

Newsletter



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From the beginning.

Editorial

Over the months from May until November 2012 I was very busy researching the history of thirty young men who went from Hanley to fight in WW1 and did not come home. These men were all associated with Bethesda Chapel in Albion Street, Hanley and part of a group known as Bethesda Our Boys. A glass memorial dedicated to these young men was situated over the vestry door inside Bethesda Chapel and during the uncertain years when Bethesda was closed unwanted visitors entered the chapel and smashed the glass memorial. Only a few broken pieces of glass were left. Thankfully, in 1974, English Heritage and our local Council carried out a survey to give the chapel listed status. Resulting in a Grade 2* listing. Part of this survey was to photograph everything inside and outside the chapel.

With 2014 fast approaching us and being 100 years since WW1 began Most family historians have an ancestor who fought in or lived during WW1. I thought that you might be interested in how, with the 1974 photograph, I researched every name on the memorial and produced a book containing my research. I hope my story will inspire you to write and publish your own family history.

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Ever since the Friends of Bethesda have opened the chapel to the public on a regular basis, many visitors pass on to us stories about their childhood association with Bethesda. One question that used to pop up often was “What has happened to the Rolls of Honour and the Glass Memorial, my grandfather’s name was on them?”. Both the Rolls of Honour and the glass memorial were destroyed during the time the chapel was empty. From the beginning we decided to raise money to have the Rolls of Honour and the glass memorial remade. We started in 2007 and by 2009 had raised enough to have the Rolls of Honour remade. These were four framed printed list’s of all the men associated with Bethesda that fought in both WW1 and WW2. There was a



re-dedication service held in November 2009 when the Rolls were replaced on the walls each side of the vestry door.

The Friends then started to raise money to have the glass memorial re-made and in November 2012 a rededication service was held for the new glass memorial which was later re-fitted over the vestry door.

When we gave the glass company the few samples of the original memorial we also gave them a list of the thirty names on the memorial. It was from this list comprising of initial, surname and regiment that I gathered information for the book. This research has made me realise how terrible WW1 was and how immensely proud I am of my granddad who fought at Gallipoli.

With only a name and regiment.



From the 1974 photograph of the original 1919 glass memorial (above) a list of the thirty fallen men could be made. This list could only consist of what was on the memorial, rank, an initial, surname and the name of the regiment he was in when he died for example the first name on the list was 2nd Lieutenant R. Adams, 1/5th Norfolk Regiment. First I looked on the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* website, www.cwgc.org opened the page marked *Find War Dead* and filled in the information as best I could. Which was Surname, Initial, War, Served with, Served in, Rank, Regiment. My search turned up no results so I began to **eliminate pieces of information**, first being rank and bingo, I had my first details for R. Adams (I had written 2nd Lieut. and they wasted the full rank in writing). He died in 12.08.1915 and is remembered on the Helles Memorial. On the same page you could **download a burial certificate**. His name was Robert and he died at Gallipoli. I then went onto *Ancestry.com* and found his *medal card*. His medal card gave his military number and the date he had died confirming the right man. On the same website I looked for his *WWI British Army Service Record*. This gave his age and address on enlistment. He first enlisted into the 28th London Regiment and was posted to the Norfolk Regiment shortly after his promotion. Through his age and address I found him in the 1911 census as a school master at Horsham Grammar School, born in Hanley. Through further **census and BMD research** I found that Robert was a son of Boyce Adams the popular Hanley grocer. Knowing that he was in the 1/5th Norfolk Regiment I placed that **information into a search engine** only to find out that shortly after landing at Gallipoli the regiment marched inland and mysteriously vanished. In 1999 a documentary was shown on BBC TV about this mysterious incident.

Through local contacts I discovered descendants of Boyce Adams and contacted them. They knew of the mystery and filled me in with lots of interesting information. Including the photograph left.



2nd Lieutenant Robert Adams

I went through the same procedure for all the names on the list but to be honest, none were easy. As all the men were associated in some way with Bethesda, I looked for men from Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent and Hanley. Often there were more than one killed with the same name, in the same regiment and from Hanley. In such cases I searched through the Medal Cards and the Service records but due to bombing in the Second World War all the service records from WW1 were partially destroyed. The remaining records being known as the *Burnt Records*. These are searchable through Ancestry, Find My Past and the National Archives and a few specialist military history websites such as **Forces War Records**. I also gained valuable information from the mans **Regiment website** such as the Canadian Regiment website, the Northumberland Regiment website and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders website. These three were particularly helpful. I visited Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, home of the Northumberland Regiment and I visited the Tower of London, the home of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. I also searched the internet for **Regimental War Diaries** on line. If you are lucky enough to find the War Diaries for

the regiment your ancestor was in then you are well blessed because these diaries contain lots of information about the daily routine, battles and casualties from the battle.

The wrong person.

Even with the greatest care I managed to research the wrong man a couple of times plus one man who has proved very difficult because I will **not assume unreliable information is correct**. I did this with Francis Bourne all because his story was so interesting and sad that I lost track of proving my facts. The only Bourne I could find at first was F W Bourne, born Hanley, killed in Alnwick Drill Hall and buried in Hanley Cemetery. Through census's and BMD's as with the other men, I found out where he was born, his parents, where he lived and where he first started to work. I then found that he joined at 18 years and was based at Alnwick, about 25 miles below Berwick on Tweed. It intrigued me that he was killed in a Drill Hall so my wife and I arranged to visit Alnwick to find out how. It turned out that to give the new young recruits a demonstration of having a gun pointed at them and being fired at they carried out an exercise where the recruits fired at each other across the Drill Hall with blank ammunition. Unfortunately someone mixed the boxes and live ammunition was used. Young Mr Bourne was shot in the head and killed instantly. His body was sent home to be buried in the family plot. It was while in Alnwick **talking to the Regiment Historian** that I felt something was wrong and I had the wrong man. Something didn't fit.

When I got home I remembered that the **Potteries Museum and City Archives** had lots of information on Bethesda Our Boys so I asked if I could look at it. Among the papers I found a typed foolscap piece on the glass memorial containing the full name, last known address, regiment and date the man was killed. I wish I had this at the beginning of my research because sure enough I had the wrong F. Bourne as well as another name I had researched wrongly. My research was good, just the wrong person. Still, we had a super time in the North East of England.

With the information from the Museum I **double checked all the research** I had done. Once I was sure I had the correct history for the correct name I set about writing it up so others could read and understand the information in book form.

It was getting close to October by the time I had finished writing up all the research, and I wanted the book published for our Bethesda Glass Memorial rededication service on 10th November. I received an email giving me **permission to download all the burial certificates from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission** website, and had been to Hanley Cemetery, located and photographed the few that are buried there with the help of the **counter staff at Carmountside Crematorium**. I now set all my research together in book form page by page. Some research was taking over one page and other research was only just one page so I took the decision to reduce the font size for the whole book to have one information page per person with the CWGC burial certificate on the facing page. This meant that I had

to pad out some stories but most regrettably had to edit some of the longer and more interesting stories. Writing an acknowledgements page, an introduction and a little about how I wrote the book I found that I had over 70 pages. I went to a number of local printers who gave me silly prices to publish the book and finally went to Brookes Printers in Sneyd Green who gave me a good price to print 100 books in full colour. Brookes turned out to be very helpful and printed and bound the book for me in less than two weeks.

I chose the picture (left) of the Cross of Sacrifice in Hanley Cemetery for the front cover of the book and gave it the title

To the Fallen.

In Memory of Bethesda Our Boys 1914-1918

After the rededication service in Bethesda we sold 49 copies of the book and received a large donation towards the cost of the printing by a grateful descendant of one of the men on the memorial. In total the full cost of publishing the book was covered by the end of that day.



Finding a WW1 Soldier.

First of all can I say I'm no expert in finding the history of a soldier and below is my own experience.

I hope this Newsletter has inspired you to trace a family ancestor who fought in WW1. If he lived or died the following information will help you. Even with a small amount of information to start with it can be possible to at least find out a general overview of a person's 1914-1918 military service. Over the last few years a wealth of resource material has been made available for tracing individuals and the British or Commonwealth military units with which they served in World War One. Some records are now available online to download free, for a fee or by subscription. Obviously you must start with a name so the more family information about your military ancestor the better. The first question to ask is whether your ancestor survived the war or was killed. Surprisingly it is easier to find initial information if he/her was killed. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is your first place to research. Every person who enlisted in WW1 received some kind of medal and those who didn't because of their occupation received a badge to indicate this. If your ancestor was in the military then the British WW1 Medal Records 1914—1920 is the place to look. Many received two medals and if your ancestor was “in at the beginning” he will have three medals, affectionately known as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred.. Pip, the 1914-1915 Star was given to the personnel who entered the war as Expeditionary Forces at the start. Added to this was Squeak the British War Medal for all who fought in WW1 and later Wilfred, the Victory Medal was added. If you know which regiment your ancestor was in then there are various ways to find out about him. First stop is to look in the British Army Service Records (Soldiers), British Army Service Records (Officers). Approximately 40% of the First World War Service Records survived the Second World War bomb damage. Known as the Burnt Records those that did survive have recently been digitized and can be searched on a number of websites. Once you have found the regiment your ancestor was in another place to look in on the Regimental Museum website. Many of these museums hold the Regimental War Diaries which are a day to day record of what each battalion in that regiment did while on active duty. Some allow you to visit the museum and search the diaries but many will only allow their own research team to research them for you. My own grandfather was in the Worcestershire Regiment and fought at Gallipoli and later in France. They charged me £30 (5 years ago) to research my grandfather's service with them. This was money very well spent as they told me everything about him. How he joined as a boy soldier in 1908 and how he was in India in 1911 and took part in the Delhi Dubar for King George V. They told me about returning from India at the outbreak on WW1 and on which ship he returned on sailing straight to Alexandria to prepaid for Gallipoli. How, when and where he was wounded, his hospital and recovery joining the regiment again in France. How when and where he fought in France and how he was classed as wounded again as a result of being gassed at the 'Front'. Where and when he was demobbed in 1919 and being awarded a silver “Wounded Badge”. I can only say again that this was the best £30 I have ever spent. I did the same while researching my father's military history in WW2. The Gloucestershire Regiment Museum charged me £25 (5years ago) and the information of my father's time in WW2 and where and how he was wounded was priceless.

It goes without saying that many of the usual subscription Family History website have links to military history information and be aware that there are not many free access ones.

Some useful Websites other than National Archives, Ancestry, Find my Past, Genes Reunited.

www.cwgc.org Commonwealth War Graves Commission to find war dead from all British involvement wars.

www.fourteeneighteen.co.uk

Military history of WW1

www.forces-war-records.co.uk

Searchable subscription site.

www.1914-1918.net

The Long Long Trail. Regimental true stories of WW1

www.ww1photos.com

1,000's of pictures of servicemen indexed by name and regiment.

www.battlefields1418.50megs.com

List of all regiments and what battles they fought in..

www.greatwar.co.uk

WW1 research and sources of information.

www.archive.gov

Government information to buy on line.