had to take a barrow and go along the road as far as Park Road and collect swill and cook it to help feed the pig. We were not supposed to have one as you were supposed to register it and, when fat, nobody was allowed to kill a pig in the back yard, it had to be sent to the slaughter house or market and you got no meat for your work. Bill Everitt used to come about 3.30 in the morning so all was done and cleared up by 7.30. Nobby Clark, the policeman, said we were a law abiding lot as, all through the war, he never had any trouble

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF LEXDEN DURING THE GREAT WAR RATIONING - By PHILIP CARDY 1908-1996 - continued

over pigs and chickens being killed when they shouldn't be. If you killed a cockerel you had to report it and the ration from the butcher was stopped for that week. But Nobby added that he did not know what Bill Everitt did for a living for he never seemed to be at work much during the day. (*William Everett was the local butcher living at 13 London Road*)

"My father was, I think, one of the most honest men I have ever known. With a large orchard just outside the gate he would not allow children to pick one fruit although he knew the cattle would eat them all. That was different - "They are Mr Bird's cattle and Mr Bird's apples and pears, not yours, so leave them alone." It was the same with the rabbits. There were swarms of them running about the fields. We were not allowed to catch one. Mother put up with it for some time and then she told Dad that she was going to tell me to catch a rabbit now and then as she could not make the meat ration go round. Dad said, "You have still got some pork." Mother replied, "After this lot we will not be allowed to keep pigs and if you kill a cockerel you have to report it and your meat ration is stopped for a week. We have got to take care of what we have got and I am going to tell Phil to get a rabbit whether you like it or not." It was with a bad grace that he gave way, stating that she was only going to teach me to be a poacher. Well, she didn't have to teach me. Although still at school I know how to catch a rabbit, and a pheasant too if needs must. So Dad had the butcher's meat ration to himself and we had rabbit, pheasant, pigeon and sometimes a wild duck from the river. Dad knew it was so, but he never asked any questions."

Philip Cardy's memories of the Great War ... to be continued.

WW1 1918 Ration Card

To be filled up by Food Office where issued.	Holder's Surname } <i>Clair</i>	KEEP THIS CARD CAREFULLY	RATIONING ORDER, N. 86. 1918.		
	Christian Name } <i>Leonard</i>		Food Office of Issue.		
	Address } <i>3</i>		MONTON		
To register for MEAT, BUTTER and SUGAR, fill up counterfoils A, B and C on this card, and give them to any Retailer you choose. See the instructions on the accompanying leaflet. You may be asked to change your Retailer again without consent of the Food Office.	Name and Address of BUTCHER	A	Name and Address of Retailer for.....	D	
	Name and Address of BUTTER Retailer	B	Name and Address of Retailer for.....	E	
	Name and Address of SUGAR Retailer	C	Name and Address of Retailer for.....	F	
	SPARE.		Signature and Address of Holder.	Name and Address of Retailer for.....	D
	D				
	Keep this counterfoil and the top portion of the card, and read the accompanying leaflet of instructions.				

The card bears the instructions: **To register for MEAT, BUTTER and SUGAR, fill up the counterfoils A B and C on the lower half of card, and give them to any Retailers you choose. The Retailers must write or stamp their names and addresses on these spaces. You will not be able to change your Retailer again without consent of the Food Office.**

WW1 COLCHESTER POET (JOHN) EDGELL RICKWORD MC



One of the youngest war poets, John Edgell Rickword, was born in Colchester on 22nd October 1898 the youngest of five children of George and Mabel Rickword. George was a cabinet maker and upholsterer who lived with his family above the shop on the corner of Culver Street and Lion Walk. In the 1890s he became a public librarian and the family moved to 15 Head Street. Later when he was Chief Librarian for Colchester they lived at 38 Wellesley Road. This was conveniently close for John Edgell to attend Colchester Royal Grammar School where he was, in time, converted to socialism on reading the works of William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, HG Wells, amongst others.

With the start of WW1 in 1914 he was determined to serve, but had to wait until September 1916 when he joined the Artists' Rifles (*badge right*), finding the training at Gidea Park easy and boring but rather difficult having to meet the requirements for neatness! In December 1917 he was transferred to the 5th Bn Royal Berkshire Regiment, arriving at the Western Front at Fleurbaix near Armentières on 21 January 1918. The weather was bitterly cold and it was there he wrote *Winter Warfare*. On 19 March Rickword and a colleague, Rowe, who were in charge of a working party, were talking together when a shell exploded nearby. Both were hit by flying splinters and taken to the base hospital at St Pol, where the shoulder wound which Rickword had received was found to be comparatively slight but sadly Rowe died on 17 April. St Pol was some miles behind the lines, but Rickword later recalled that "the Germans were bombing the railway station by day, testing, with fair success, a long-range gun on the church in the square, and brightening our evenings with air-raids on the dumps surrounding the hospital". He also remembered a visit to the hospital by a concert party, and commented: "For the courage which faced these dangers and the skill which organized it no praise could be extravagant".



Back on the Front, he was deployed to Vimy Ridge where, as a result of his actions, the Germans were forced to retreat and he was awarded the Military Cross. The citation reads "For conspicuous gallantry and initiative near Dourges on 15th October 1918. He volunteered to cross the Haute Deule Canal and make a reconnaissance. After crossing the canal at Pont-a-Sault, his presence was discovered by the enemy, who kept him covered with their machine guns. In spite of this he worked his way along the eastern bank of the canal, and brought back most valuable information, which enabled his company to form a bridgehead." In early 1919 he suffered an eye infection which caused an eye to be removed and replaced by a glass one costing 3gns!

He went up to Pembroke College, Oxford where he read French Literature for four terms, leaving to marry his Irish fiancée, Margaret McGrath, in the autumn of 1920. They had two daughters, but the marriage was not a success and after the war his life was dominated by his love of literature. He started several literary review papers, and edited others, none of which lasted for more than a few years. His post war writing included many erotic poems – not to be printed here! A collection of his poetry published in 1921 was called "Behind the Eyes".

In 1921 he was described as "slight and fair-haired, with a very quiet manner and a soft voice" which does not seem to match his support of the miners during the 1926 General Strike in Penybout, Powys, where he had moved to live with his then girlfriend, Thomasina. He was a member of the Labour Party for many years but joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1934 and was considered to be an important intellectual within the party. He also became active during the time of the Spanish Civil War, visiting the country in 1938.

On the death of his wife, Margaret, in 1944 he married his long-term lover Doris Back, who had already obtained a divorce. They had lived for some years in Hampstead, London, but when Doris died in 1964 at Black Notley Hospital, John Edgell Rickword is recorded as a Bookseller living at 97 Head Street, Halstead. He returned to London where he died on 15 Mar 1982.

The Soldier Addresses His Body

by Edgell Rickword

*I shall be mad if you get smashed about,
we've had good times together, you and I;
although you grouched a bit when luck was out,
say a girl turned us down, or we went dry.*

*But there's a world of things we haven't done,
countries not seen, where people do strange things;
eat fish alive, and mimic in the sun
the solemn gestures of their stone-grey kings.*

*I've heard of forests that are dim at noon
where snakes and creepers wrestle all day long;
where vivid beasts grow pale with the full moon,
gibber and cry, and wail a mad old song,*

*because at the full moon the Hippogriff
with wrinkled ivory snout and agate feet,
with his green eye will glare them cold and stiff
for the coward Wyvern to come down and eat.*

*Vodka, kvass or bitter mountain wines
we've never drunk; nor snatched the bursting grapes
to pelt slim girls among Sicilian vines,
who'd flicker through the leaves, faint frolic shapes.*

*Yes, there's a world of things we've never done,
but it's a sweat to knock them into rhyme,
let's have a drink, and give them cards a run
and leave dull verse to the dull peaceful time.*

Winter Warfare

by Edgell Rickword

*Colonel Cold strode up the Line
(tabs of rime and spurs of ice),
Stiffened all that met his glare:
Horses, men and lice.*

*Visited a forward post,
left them burning, ear to foot;
fingers stuck to biting steel,
toes to frozen boot.*

*Stalked on into No Man's Land,
turned the wire to fleecy wool,
iron stakes to sugar sticks
snapping at a pull.*

*Those who watched with hoary eyes
saw two figures gleaming there;
Hauptmann Kalte, colonel old,
gaunt in the grey air.*

*Stiffly, tinkling spurs they moved,
glassy-eyed, with glinting heel
stabbing those who lingered there
torn by screaming steel.*

CORDER AND JACK CATCHPOOL Conscientious Objectors

by Carol Holding (nee Catchpool)



This, in brief, is the story of two brothers in the Great War, my uncle Corder Catchpool (*picture left*) and his younger brother by eight years, Jack (E St John - my father b1890, *picture right*), and their struggles as Conscientious Objectors.



As Quakers, both were greatly troubled by the morality of going to war whatever the official cause and, being anxious to be of service, joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit (FAU) which often found itself near the fighting front line.

Corder, who joined in November 1914, was born in 1883 and became convinced that the coming of conscription in 1915 would mean more militarisation of the FAU and not just the alleviation of suffering, so he left in May 1916. His graphic descriptions of the front during the first two winters in France, including the battles at Ypres and some hospital and civilian work (and his longing to go and help Serbia), highlight the horrors. However after he severed his connection with the FAU his certificate of "absolute" exemption granted by the War Office was withdrawn.

His writings then follow his Courts Marshal, prison in Reading, Worcester, Devonport, Harwich and Ipswich and make grim reading. Knowing that many of his colleagues were prepared to accept the death penalty for their beliefs, his initial sentence of twelve months hard labour in 1917 (he was later given a further eighteen months) seemed a lesser evil. His writing from prison is full of humility. This is typical. "The army is really overwhelming me with kindness. Two officers - just the two who seemed Cads at Devonport (our censoring friend and another) have gone out of their way to be courteous - why is it? They are such fine handsome young men in their smart uniforms - one just longs to be able to establish sympathetic touch at some point with them and when I am blocking all they are out for, like sand in the most delicate parts of their great machine, I feel something like humiliated at my unworthiness, and am flung back on the thought that only a whole life of devoted self sacrifice can square the account, or rather the second half of a life! And then I shall just go back to business and happiness and security, economic and physical - and men are lying wounded for days in waterlogged shell holes. God forgive me and help me".

At the outbreak of war my father, Jack, was working at the Toynbee Hall settlement in the East End and after studying first aid at the London Hospital joined the FAU in Spring 1915, organising transport at Malo-les-Bains not far from the front. The brothers had to return to England just before Christmas on the death of their father, who was living in Wanstead but had a house in Colchester. They returned to Dunkirk but the main body of the Society of Friends could no longer give support to the FAU. After Jack's tribunal, which was easier than he expected, he joined the "War Victims Relief Unit" about to leave for Russia and so was not deemed a deserter. From Russia he made a long journey to Armenia where he spent time in an isolation hospital with typhus. His recovery saw him helping repatriate families in Moscow and St Petersburg and was

CORDER AND JACK CATCHPOOL Conscientious Objectors - continued

eventually arrested, on a charge of forged papers, court marshalled and sentenced to transportation to Vladivostok, via the trans-Siberian railway in the summer of 1918.

After a long time in China and Japan he should have been able to return home that winter but he had to return some precious documents to the Archmandrite or High priest of the Armenian Church in Jerusalem. These had been sewn into his clothes for safekeeping in Armenia (and travelled with him over 20,000 miles). He finally returned to England in June 1919 (four years after leaving).

Both brothers were married a year later in June and July 1920, Corder to Gwen Southall and Jack to Ruth Wilson, both from Birmingham Quaker families Jack and Ruth (newly qualified as a doctor at Manchester University) lived and worked at Toynbee Hall for three years and later again as Warden in 1963. In between his work he set up the YHA (Youth Hostels Association) in 1930 and, for older people, a housing society in Welwyn Garden City, where he and his growing family had gone to be wardens of New Town Hostel in 1926.

Corder and Gwen lived in Darwen, Lancashire. Although trained as an engineer he now worked as Welfare supervisor for mill workers and manager of "Spring Vale Garden Village Ltd". Later he became an ambassador in Berlin, risking further imprisonment, trying to broker peace and keep bridges open as the Nazis came to power.



Lance Sergeant Charles Mann

Hidden beneath a thick tangle of brambles and nettles in a shady part of the churchyard is a modest grave recording the death of Maria Mann on 8th February 1939 aged 78 and her husband, Frederick, who joined her a few weeks later. On the east side of the grave is a plain kerbstone simply saying "Also Charles William, beloved son of the above, killed in action Sept 1916. In memories garden we meet every day"

Charles William Mann was born in Lexden in the autumn of 1894, one of eleven children of Frederick and Maria Mann. Frederick was a carpenter working from the family home at 12 Lexden Street, a cottage opposite the Crown. By the 1911 Census Charles was working as a gardener. Later he worked at the Great Eastern Railway at North Station and then as a conductor on the local trams where the terminus was conveniently close to his home

Before the Great War started he enlisted with the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards – one of the regiments based in Colchester at the time - but soon saw active service in Flanders and was killed on the Somme at the Battle of Morval on 25th September 1916 aged only 22.



Cap Badge of the Grenadier

The Battle of Morval, fought from 25-28 September, was a continuation of the Battle of Fleurs-Coucelette (15-22 September) when the British Army used tanks for the first time and where the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith's son, Raymond, was killed on 15th September. Fighting was intense but gradually the British pushed forward and broke through the German defences. By now the weather was turning autumnal, heavy rain making conditions difficult and stretching the men to the limits of their physical endurance.



British Infantry at Morval 25th September 1916)

The preliminary bombardment began at 7am on 24 September. Early the next day the assault troops waited in muddy 'jumping-off' trenches, witnessing a ferocious barrage on German positions. At 12.35pm on 25 September, as the creeping barrage pounded down on No Man's Land, the infantry advanced gaining Morval and Lesboeuufs by 3.30pm.

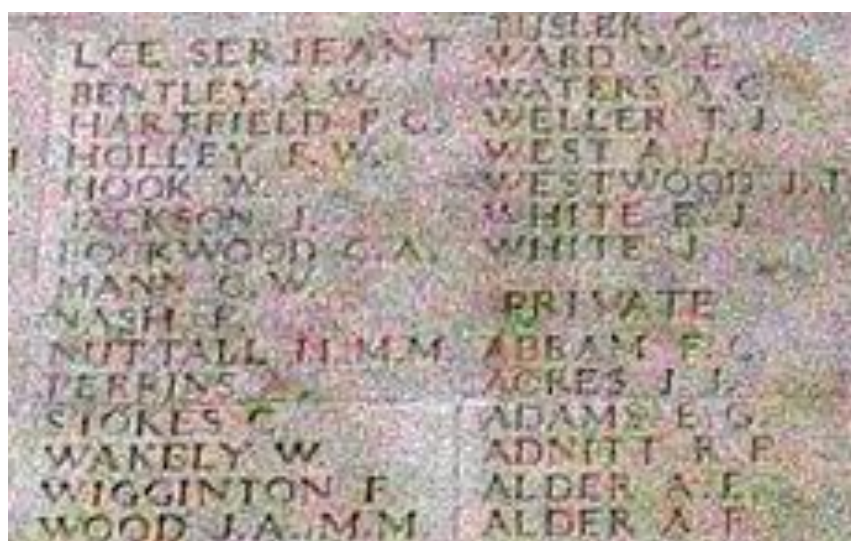
TALES FROM THE CHURCHYARD - continued

There was determined German resistance but on 26 September, with the assistance of a tank, Guedecourt village was taken that evening. Further attacks took place on 27 September and the following day the line passed to French forces.

The newspaper article of the time reports "Friends of Charlie W Mann will be sorry to hear that he is posted as missing and great sympathy is felt for his parents, Mr and Mrs Mann of 12 Lexden St who have just received the official news that the Lance Sergeant, serving in the Grenadier Guards, was wounded and has been missing since 25th September. Sometime since a friend of his in the Regiment wrote to say he saw the Sergeant shot, but he was unable to obtain any definite particulars. Sgt Mann joined the Army before hostilities commenced. His brother Harry is in France with the Essex Regiment having been drafted from the 8th (Cyclist) Battalion, Essex Regiment.

He is buried at Thiepval and his name is recorded amongst thousands of others who gave their lives in France during the Great War. His brother survived and returned home.

Thiepval Memorial



Mann C W inscription

ORIGIN OF THE REMEMBRANCE POPPY

Poppies grow naturally in conditions of disturbed earth throughout Western Europe. Before the Great War these were rare in the fields of Northern France and Flanders but from late 1914 the poppy spread prolifically until it appeared as a sea of red - an ironic symbol of the blood spilt by so many.



A Canadian Army officer, Capt John McCrae, was serving as a surgeon during the battles of the Ypres salient in 1915. Following the death of a friend, Lt Alexis Helmer of Ottawa, and during a lull in the fighting he tore a page from his despatch book and started writing in pencil his now famous poem. He was not happy with it and discarded it, but a fellow officer retrieved the paper and sent it to England to be published. It was rejected by the "Spectator" but it was published by "Punch" in its December 8th edition of 1915. The words of Captain John McCrae would come to immortalise the symbol of sacrifice the

world over.

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow*



© greatwar.co.uk

On Saturday morning, 9th November 1918, two days before the Armistice was declared, the 25th Conference of the YMCA Overseas War Secretaries was in progress in New York. Moina Michael (1868-1944) was on duty and a young soldier left a copy of the latest edition of the "Ladies Home Journal" on the desk. It included a page with a vivid colour illustration and the poem entitled "We Shall Not Sleep" (the alternative name for "In Flanders Fields"). From that moment she vowed always to wear a red poppy as a symbol of remembrance for those who had served in the war. She also scribbled down a response to the poem entitling her verses "We Shall Keep the Faith".



ORIGIN OF THE REMEMBRANCE POPPY - continued

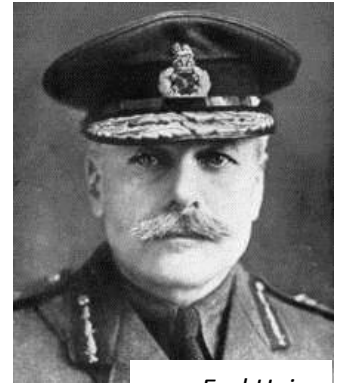
In appreciation of her effort to brighten up the Hall with flowers at her own expense three delegates gave her a cheque for \$10 with which she bought 25 red poppies. She kept one for herself and gave the rest to the enthusiastic delegates, one of whom was the French Secretary, Madam Anna E Guérin.



Madam Anna E Guérin

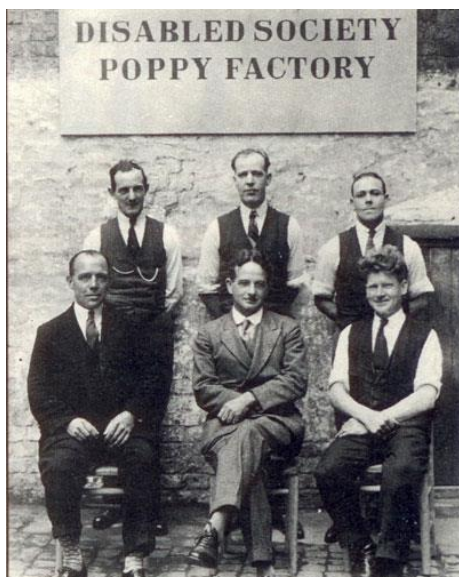
At a conference in 1920 Moina Michael's efforts resulted in the poppy being adopted by the National American Legion as their official symbol of remembrance. Madam Anna E Guérin, having bought one of the first 25 poppies in 1918 had been visiting various parts of the world and suggested that artificial poppies be made and sold to help ex-servicemen and their dependants.

The British Legion was founded on 21 May 1921 bringing together four National Organisations of ex-servicemen from the Great War. Later that year Madam Guérin and a group of French war widows approached the former British Commander-in-Chief, Earl Haig, at the Legion Headquarters in London about selling artificial poppies to honour the dead and raise funds to help needy soldiers and their families.



Earl Haig

The first Legion Poppy Day was held in Britain on 11 November 1921 and in 1922 Major George Howson MC, an engineer who had served on the Western Front, founded the Disabled Society to help disabled ex-Service men and women. He suggested to the British Legion that the Society should make and distribute poppies to the public and that the flowers should be designed so that a one-handed man could assemble them. With a grant of £2,000, he set up a small factory off the Old Kent Road with five ex-Servicemen and within a few months the factory was providing work and an income for 50 disabled veterans. As demand grew, the factory became too small and in 1925 it moved to larger premises in Richmond, close to the



*Major George Howson MC (centre front)
with the initial workforce*

current Poppy Factory, which dates from 1933. In the same year the charity changed its name to the British Legion Poppy Factory. Today a constant work force of fifty people, many of them disabled and ex-servicemen, manufacture poppies throughout the year, aided by machinery. The black plastic centre of the poppy was marked "Haig Fund" until 1994 but is now marked "Poppy Appeal".



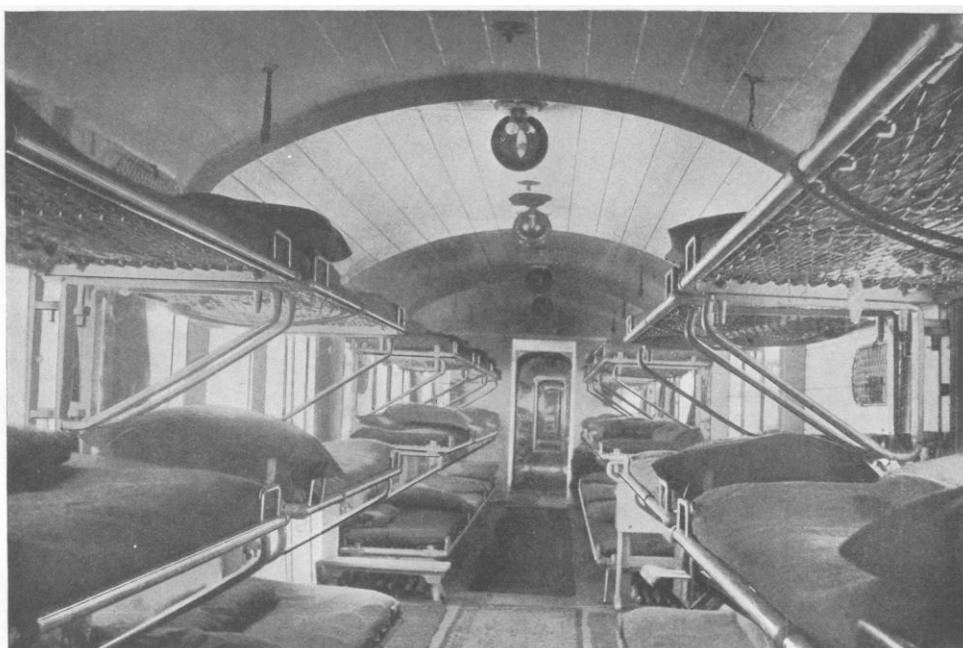
FRIENDS' AMBULANCE UNIT (FAU)

The Society of Friends key policy body "Meeting for Sufferings" met in London on 7th August 1914 to consider their response to the outbreak of war. The group had begun in the 1660s to document and alleviate the sufferings of Friends and their families. Convinced that ambulance services would be woefully inadequate on the Front, a group of young Quakers worked on the idea of a unit which could save many lives and also enable conscientious objectors to participate in a nonviolent way yet make a vital contribution to the war effort. When conscription was introduced in 1916 members were drawn from registered conscientious objectors.



Phillip Baker, an outstanding academic and diplomat, appealed for volunteers in a letter to "The Friend" of August 21st. He wrote to Colin Rowntree inviting him to join the initial training on 25th August 1914 in London. Then, early in September, a six week training camp was established at Jordans, a hamlet in Buckinghamshire. Sixty young men were instructed in first aid work, stretcher drill, camp cookery, sanitation, and home nursing. When the Belgian army collapsed in late October 1914 the first boat load of 40 men, 3 doctors, 8 ambulances and medical supplies, led by Philip Baker and including Corder Catchpool, left London for Dunkirk. It was understood that they would operate in a semi-military way to appease the military mind and local French and Belgian authorities. They were initially called the "First Anglo-Belgian Ambulance Unit" - soon changed to the "Friends' Ambulance Unit" (FAU).

Some way out of Dover they met a torpedoed cruiser, the "Hermes" and carried the victims back to England. Setting out again, they worked at Dunkirk in the military evacuation sheds, looking after several thousand wounded soldiers until they could be evacuated. After a terrible typhoid epidemic during that winter, the first of four hospitals, the Queen Alexandra, was established at Dunkirk.



The FAU chiefly provided medical support for wounded and sick troops in hospitals and on ambulance trains (*picture left*) and ships. They worked closely with fighting soldiers and in this way could support the wounded but not the war. They cared for anyone they found wounded, including Germans. To the French army, the FAU seemed an organisation of 'amiable and efficient cranks' but the FAU

FRIENDS' AMBULANCE UNIT (FAU) - continued

workers were brave and dedicated, feeling 'privileged to try to patch up some of the results of this ghastly mistake'.

As the needs increased so did the FAU and many non-Quakers joined. There were two sections: the Foreign Service and the Home Service. After the initial emergency at Dunkirk, the Foreign Service set up and staffed a number of civilian and military hospitals in France and Belgium including Ypres and Poperinghe. They ran French ambulance convoys (Sections Sanitaires Anglaises); serviced First Aid stations, Postes de Secours and Casualty Clearing Stations near the front line. They started on a programme of civilian relief; established orphanages; evacuated children, patients and civilians from war damaged and unsafe areas; gave anti-typhoid inoculations, dealt with water purification and, because of the widespread concern for infants, took on the job of milk distribution. In 1915 they started running ambulance trains and by 1916 they had two hospital ships. When Italy came into the war in 1915 the Anglo-Italian Ambulance Unit was set up separately and several FAU members, including Philip Baker and his wife, worked in Italy for the rest of the war.

The FAU Home Service set up and helped to run four hospitals in England, one at the Rowntree factory in York, one in a Cadbury house in Birmingham and another two in London where they had an office and a clothing department. They also continued to run training camps, mostly at Jordans.

This work continued both in England. In France and Belgium there were eventually some eight hospitals staffed by the FAU. At the end of the war in 1918, there were 640 men (the FAU was entirely male) working on the European mainland, and 720 men in Britain. 21 died in action and a further 420 were involved at some stage during the war. They had driven over two million miles and had



Members of the FAU at work

transported 277,000 sick and injured people. If the work of the Italian unit is included, these figures increase by about 50%. Their funding (about £140,000 in total) had come from many sources, including Quakers.

The unofficial motto of the Friends' Ambulance Unit was 'find work that needs doing. Regularise it later, if possible'. In the heat of the conflict, that is exactly what they did but they were never officially regularised. After the armistice in 1918, the FAU worked for another year on civilian relief and repatriation and was finally closed in 1919. The concept was revived in WW2.

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