



## JULY CRISIS: DESCENT INTO WAR 1914

Professor T. G. Otte, MA, PhD

17th September 2014

There are two principal reasons for the fascination with the Great War. First, it profoundly transformed Europe and indeed the wider world. The Commonwealth war graves in Flanders, the hills of Champagne or the *jardins de funèbre* and *Heldenhaine* that scar those landscapes are reminders of this. But beyond that, many of the vicissitudes of the twentieth century were rooted in this conflict. The second reason was no less significant. Scholars of the war fall into two broad categories: those who argue that at the core of the events of 1914 was a conscious policy act by one Power or another to opt for war; and there are those who think that politicians lost control and the nations of Europe, in Lloyd George's phrase, 'slithered over the brink into ... war.' This mattered because it touches on the nature of man and the nature of politics in general. For if the former view prevails, then there was something rational and deliberate at the root of the 1914-18 war; and if it was rational then there is hope. Lessons can be learnt, and a recurrence of such a cataclysm avoided. If the latter view prevails, then politics are irrational and uncontrollable – and there is no hope.

The events at Sarajevo on 28 June were the starting point of the July crisis. The seven assassins belonged to a type, once again familiar: disaffected youths, self-radicalised to become martyrs for their chosen cause. They expected to be killed or to kill themselves after the murder. They were also not very good. But the Habsburg officials in charge of the visit were no better. The security arrangements made by the Austro-Hungarian governor of Bosnia, General Oskar Potiorek, were threadbare (a whole army corps was camped outside Sarajevo, but not called out because the soldiers had not got the right uniforms for royal events). Inviting the future ruler of the Habsburg empire to 'show the flag' in this unstable province on St. Vitus' Day, a significant day in Serb nationalist mythology, was like asking the Prince of Wales to visit certain parts of Dublin or Belfast on St. Patrick's Day in 1913 or 1914.

Behind Gavrilo Princip and his companions were elements of Serbian military intelligence, only imperfectly controlled by the civilian authorities in Belgrade and locked into a vicious power struggle with them. Political violence and aggressive irredentism were in the political DNA of the Karadjordjević state. Perhaps no-one embodied this bloody combination more than the man who had commissioned the murder of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Col. Dragutin Dimitrijević ('Apis'). Apis had convinced himself that the Archduke was the head of the anti-Serb war party in Vienna. He was quite wrong. Franz Ferdinand had had a restraining influence on the hotheads in the Habsburg leadership during the recent Balkan wars. Removing him took the brakes off the war party and, of all the Powers, Austria-Hungary was the only one intent on war in 1914 although her role has often been ignored; and, indeed, part of the subtext of Austrian historiography since the war has been to blame its German ally.

For many senior Habsburg officials, convinced of the need to eliminate the perceived Serb threat to the Habsburg dominions, the assassination was a pretext for an aggressive solution. The fear that the growth of Serbian nationalism would accelerate the threat to the multi-ethnic empire was real enough, but there had been a certain blasé and unrealistic belligerence about decision-making at Vienna. Habsburg diplomacy suffered from 'tunnel vision'. 'Settling with Serbia' trumped all other considerations. In the spring of 1914, Austro-Hungarian officials had prepared a diplomatic offensive to contain Serbia by closer ties with Bulgaria and Romania. Now, after Sarajevo, that same plan was recycled to prepare for war even though the financial costs were prohibitive; Vienna's mobilisation during the Austro-Serb crisis in 1912 had swallowed three-quarters of the entire Austro-Hungarian defence budget.

Vienna's plans were shaped by diplomatic, strategic and domestic considerations. The assumption, based on recent experience, that a third Austro-Serb crisis would cause Belgrade to yield to a determined Austria-



Hungary was reinforced by perceptions of Serbia's ally, Russia. Reports from the St. Petersburg embassy suggested Russia was financially and politically weak and that the Russian government would concentrate on domestic and economic consolidation. Moreover, a more assertive Austrian policy in the Balkans would counteract Russian policy in the region, would help to galvanize Germany and bolster the Triple Alliance including Italy.

Nothing could be done, however, without German support. Because of the dualist constitutional compromise of 1867, the consent of the Hungarian government was required before action could be taken against Serbia. The Hungarian prime minister, Count István Tisza, although a staunch supporter of the German alliance, opposed war in case the result was that more obstreperous Slav minorities entered the empire. Obtaining German support for action against Belgrade, then, was vital to creating the necessary internal consensus in favour of war.

Berlin, however, gave conflicting signals to Austro-Hungarian suggestions of an assault on Serbia. The initial response by German diplomats was one of great caution. Hasty action had to be avoided and Vienna was not to make 'humiliating demands on Serbia.' On the other hand, Kaiser Wilhelm II thought that 'The Serbs need to be sorted out, and soon.' But, as so often, he too was by no means consistent and when faced with the prospect of a continental conflict at the end of July, he was ready to row back.

Wilhelm's position was important because of the so-called 'blank cheque' he gave at a lunch for the Habsburg ambassador, Count Laszlo Szögyény on 5 July 2014. Before lunch, Wilhelm had been all statesmanlike responsibility; after lunch, he yielded to the ambassador's appeal to monarchical solidarity. Vienna could feel assured of Germany's loyal support. Indeed, Wilhelm would regret it if Vienna did not exploit the current, favourable, situation. This 'blank cheque' was re-affirmed on the following day by the German chancellor.

German motives have been discussed extensively but the established consensus is now that Berlin took a 'calculated risk' of being dragged into a continental war; and that the German objective was either a diplomatic success or a limited continental war. There is much debate too about the personality of Bethmann Hollweg, the German Chancellor. But the real problem was that there was no policy coordination at Berlin. Wilhelm had had no briefing, nor did he find out beforehand whether the army was ready for a conflict. There was no proper strategic planning in Berlin and few institutional checks on the Kaiser's powers. Certainly, the chancellor would not stand up to him. Bethmann Hollweg was a bureaucrat, not a political leader. He was frightened of the further escalation of the Balkan crisis and about Russian intentions; perhaps this is why he listened to arguments for preventive war. Misleading intelligence about a possible Anglo-Russian naval convention reinforced his fears. However, his role during the July crisis was not central because he was away for much of the month. In any case, German decision-making was so compartmentalized that, although Bethmann was also the political head of the Foreign Ministry, his state secretary, Gottlieb von Jagow pursued his own diplomatic strategy during the crisis, and even sabotaged the Chancellor's attempt to avert war at the end of July.

So if there was a 'calculated risk' taken at Berlin, it was based on individual calculations, not on collective deliberations and decisions. A German policy of bluff, threatening a continental war in order to secure a diplomatic success, would have required close diplomatic coordination with Vienna. There wasn't any. Decision-making in the two capitals remained separate. With the 'blank cheque' Germany surrendered her ability to restrain Vienna. Ambassadors had considerable latitude and were sometimes out of the control of their ministers. The German ambassador at Vienna, Baron von Tschirschky, secretly encouraged the Habsburg leadership to go to war, advised on how to deal with Berlin and torpedoed his own government's last-minute attempts to rein in their Austro-Hungarian ally. The reverse of Tschirschky was his colleague in London, Prince Lichnowsky. An Anglophile, he had successfully worked for a détente with Britain and had warned against becoming dependent on Austria-Hungary. But his warnings were ignored, just as he himself was kept in the dark about German policy and was finally seen as discredited in London.

What was Russia's position? St. Petersburg had no knowledge of, or involvement in, the plot against



the Archduke. Regicide was not popular with the Tsar or his advisers. They feared the possible effect of foreign complications on Russian domestic politics. But, equally, domestic developments complicated foreign policy-making. In February 1914, Tsar Nicholas II removed Prime Minister Kokovstov and the remains of recent constitutional reforms in order to strengthen his own position as monarch, but the new government was riven with infighting between doves and hawks. Moreover, Russian policy-making was highly inefficient. The Foreign Minister, Sazonov, the 'holy fool', was intelligent but incompetent and his vacillations during the crisis contributed to its escalation. His preoccupations were the cooling of relations with Britain, and the anticipated final collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Russia did not want to dominate the Balkans or destroy Austro-Hungary. She needed peace to develop her internal resources. Sazonov therefore advised Belgrade to 'exercise extreme caution' in relations with its Habsburg neighbour. Vienna in any case denied rumours reaching St Petersburg that it was planning a *démarche* in Belgrade in reaction to the assassination: another reason for the vehemence of the Russian reaction when the crisis broke on 24 July.

Nor was Sazonov prepared to yield to Austrian pressure. Russia's economy could again support the country's status as a Great Power, as was powerfully underlined by the 'Great Programme', a four-year rearmament programme commencing in 1914. This did not imply aggressive designs on Russia's part, but meant St. Petersburg could back up its diplomatic moves by armed force.

The current administration in Russia's ally, France, under René Viviani was weak. The Prime Minister was in an uneasy partnership with the right-wing President Raymond Poincaré who mistrusted Viviani and regarded him as unsound on foreign policy. For Poincaré, the alliance with Russia was the cornerstone of French policy. Indeed, he had in 1912 gone far towards unilaterally tightening the terms of the pact with Russia. If Russia decided to go war against the two Germanic Powers, France would support her. This was not a 'blank cheque' *avant la lettre*, but it meant that France was far less likely now to restrain Russia. Viviani was profoundly ignorant of foreign affairs. He was reluctant to encourage Russia to interfere in any Austro-Serbian dispute, but also to do anything that would strain French–Russian relations. An additional complication was the extent to which France's ambassador at St. Petersburg, Maurice Paléologue, pursued his own private diplomacy.

Much of the political energy of the minority Liberal government in Britain under Prime Minister Asquith was consumed by the situation in Ireland. The cabinet itself did not concern itself with the Balkan crisis until the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia on 24 July. This was not surprising nor an indication of general British apathy. Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, retained complete control over foreign policy until Cabinet approval for possible intervention in the situation was required.

Grey has been criticized for not reacting swiftly enough to the crisis and for failing to issue a clear warning to Berlin. However, the evidence and the context of events suggest a different interpretation. On 6 July, Grey had hinted to the German and Russian ambassadors that Britain could not be ignored if the dispute escalated and that Berlin and St. Petersburg had to reassure each other of their peaceful intentions. An explicit warning was neither necessary nor desirable at that stage. Grey wished to continue the recent, successful, cooperation with Germany in Balkan affairs. He realized that the military balance in Europe had shifted to Germany's disadvantage which gave Austria all the more leverage over Germany. Grey had clearly signalled to Berlin and St. Petersburg the potential risks of the situation in the Balkans.

Habsburg policy moved at the pace of an arthritic snail and although Vienna and Budapest agreed on war on 14 July, still Austria-Hungary did not strike. After the cumbersome internal consensus-building, the empire's pre-industrial economy prevented a swift military move. Half the army had been sent on harvest leave. Recalling the troops would delay the harvest, be financially costly and cause supply bottlenecks in a military campaign. Above all, it would alert the Powers to Vienna's plans to resort to force. Yet another problem arose. Because of the harvest, the planned ultimatum to Belgrade could not be delivered any earlier than 22 July, shortly before the long-planned state visit by Poincaré and Viviani to St. Petersburg on 20–23 July. Vienna wanted to act swiftly but did not want the French to coordinate plans



with the Russians which meant a further delay until 24 July when Poincaré and Viviani were on their ship returning from Russia and out of direct contact with what was going on.

The Austrian foreign minister, Berchtold, no longer consulted nor shared information with Berlin because of his fear of leaks, but the Austrians knew that Berlin had informed its ambassador in Rome of Habsburg plans for some move against Serbia. They could have aborted the move. On 21 July, at a reception in St. Petersburg, the French president pointedly told the Austro-Hungarian ambassador there that Serbia had friends – an assurance to Russia of France's loyalty to the Franco-Russian alliance. The warning went unheeded in Vienna.

Vienna intended that the ultimatum to Serbia of 24 July should be rejected – the instructions to the Austro-Hungarian minister at Belgrade were clear. And, contrary to popular mythology, Belgrade's response was not an acceptance of any of the substantive points of the ultimatum while any apparent acceptance was hedged in by reservations that amounted to a rejection. Probably the Serbian government always intended to resist, but softened their response out of concern for the reaction of the other Powers. Austria-Hungary wanted war, and the Serbian note was sufficient pretext for breaking off relations.

The escalation of the crisis affected the other Powers in different ways. Grey's response to the ultimatum was, in the event of Russian interference, to propose mediation by the four Powers not directly interested in the conflict, while Austria-Hungary and Russia halted their advance. But the plan could only work if Germany joined the mediation effort; nor was Grey aware at that time that it was no longer possible to enlist French support to hold back Russia. So the danger was that the two alliances would be activated.

The Russian Council of Ministers on 24 July decided on a firm line and a twin track approach. Vienna was asked to extend the ultimatum and Belgrade asked to give a conciliatory reply to the demands in it. At the same time, thirteen army corps were to be prepared for mobilization against Austria-Hungary.

As for France, while Poincaré and Viviani were at sea, Paléologue's role was crucial. He withheld crucial information from his superior at Paris, most significantly the fact that partial mobilization was to commence, and that he himself had given strong assurances of France's unconditional support – something he had not been authorized to do.

All the while Austro-Hungarian policy continued to plod along. Partial mobilization was ordered for 28 July, but not along the Galician frontier with Russia to deny her a pretext for intervention. The chief of staff, Baron Conrad, wished to complete mobilization before war was declared, but the diplomats feared that this would expose Austria-Hungary to intense international pressure to accept mediation. Conrad eventually agreed to the declaration of war to be issued on 28 July.

But war was by no means inevitable even now. Historians have been tempted to argue that the various attempts at a diplomatic solution at the end of July were doomed to fail. But this was not necessarily so. The Powers had diverging interests which helps to explain why July 1914 was different from earlier crises. Professor Otte did not have time to examine the details of the last stages of the crisis but made seven further points:

(1) Policy resorted to military measures to increase leverage. Military factors, not policy, shaped general assumptions about war. Grey and Bethmann Hollweg, Sazonov and Jagow thought, wrongly, that the prospect of war was sufficiently awful to deter the other Powers. Russia was a special case, with a total disjuncture between ministers and the general staff. For Sazonov, partial mobilization was a tool to increase pressure on Austria. But the chief of staff, Yanushkevich, did not understand (and thus could not explain to ministers) that partial mobilization would make full-scale general mobilization at a later point impossible. What's more, Sazonov believed that mobilization could be kept secret although once the mobilization order had been issued, notices would be posted in all public places of the Russian empire.

(2) There were different understandings of deterrence by the key actors. Poincaré and Sazonov insisted that 'clarity of intent' would contain German and Habsburg aggression. But for France, deterrence (meaning military movements) translated into a rigidity that made a diplomatic solution more difficult.

The balance between Sazonov's offers of mediation and military preparations were ill judged. He kept





dithering between direct talks with Vienna, or mediation by an international quartet as suggested by the British. His violent language to the German ambassador, followed by an amiable chat with the Habsburg representative was confusing, especially since both diplomats compared notes and remained convinced until the very end that Russia would not intervene.

(3) Mediation based on a localization of a Balkan war remained an option until 1 August. Grey's initiative of 26 July for a four-power conference to mediate between Vienna and Belgrade suited the German Chancellor. However, Britain could not restrain France and Russia so a conference would only work if all sides stopped all military activities. For the proposal to have worked before Austria invaded Serbia, it would have required German pressure to force Vienna to accept mediation. But this the Chancellor refused to apply, unless the Russians were persuaded not to intervene militarily in the Austro-Serb dispute. The insistence on strict localisation further narrowed the room for diplomatic manoeuvre. For the moment, Bethmann and Jagow remained wedded to the idea of giving Austria-Hungary every opportunity to reassert her influence in the Balkans.

In any case, Jagow, acting alone, effectively sabotaged the Chancellor's attempts to regain leverage over Vienna by issuing a second 'blank cheque'. Vienna, he let it be known there, should only accept the proposal if encouraged to do so by the German ambassador, the pro-war Tschirschky. In issuing it, Jagow not only torpedoed Bethmann Hollweg's proposals, he also torpedoed his own. On 29 July, in panic, the Chancellor and Jagow sought to revoke the second 'blank cheque' by instructing Tschirschky to tell Vienna that Germany refused to be dragged by Vienna, recklessly and without consideration of advice, into a world war. Tschirschky ignored his instructions.

(4) The incoherence in Germany got worse. The Kaiser now decided that the Serbs had given in to Austrian pressure and thus had removed every reason for war. He suggested that, while Vienna could not stop mobilization, to retain leverage over Serbia, she should occupy Belgrade temporarily as a 'forfeit' during negotiations. Grey was prepared to proceed on the basis of 'Halt in Belgrade'. The Kaiser's and Bethman's willingness to press for 'Halt in Belgrade' and the Kaiser's willingness to accept what he mistook to be a British government (but in fact cooked up by Lichnovsky and Grey's private secretary) offer of neutrality on 1 August, provided any European conflict remained confined to the East, reinforces the argument that the German leaders were not pursuing the option of a preventive war. But Germany no longer had any influence on Austria and 'Halt in Belgrade' was never a practicable solution because Austria intended to invade Serbia from the west rather than across the Danube to attack Belgrade.

(5) The alacrity with which Grey supported Bethmann's proposal underlines the pacific nature of British diplomacy. The deep division between Britain's ministers on this issue, which meant the possible collapse of the Asquith government, made a peaceful solution all the more pressing. This also explains Grey's reluctance to give assurances of more than diplomatic support to France; but as France would not restrain Russia, and as Britain had no influence over St. Petersburg, Grey had no other choice but to accept a solution on German terms.

(6) It was only at this late point that German decision-making was shaped by military considerations. Throughout the crisis the diplomats in the Wilhelmstrasse retained control over decision-making. Indeed, when, on 30 July, Moltke pushed for a military response to news of Russia's mobilization, he was rebuffed by the Chancellor. To the end, at the core of German policy was an assumption that Russia could be deterred from interfering.

The events of 28–29 July had dispelled any hopes in St. Petersburg of a peaceful outcome. The Austrian bombardment of Belgrade on 28 July and the warning by the German ambassador on 29 July that, unless Russia stopped her military preparations, Germany would commence mobilization, confirmed Sazonov's suspicions that Vienna had wanted war from the start. He was not prepared to yield to German pressure and on 30 July persuaded the Tsar to authorize general mobilization. It is difficult to refute the argument that Russia's decision to mobilize made war inevitable. The Russian military leadership lacked professional competence and the confusion at St. Petersburg about the practical implications of partial mobilization made



matters worse. On the other hand, it was the only way Russia could have deterred Austria-Hungary and even then it failed to do so.

Germany's war plans assumed that speedy mobilization was of imperative importance. Although Berlin realized that Russia's mobilization did not necessarily mean opening hostilities, the German 'Schlieffen Plan' did not distinguish between deployment and the commencement of operations. Mobilization meant war. With this in mind, the German leadership decided to declare *Kriegsgefahrzustand* – state of immediate danger of war – a preparatory step to general mobilization, effectively placing Germany under martial law.

(7) Even now, there was still a small chance of avoiding all-out war. Grey held out the prospect of British neutrality, provided Berlin and Vienna 'could get any reasonable proposal put forward.' If this were rejected by France and Russia, Britain would remain aloof. At the same time, a German attack on France, would draw Britain into the conflict. There was still time to explore this latest initiative. That neither Berlin, nor for that matter St. Petersburg, was ready to draw back from the brink at this point rested on a simple calculation. Yielding now meant accepting a diplomatic defeat with adverse domestic consequences. Certainty on that score trumped concerns about the uncertainty of the more distant outcome of a military conflict. Here, and perhaps only here, domestic calculations mattered in the whole July crisis.

The frantic activities after 1 August were meaningful only to the extent to which they helped the Powers to prepare their countries for a continental war, and to make their moral case to their domestic and international audiences.

What, then, have we drawn from the deep well of 1914? Above all, there was a failure of statecraft. None of the decision-makers of 1914 desired a continental war. But individually – with the exception of Grey – after a long period of peace, they had lost 'the sense of the tragic', as Henry Kissinger once observed: the sense of the fragility of all human achievement, and of peace and order, in particular. Their actions were shaped by their recent experiences in international politics. Impelled by a conviction of the rightness of their chosen course and impervious to the inherent risks of their actions, they found themselves impaled on their own faulty calculations. In that sense, theirs was a tragedy because they had lost the sense of the tragic.

The July crisis does not offer neat 'lessons of history'. And yet the concerns and events of that and earlier years are more immediate to us today than the events of the 1970s or 1980s. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, as multiple power centres compete for economic, military and political influence and when suicide bombers have re-emerged, the contours of the international landscape of 1914 no longer look alien. And as the leading international players today are entangled in global financial and regional political crises, each with its own complex internal logic and each beset with enormous risks, yet suggestive of strategic opportunities, the attempts of the decision-makers of 1914 to avert war but to extract advantages for themselves no longer look so different from the challenges of today.

Professor Otte concluded by saying that if re-examining 1914 has anything to teach, it lies in heightening sensibility of the broader sweep of history. If it helps to sharpen our understanding of the importance of strategic thinking and to increase awareness of the frailties of human judgment in politics, then it will have achieved something. To appreciate this is, perhaps, the only pertinent lesson to be learnt from history.

Hugh Arbuthnott





# THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE NORMAN CONQUEST FROM THE *CARMEN DE TRIUMPHO NORMANNICO*

Commemoration Lecture

Ms Kathleen Tyson

16th October 2014

**K**athleen Tyson began by describing how she had enlisted the assistance of the Royal Library of Belgium in digitally photographing the only surviving early medieval text of the *Carmen* by Bishop Guy d'Amiens, who had written the poem in 1067 to celebrate the Norman invasion and victory.

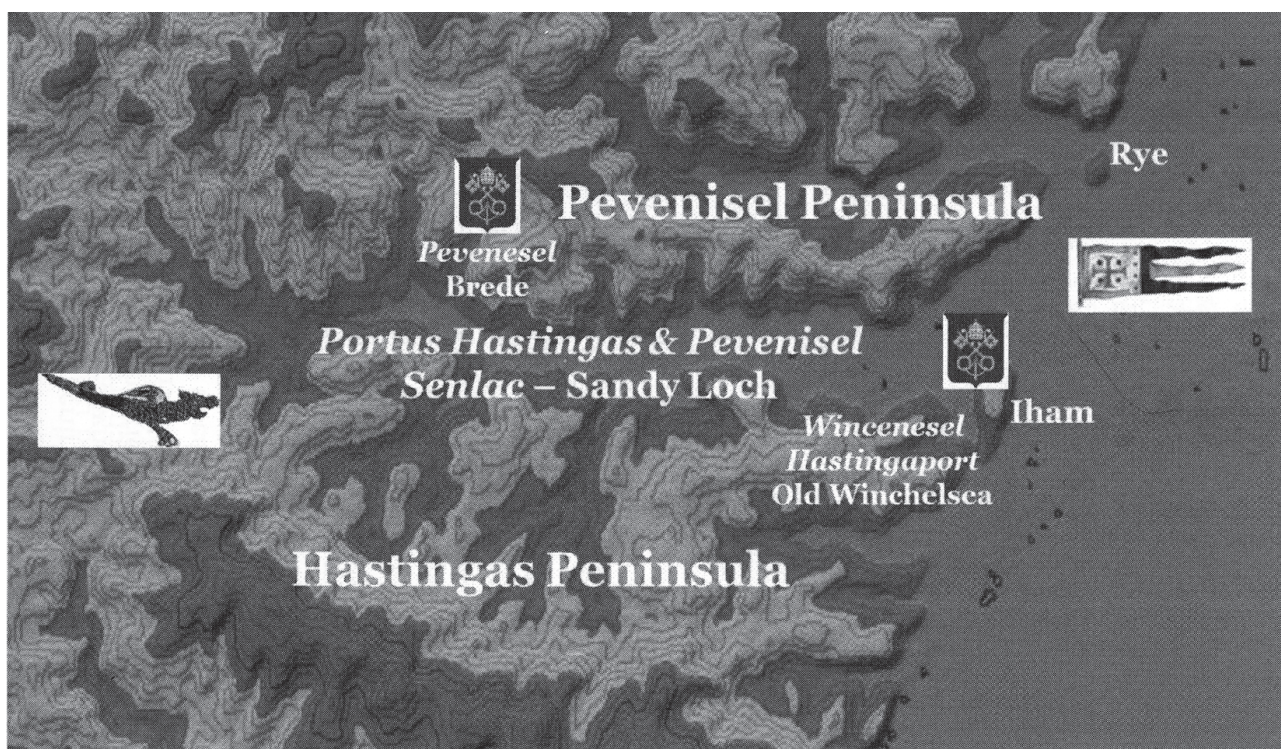
The lecturer had reinterpreted some passages of the text; corrected some eighteenth/nineteenth century mistranslation; and made further associated enquiries. This process had led her to two conclusions:

1. The Norman fleet landed at an estuary – well known to them at the time – in the area of Brede and not, as traditionally identified, in what is nowadays described as Pevensey. They camped west of Old Winchelsea on the shore of a great sheltered harbour.

2. The topographical descriptions in the *Carmen* suggest that Harold used the ridgeways of Icklesham and Sedlescombe to intercept William, and the battle was as likely to have been a little west of Brede as it was to have been on the traditional site.

In support of her conclusions, Kathleen Tyson set out the following arguments:

1. The two peninsulas either side of, and forming, the Brede estuary were known to the Normans as 'Hastingas et Pevensel'. They were different from the places called Hastings and Pevensey today. In the eleventh century the Brede estuary contained a large port called 'Portus Hastingas et Pevensel'. Medieval sources suggest that Hastings and Pevensey did not have ports, so landing a fleet there could not have happened. Pevensey was in any event bounded by salt flats and woods which would have made it hard to establish a base after disembarking.

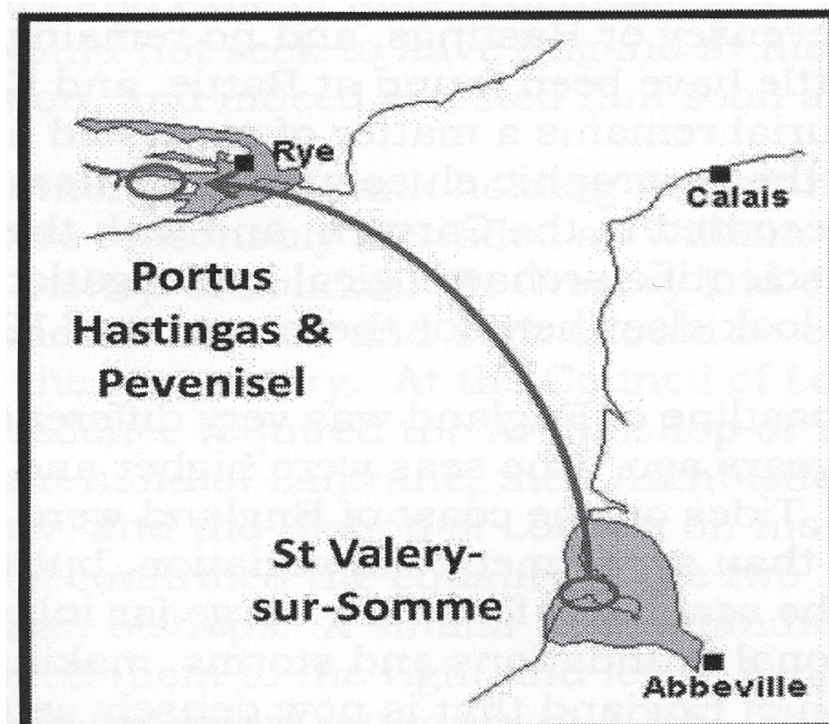






*Scene 39 from the Bayeux tapestry shows an estuarine landing onto a firm sandy strand.*

2. Further research had suggested that the account of Julius Caesar's landing might have been referring to the Brede estuary; if so, William might have borne that approach in mind tactically and copied it. In any event, Hastings et Pevenisel was in the large area of the Ramaslege (encompassing Bulverhythe and Rye as well as Brede and Old Winchelsea), a possession of Fécamp Abbey by gift of Aethelred in 1015, so William would have been familiar with it. The Fécamp monks had established buildings for the collection of port and market tolls, and for taxation. William might have favoured this area as a landing place as it would have been well known to Norman navigators.







3. Use of geomorphological methods to reconstruct the topography of Brede in the eleventh century indicated that the Brede estuary would then have been plenty big enough for upwards of 600 ships to disembark. The *Carmen* can be interpreted as describing a passage up and disembarkation in an estuary and one of the frames in the Bayeux Tapestry can be interpreted to confirm that. The Old Winchelsea/Iham Hill area would have conformed to the topography implied in the poem of a harbour guarded by cliffs and two castles, which might have been the monastic buildings. Today at Iham Hill there was a mound and some rubble which might have been Frankish buildings useful to the Norman invaders; if so they would have looked similar to some buildings at the invasion site portrayed by the Bayeux Tapestry.

4. The poem describes Harold using wooden bridges and planks to ford rivers on his way to meet William. He would have been much more likely to have needed them if he was heading for Brede than he would if going to the traditional battle site.

5. Some etymological clues were supportive, for example 'Senlac' could be translated as the Anglo-Saxon for 'sandy loch' which could be an apt description for the Brede estuary.

6. If the tradition that Harold was buried facing 'sea and strand', were true, the ridgeway at Icklesham would satisfy the description.

7. The distance of Battle Abbey from the Brede estuary is explained by the fact that the new commemorative abbey could not have been built in the area belonging to Fécamp; the new king would have to have built it at the nearest point to the battle site that was within his own lands.

8. The *malfosse* incident could easily have occurred at a disused ironworks, common in the Brede area.

Adrian Hall

Illustrations taken from Kathleen Tyson's book, *Carmen de Triumpho Normannico: The Song of the Norman Conquest*, 2014.



## THE LINES OF TORRES VEDRAS AND THE 1810 CAMPAIGN IN PORTUGAL

Lt. Col. (ret'd) Roderic MacArthur

20th November 2014

By 1807, France had taken over much of Europe and made alliances with several other countries. The exceptions were Britain and Portugal. While not at war with France, Portugal, an old ally of Britain, had roused Napoleon's wrath by trading with Britain.

In 1807, Napoleon invaded Portugal and took Lisbon; the Royal Navy evacuated the Royal Family who went into exile in Brazil. Napoleon then made a mistake in deposing the Spanish Royal family and replacing them with his brother, Joseph. In 1808, the Spanish revolted and a month later the Portuguese followed suit, led by the Bishop of Porto.

The British landed at Figueira da Foz in August 1808. The army, led by Wellesley, was largely made up of British forces but had a not insignificant proportion of Portuguese soldiers, a proportion that was to steadily increase over the months ahead. They engaged and defeated the French just north of Torres Vedras at Vimeiro; on that same day, Wellesley was superseded by two senior officers who opened negotiations with the French. The talks resulted in the Convention of Cintra in August 1808, allowing the French to withdraw back to France with their equipment and loot, transported by the Royal Navy! A Board of Enquiry was set up to investigate these events which were seen as a disgrace back home. Needless to say, the Portuguese were far from happy.

Sir John Moore took over control of the British forces; the French were still at the foot of the Pyrenees. Led by Napoleon, the French broke out and went straight to Madrid. Moore could not get to Portugal so went northwards to Corunna and Vigo, which the French eventually took. They went on to re-occupy



*The tomb of Sir John Moore in Corunna. Photograph courtesy of Gladys Fawthrop.*



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northern Portugal. The British sent a task force to Lisbon, led by Wellesley who had been exonerated by the Board of Enquiry. He marched quickly to northern Portugal, outflanked the surprised French, and drove them out. Wellesley then went on to Spain, joined with the Spanish army, and defeated the French at Talavera in July 1809, leading to his becoming Viscount Wellington. The Spanish, however, were unable to maintain their support, so Wellington withdrew to Portugal.

By 1810, the Anglo-Portuguese army were the only troops available, so Wellington determined on a scorched-earth policy if the French were to invade. In the greatest secrecy, he ordered the construction of the lines of Torres Vedras. At the same time, he ensured the reform of the Portuguese army under Beresford, who became Marshal of the Portuguese army. British officers were appointed to the Portuguese army to help bolster it, among their number being Captain William Warre, who volunteered and was appointed as a Major; born in Portugal, he translated Army manuals into Portuguese and was an expert tactician. Great effort was made to integrate the two armies.



*The Lines at Sao Vicente in 1810 and today*







In August 1810, the Anglo-Portuguese army amounted to 56,000, made up of 32,800 British (including the King's German Legion) and 23,200 Portuguese. The French had 320,000 troops in Spain but most of those were tied down to prevent the Spanish revolting. The only army the French had available was led by Massena, a renowned looter and womaniser, who was accompanied by his 18-year-old mistress, Henriette Leberton, dressed in a Hussar's uniform (this caused great offence to his fellow officers, notably Marshal Ney).

A most able General, Massena led a force of some 65,000 men, mostly French but including an Irish legion. The French advanced through northern Portugal, pausing at Viseu (the rumour was that Massena's mistress needed a rest!) and met the British at the Battle of Bussaco on 27 September 1810.

Wellington drew up his troops on a high ridge, with cavalry on the flanks. The French had no idea that Wellington's line was so long and aimed their first attack at what they thought was the end of the line but was in fact the centre; the next attempt was at an even stronger part of the line. Both attempts failed. Several attacks were defeated by the Portuguese contingent in the army and it is thought that Wellington deployed the Portuguese to persuade them that they could defeat the French. The engagement certainly gave them confidence.

Wellington realised that the French had more troops on the way so strategically withdrew to the Lines of Torres Vedras, a line of defences protecting Lisbon. During the retreat, he implemented a scorched-earth policy as planned: 300,000 civilians were displaced, with an estimated 40,000 dying of starvation and disease during the subsequent winter. In October 1810, Wellington entered Torres Vedras. The army had had no idea that these defences had been constructed: there were 2 lines, going out to the coast from Alhandra. While the original concept was devised by a Portuguese officer a few years previously, credit for these defences must go to Lt. Col. Richard Fletcher of the Royal Engineers: they took 11 months to construct, engaging 7,185 personnel, at a cost of £100k. They comprised:

- Forts complex with interlocking fire, the two main fortifications being Forte Sao Vicente and Forte de Alqueidao
- Escarpment of hills to make scaling them very difficult
- 50,000 trees felled to create abattis
- Bridges demolished to impede the French advance
- Roads built behind the lines to facilitate the movement of the Anglo-Portuguese forces
- Royal Navy patrolling the Tagus near Alhandra, including a fleet of 14 gunboats
- Telegraph posts set up which allowed messages to be sent 29 miles along the first line of defence in 7 minutes (there was a backup system of semaphore to cope in bad weather), organised by Royal Navy specialists

In total, there were 56 miles of lines, with 152 forts and 618 guns, manned by 18,100 troops. The militia were responsible for manning of fortresses; Wellington headed up the mobile force. When Massena saw the defences, he was amazed. When he asked his staff why they had not known about the lines, someone replied, 'Wellington has made them'. Massena shouted, 'To the Devil with you! Did Wellington make the mountains?' A French attack on Sobral failed and they pulled back to winter at Santarem. The French were used to living off the land, so the scorched-earth policy of Wellington led to severe deprivation in the French army. Many died of starvation and disease. The Portuguese Ordenanza attacked supply trains trying to reach Massena's forces and the 8,000 reinforcements who arrived from France only added to his problems by further draining his limited resources. In March 1811 the French retreated to the Spanish border. There was a skirmish at Pombal and then the French withdrew to Spain in April 1811. The same month, Wellington surrounded the French in Almeida and tried to starve them out. The French lost the Battle of Fuentes de Onoro in May 1811, and Massena was sacked; at the same time the French escaped Almeida.





The French, having lost probably around 30,000 troops, never returned to Portugal. The lines of Torres Vedras still remain: Sobral and Torres Vedras are particularly well-preserved and 3 or 4 smaller fortifications around Alhandra, while others are being renovated. Little has changed in the area in the intervening 200 years.

Sarah Hall



## A CENTURY OF ANGLO-GERMAN RELATIONS IN ONE FAMILY

Sir Brian Crowe KCMG

15th January 2015

Sir Brian Crowe spoke to the Society on the subject of his Anglo-German ancestry, with particular reference to the family's involvement with European politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sir Brian had himself enjoyed a diplomatic career, latterly as HM Ambassador in Vienna, so well understood the machinations of government.

The original ancestral home at Gamburg an der Tauber remains within the German branch of the family, although money is lacking to maintain this baroque house in its former high standard. The two sides of the family still meet up every five years – presumably not all 300 at the same time!

The first ancestor described was Joseph Crowe, born in 1814. He studied art in Paris and became an art historian for the *Illustrated London News* in the Crimea; he later reported for *The Times*. Prime Minister Lord John Russell sent him to Germany at the time when Germany was still a collection of small independent states. He was asked to report on who would become the predominant power in Germany: Austria or Prussia?

Prince Albert, in particular, valued his opinions and Crowe became a confidant and close friend of the Prussian Crown Prince Frederick (Fritz) and the Crown Princess Victoria (Vicki), the eldest child of Queen Victoria and Albert's favourite. Their intimacy was such that Vicki painted Crowe's portrait in black sepia, a picture that still hangs in Sir Brian's house.

Crowe was later appointed Consul-General in Leipzig having successfully sat the new Civil Service examination. He moved on to Düsseldorf and, finally, in 1880 to Berlin. From 1882 he was the commercial attaché in Paris, acting for the whole of Europe. His opinions were much valued by Fritz who asked him what he should do about Bismarck. Crowe's advice was that he should 'keep him at first' – good advice that Fritz kept in his sadly short reign of one hundred days, but which his successor Wilhelm foolishly failed to follow.

Fritz and Vicki were liberal and democratic and Fritz's early death is one of history's 'what ifs'. Had he lived, would Germany have taken the same militaristic and expansionist path that led to 1914? It is certainly the fact that in 1890 Britain had been supportive of Germany, only reacting to German realignments by signing the Entente Cordiale with France in 1904 and by joining the Franco-Russian alliance in 1907.

Whilst in Germany Joseph had met the aristocratic Asti von Barby whom he married after a whirlwind romance, thus uniting the Crowe family with that of Gerhardt. Asti's sister had married Karl Gerhardt, a doctor. He was professor of medicine in Würzburg in 1870 and, like Crowe, was an acquaintance of the then Crown Prince whom he was treating for cancer of the throat. He examined Fritz in 1887, removing polyps from the vocal chord, but unfortunately unable to remove the cancer. A further operation was suggested but neither Fritz nor Vicki favoured this. Wilhelm, however, supported the idea and it went ahead. The English surgeon Sir Morrell Mackenzie was brought over to operate, but it did not save Fritz or Morrell's reputation.

Joseph's son Eyre (and Sir Brian's grandfather) was born in 1864 and knighted in 1917. He, too, had a distinguished diplomatic career being successively a clerk in the Foreign Office 1885, Senior Clerk 1907; Counsellor of Embassy 1907; Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1920; and, in passing, married his cousin Clema, the daughter of Professor Gerhardt.

Eyre Crowe seemed to be one of those people whose influence far exceeded his nominal position.



*Sir Eyre Crowe*

He was a firm believer in British supremacy over German dominance. In 1907 he published a fifty-page document, the Eyre Memorandum, which discussed German attitudes towards England. England by then was wary of, but not ill-disposed towards, Germany. Joseph Chamberlain, for instance, wanted better relations with the Kaiser. Sir Edward Grey agreed with Crowe's views but other appeasers felt that his opinion of the Kaiser as abrasive and provocative was ill-advised. Crowe was *not* anti-German and believed in 1914 that England would renege on the Triple Alliance. Clearly his Anglo-German inheritance – and German wife – was a difficulty. Nevertheless, he was in charge at official level of the Economic Blockade of Germany and after the war led the British delegation at the Paris Peace Conference and crossed swords many times with Lloyd George because of the latter's hard line on peace terms. He later became Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.

In 1925 Crowe arranged for the publication of the Zinovieff letter which seriously embarrassed the Labour Party Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald. The letter was widely – and correctly – believed to be a forgery by the White Russians. It purported to be a letter from Zinovieff, head of the Soviet Comintern, urging British Communists to incite unrest. The *Daily Mail* obtained a copy of the letter but Crowe pre-empted them. Macdonald denied authorising publication, but the damage to the Labour Party was considerable. (In 1967, when Sir Brian was in the Foreign Office, George Brown, then Foreign Secretary, initiated a search for the letter, but it could not be found.)

Sir Eyre died in 1925 of overwork and contact with the German side of the family foundered.

In 1936 Eyre's daughter visited her German relations but was uneasy with their apparent sympathies with Hitler's Germany. Contact was not maintained.

During World War II, members of the German family served both in the Waffen SS on the eastern front and in the Volksturm in the defence of Berlin. Cousin Karl, despite *not* being a Nazi, died in Berlin 'in favour of his duty to the German cause to fight to the end'. In 1945 the family home in Gamburg became a hostel for refugees and it was not until 1973 that cordial relations were resumed and visits made.



## THE BRAVE REMEMBERED: BATTLE AT WAR 1914–1919

Mr George Kiloh

19th February 2015

George Kiloh started by thanking all the families and everyone who had helped with information, in particular the Whistlers and Moores.

He continued by saying that we all know something about the war, and something about who fought. The war memorials tell us names, but that's all. Except for a very few, we don't even know where they served, let alone who they actually were: family, jobs, or where they lived. Rarely do we know exactly where they fought or how they died.

We say 'men' because women were not allowed to fight, but that does not mean women did not work extremely hard. Indeed the war could not have been won without them. Only one local woman is known to have served: Joan Ashton, later Joan Whistler. Documents suggest that she may have been attached to the Army Service Corps. She did various jobs, including driving lorryloads of shells from depots to their stores near the front. The roads were bad, the lighting poor, there was no assisted power steering and no heating in the lorries. It was very dangerous work.

This talk was not the place to discuss the contribution of women, other than to say that the war simply could not have been continued without them. Later in the war women were recruited into the services as non-combatants, playing support roles that had previously been occupied by men who were then released to take part in the actual fighting. Battle was a convenient billeting off point for soldiers going to and from Newhaven for Dieppe and Battle was full – looked after by women. Nearby Normanhurst was a major military hospital.

### The War

Some commonly held perceptions need to be tested.

The first is that which equates the First World War with the western front. Although the western front features heavily in the fortunes of many, but actually Battle men served not only there but at sea, at Gallipoli, in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, in South and East Africa, in India, Singapore and the Balkans. About a fifth of Battle deaths were unconnected with the western front. The first two Battle men to die did so at sea in the disaster of September 1914 when, within ninety minutes, three warships were sunk by a single German submarine off the Dutch coast, with considerable loss of life. One of them, Albert Beaney, a Battle postman, served and died on one of these ships, the *Hogue*.

The second, reinforced by the musical *Oh! What a Lovely War*, is that of 'lions led by donkeys'. High command made some terrible mistakes. It was over-optimistic, suffered from a lack of good intelligence or ignored it. Many members never visited the front. One general who did exclaimed, 'Good God, did we send men to fight in this?' But no one had ever fought a war like this. All the tried and tested military tactics of manoeuvre, deception, diversions, etc. failed. Air power was in its infancy. Tanks arrived late and had to be learned how to be used. The first tanks moved so fast that infantry could not keep up nor artillery support them.

The third is about conditions at the front. They weren't always awful, except during the actual battles. But they weren't good – there were cold periods, and rats, and mud. The army was ill-supplied, particularly at the beginning. Correspondence from the front attests to all of these: freezing conditions and frostbite in the 1914–15 winter, and worse. Godfrey Webster wrote about the rat hunts. One Battle soldier wrote in January 1917:





I don't know whether I shall take up mining or become a farmer's boy when I get the sack from this job, as no carter ever had more mud to go through than there is out here.

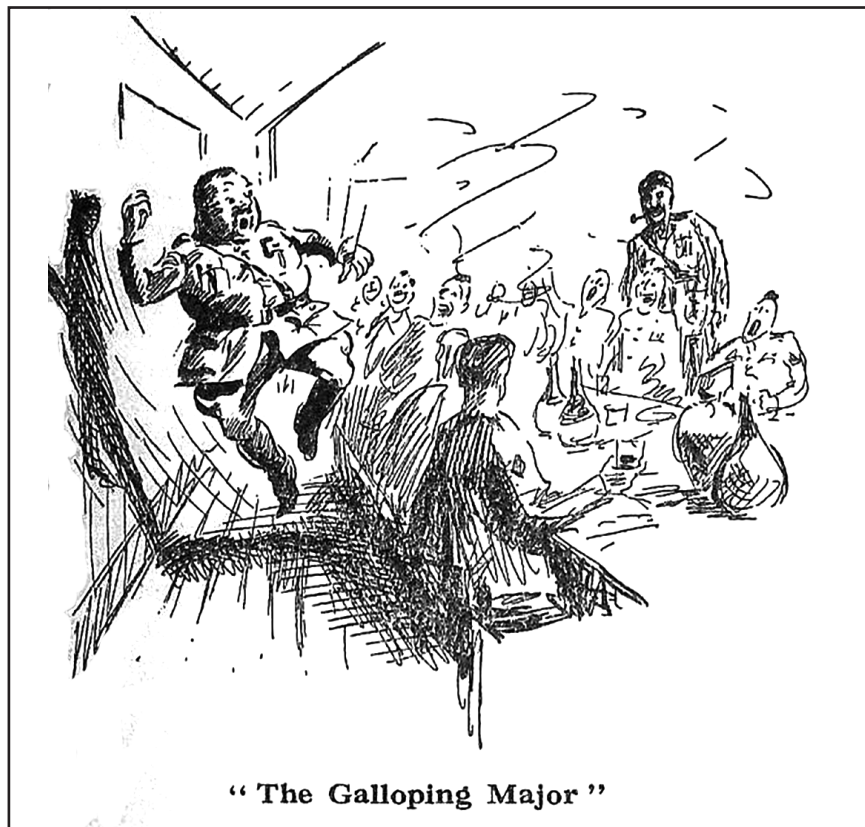
Another man wrote home in 1915:

We have been in the trenches. We are out for a few days rest now, and we are glad of it too. It is very rough out here, but we stick to it very well, you see. We have got through the first round safe and well. It is a terrible sight out here; you would never believe it. Villages and churches smashed to atoms. We have to be careful in the trenches. One shell dropped about twenty yards behind the trench, in a muddy river. We had some of the mud, but we didn't get hit. I thought it was all up. Our chaps are in very good spirits, and full of fight. I had two days and two nights without a wink of sleep. When we came out we had a six miles' march with about eighty pounds on our backs. We were absolutely done up ... I will never grumble again after this lot.

He never got the chance to grumble. This was Frederick Blackman, who did not survive the war.

But there were good medical services (we'd learnt from the disasters of the Boer war) and men were regularly taken out of line for periods of rest. And sometimes they could have a good time – particularly if they were officers. At least one Battle officer came home for a weekend's hunting.

Christmas 1917 in Italy is caught by this cartoon. The galloping major is Thomas Whately Rose, formerly a clerk to the solicitor Augustus Raper of Upper Lake. He had emigrated to Australia just before the war. The food and drink can be seen at the table and seriously understates what was made available on that occasion. Rose won the MC and the Italian Silver Medal for Valour. He returned to New South Wales after the war and died there in 1927. His obituary attributed his death to the effects of war service.



“ The Galloping Major ”



Fourth, everywhere had its share of VCs and executions. Battle had no VCs, sorry to say – and equally sorry to say that VD was by no means uncommon. There were no executions. The worst offence was six months hard labour for stealing an officer's property.

Battle had only one conscientious objector, who joined the Non-Combatant Corps.

Fifth, everyone thinks that 1916 was the worst year of the war but for Battle it wasn't. Easily the worst was 1918, from the great German advance in the spring and the massive Allied counter-attack in the last part of the year.

#### Place and Date of Death

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918*	Total
Belgium		3	1	8	1	13
France		6	24	11	31	72
Gallipoli		1				1
Near/Middle East			2	5	1	8
Africa			1			1
India			1			1
At sea	2	**3	1	1	1	8
Germany		1				1
In UK		2	1	3	1	7
Total	2	16	31	28	35	<b>112</b>

*\*including one 1919 death in the UK from wounds received in France in 1918. \*\*all three were at Gallipoli.*

Some died here in Battle or at home so it is not always possible to know where or when they were wounded. Similarly the French and Belgian figures are a bit mixed because of where they were sent to hospital. A few died in the Middle East – there was a lot of activity in Mesopotamia and Palestine. One in Tanganyika and two at sea and one when a POW in Germany: 112 altogether. The Battle war memorial has 59 names.

Fifth, one may think that all the Battle men went into the Royal Sussex Regiment. Many of them did, but many didn't. 120 of the 501 total known joined the Royal Sussex. The interesting thing here are the Empire Forces: quite a number signed up with the Canadians, but also with the Australian and New Zealanders. These were emigrants who came back to fight. The others are oddities who can't be traced; possibly because over half the WWI military records were destroyed in the Second World War bombing.

Sixth, we may think that these were all young men. They weren't. The records show quite a range (by year of birth):

Pre-1870: 9	1870–74: 25	1875–79: 61	1880–84: 78	1885–89: 101	1890–94: 116	1895–99: 101
	1900– : 7					
Unknown: 4	<b>TOTAL: 505</b>					

The oldest Battle man known to have served, Frederick Rich, was born in 1858 and was therefore 55 or 56 when he joined up. He must have passed a medical, but was later discharged as unfit and in fact died at the end of 1916. The oldest man on our memorials, Henry Congdon, was born in 1869. The youngest to serve were born in 1900. How the older ones were allowed to join we don't know: possibly they falsified their ages.

There were some men who should never have served. Three Battle men were passed fit for service and sent to their regiments, only for their officers to find them so physically or mentally useless that they were re-examined and discharged. But we do know that all classes served. Indeed, the death toll among officers was particularly high.



Here are pictures of two men. Both died near Ypres in 1917:



*Godfrey Webster*



*Trooper Frank Carter*

This is Godfrey Webster, heir to Battle Abbey and the last heir to the Webster baronetcy and prospective owner of Battle Abbey. He does look rather a chinless wonder, but he wasn't. Not only was he a captain in the Grenadier Guards when he died at the age of 20 but he was a keen ornithologist who had been elected a Fellow of the British Ornithological Union while he was at the front and who left behind two essays on birds written when he was still at Eton, the quality of which suggest an author of much greater maturity and experience, and indeed of promise. He died at 3rd Ypres, about two months after his mother's death.

At the other end of the scale, we have Trooper Frank Carter. Carter was the son of a higgler of Netherfield and in 1911 stockman on a farm. His civilian life must have been dusty or muddy, probably smelly; his family house at Netherfield probably didn't have running water. By 1917 he was married and had a son and had moved to Warfield near Bracknell. Just look at his turnout. Everything is smart, clean, perfect. He was a trooper with the Life Guards and a real credit to his regiment. He died in November 1917 at Passchendaele.

Where in Battle did these men live? The answer is everywhere. Remember that Battle was a good bit smaller in those days. There were no housing estates. The first council houses had gone up on Netherfield Hill just before the war, but the town stopped effectively at Watch Oak. Going south, there was a scattering of houses along the east side of the Hastings road; there was very little down Marley Lane. So the area was very concentrated:

Caldbec Hill: 21	High Street + yards: 69	Upper/Lower Lake: 33
Hastings Road: 53	Whatlington Road etc: 15	Marley Lane etc: 4
Netherfield: 110	Mount St: 35	St Mary's: 24
Farms etc: 58	<b>TOTAL 423</b>	

*Hastings Road includes all premises from the Powdermill junction to the Black Horse area, excluding St Mary's Terrace and Villas.  
High Street includes Watch Oak and the lower end of Netherfield Lane.*



You can see from the farms item how strongly agriculture featured in the economy of the town, along with gypsum in the Netherfield area. Nowhere in Battle or Netherfield was free from direct involvement in the war. Whole families joined up. In 1915, for example, when Charles Carter of Mount Street enlisted he told the *Hastings Express* that he had three sons and four brothers already serving. They all came back; other families were not nearly so lucky.

The exteriors of Battle buildings haven't changed much in the last century. Once you know the addresses you can imagine the stress on those who stayed. Walk along St Mary's Terrace, for example, and it is all too easy to imagine the scene as the women cleaned the front steps and windows and chatted among themselves, anxiously watching a telegraph boy approach. Was he coming to them? And if not, to whom?

### Methodology

Where is all this information to be found? Anyone looking for those who served must start with the three war memorials. They list 59 names for the dead.

The 1911 census, the local newspapers – the *Hastings Express* is absolutely invaluable – the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and other official records are principal sources, as are the records for births, marriages and deaths for the relevant periods. The internet has a number of family histories and a few have been helpful. A very few local families have given information, for which Mr Kiloh was most grateful. The incinerated official war records prove the main stumbling block.

Going through the records one finds out two main things. First, there were indeed many more people from Battle who died (let alone those who survived) than are on the memorials. But what do we mean by Battle and what kind of connection justifies placing a man on the list?

The two leading memorials were erected by the clergy. Early in 1919 a committee was set up to agree how a proper memorial might be established. A nursing home was turned down on grounds of cost. Then the Dean took matters into his own hands and erected the cross that stands outside St Mary's today at his own expense.

By June 1919 he had found 36 names for the memorial and published them in the *Hastings Express*, asking for more. He received another five. However, he failed to take notice of the *Hastings Express* of 24 May in which the Battle and Langton School published its own roll of honour. Eleven names on that list failed to make it to the final 41 on the Dean's memorial.

Looking at those 41 (or 42 in the Memorial Halls) it can be seen that the Dean limited his interest to the ecclesiastical area for which he was responsible. But his criteria are a matter of conjecture as the link to Battle for some of his inclusions was extremely tenuous: for instance, a man born in what is now Pakistan (who joined up there) had a brother who farmed down at Breadsell. Another was a Scot from Dunbar who kept a pub in Berkshire, whose widow returned to Battle after his death in 1918. Yet the Vitler and Ling brothers whose homes faced each other across Abbey Green, all four of whom died, were not remembered. The vicar of Netherfield seems to have done a much better job but used the same sort of criteria.

We are definitely not in the business of removing names from rolls of honour so we must follow the clergy's criteria to establish a full roll for ourselves.

This means that instead of 59 dead we have 112, with the addition of 389 survivors. As to the latter, we know that there must be more, and some names have been suggested; but the evidence has not been found to include them. We then have the question of what area constitutes 'Battle': the hundred of Battle which includes Whatlington? or the Battle Union for the Workhouse which is much wider? or the rural or urban council? – there are many possibilities. But when the number got to 500, this imposed a limit on the scope of this study. It would take years to research a wider area. The urban area was chosen – see above.

The second matter arising from a study of the war is why do we only commemorate those who died? It





is understandable at the time that those who came back wanted their dead comrades to be remembered. But they are all dead now. The last man from Battle to serve died in the 1980s. The point is that people had no choice as to where they were sent. There was some choice of regiment but none as to where it was sent or what conditions it met. Whether a man lived or died was very largely a matter of accident.

There were some who behaved bravely, perhaps too bravely: Captain William Curry, for example, the man from Pakistan, went out alone at night to spy out the land between his line and the German trenches and was mortally wounded. Others lived, for instance Sergeant Sydney Rose of Netherfield, who earned a Military Medal. Was Rose any less brave than Curry? Had he been killed he would have been remembered. So it is clear that after a century we should celebrate the survivors too.

### Some of the Men

What follows are brief accounts of a few of the men.

*Major Robert Raper* was a son of the solicitor Augustus Raper and lived in Powdermill Lane. He was married with three children; a fourth was born a few weeks after his death. Robert had been much involved with the territorials in Battle before the war and was anxious to get a commission with the Royal Sussex. However, they dragged their feet and he went off to join the South Staffordshires. On 1 July 1916 his regiment was some miles behind the front line when the battle of the Somme began, but that day's attempt to capture the German-held village of Fricourt failed. The South Staffs came up overnight and took the village on the next day but in moving further north Raper was killed. His family helped rebuild Fricourt after the war and there is a plaque there that commemorates him.

*Frank Hoad* achieved a posthumous distinction through a poem, 'Pillbox' by Edmund Blunden whose book, *Undertones of War*, appears to contain the only description of a man's death at the front where the real name is given. The convention followed by Siegfried Sassoon and others was to use pseudonyms. The death described was on the Somme front in September 1916.

Born at Battle in 1889, he worked on farms and in 1914 described himself as a farmer. The family moved around a good bit, and his own local memorial is at Ripe. Hoad joined up in September 1914, was promoted to corporal in December and sergeant in July 1916. The poem suggests that he was killed by a shrapnel fragment. The army record reports him as missing, presumed dead; no body was identified; but some personal belongings were recovered and sent home: some letters, a pocket case and prayer book, a pipe and a wristwatch and strap.



Then here is *RSM Charles Thomas*, a man who joined the volunteers of the Cinque Ports Battalion when he was only 14. He was an excellent shot and won the Queen's Prize at Bisley in 1911, which came with £50 (worth about £4400 of 2014 money). One of his brothers died in the war, at home and of trench foot. Charles died at Battle in 1953.

*William Blackman*, son of a coal merchant of Mount Street rose to be Regimental QMS and was clearly another crack shot and one would guess a rather tough man. Blackman served throughout the war. One of his brothers – Frederick, quoted already – was killed in the war (at Ypres in 1917) and another was an air cadet killed in an accident near Paris in the autumn of 1919, after the war had finished. William Blackman died in 1969.

Then there is the extended *Smale* family. The Smales were lucky,



unlike the Vitlers and Lings of Battle or the Carters and Hollands of Netherfield. All of them returned. They lived at 5 Abbey Green. George Radford, was lucky to survive because a shell fragment was halted by the New Testament he kept in his breast pocket. He served in France and Italy, including the ordeal of Bournon Wood in the battle of Cambrai in 1917. Charles was a chauffeur who joined the Scots Guards. He died young in 1931. Herbert was a stable groom with the vet at Old Almonry Farm, and served in the Balkans as well as on the western Front. He died in 1962. Arthur served with the Lancers in India. He died in 1968. Thomas was a Driver with the Service Corps and lived to 1964. John was with the Royal Artillery, later the Royal Engineers. He died in 1956. A. Thompson was a gardener at the Deanery but no more is known.



*Ralfe Allen Fuller Whistler* was a professional soldier like his father, whose family home was (and is) at Caldbec House. He served in a number of places and was wounded four times, the last time fatally at Oppy in France in April 1917. This picture, which is not a photograph but a painted miniature, shows a good-looking, confident young man on his passing out from Sandhurst just before the war. A man of some promise.

*George Holland* was killed along with two other Battle men on 'the day that Sussex died', in the useless assault on the Boar's Head on 30 June 1916, a diversionary tactic from the Somme. We know that he was from Netherfield but precise evidence of his birth and background have not yet been satisfactorily established. If anyone knows ...

He may just have been related to a mysterious Holland of Netherfield who served with the Royal Sussex before the war and then left for Canada. Perhaps he tried to enlist and was refused, which would be the right decision because during his ten years' service he was very frequently drunk, delinquent in his duties and regarded as mentally deficient. In India he was charged with, among other things, being improperly dressed in a native brothel (which raises the question, one must suppose, whether the army had defined proper dress for such a location!) and had tried to hang himself. He was finally transferred to the Sanitary Police, probably the least comfortable posting of all: responsibility for the provision and condition of the latrines.

### Coda

There is one man left who should be remembered, partly because he was the last to die directly as a result of the war.

This was *Monty Davison*, born at Battle and a son of a Battle doctor who practised at Langton House, from before at least 1879 to 1895. Davison was a Captain in the North Staffordshires. Late in 1917 he sat in his trench at night, awaiting the call to go over the top in the morning, and he believed that he would be killed. He wrote a poem of eight stanzas which he gave to a fellow-officer with a request that it should reach his (Davison's) father. But Davison survived and his comrade did not and so he retrieved his poem. But in March 1918, in the great German assault, he was badly wounded and captured. He was still very ill at repatriation and agreed to an operation in January 1919, but died in hospital. Here are the last two stanzas of the poem. Eppy is Epehy, where he was to receive his ultimately fatal wounds.



Street scenes in Arras – ‘Eppy’s’ coat of snow –  
A Red Cross ambulance at eventide,  
Speaking to weary wounded of the slow  
And comfortable homeward motor-ride –  
Glories of old gold on the puddled way –  
Sun flashes of a washed-out winter day.

Dear memories that live, though I must die!  
Mind paintings that are still a part of me!  
Let no one grieve – for it is willed that I  
Must pass through Life through Death to Victory.  
Grieve not – for Life had been too sweet for Grief.  
I go quite happy in this sure belief.

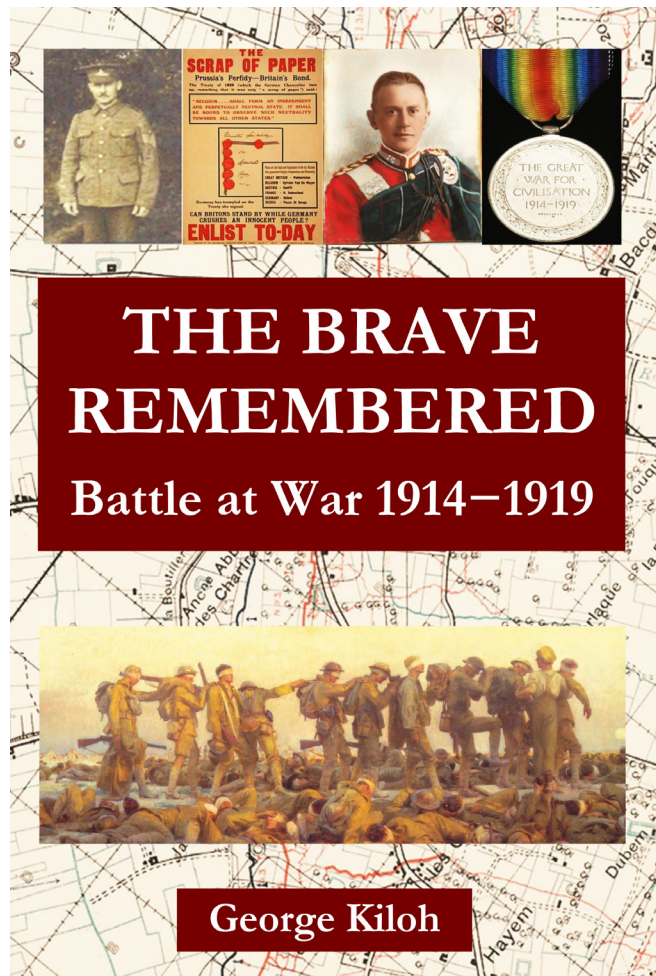
Monty Davison’s father lived in this house where we are now, and had his medical practice here. It must be certain that Monty and his three siblings were born here; we know that Monty lived the first eleven years of his life here.

His name is not on any of our memorials. But tonight, in his house, we have at last remembered him.

Amanda Helm

This talk was based on George Kiloh’s book, *The Brave Remembered: Battle at War 1914–1918*, published by the Society in June 2015.

The book contains many photographs, maps, quotations – the Edmund Blunden poem in full, for instance – as well as short biographical notes on *every* known man who served. It is an invaluable resource to anyone wanting to find out about their families as well as those who have come to visit or live in Battle and want to know more about the history of the people who lived here. The book, ISBN no 978-1-903099-01-8, can be obtained by contacting the Honorary Secretary, Neil Clephane-Cameron by phone 01424 775590/07836 522257, via email at: [neil@clephane-cameron.com](mailto:neil@clephane-cameron.com) or through the Society’s website.







## SOUTH-EAST ENGLAND – ETERNAL BATTLEFIELD

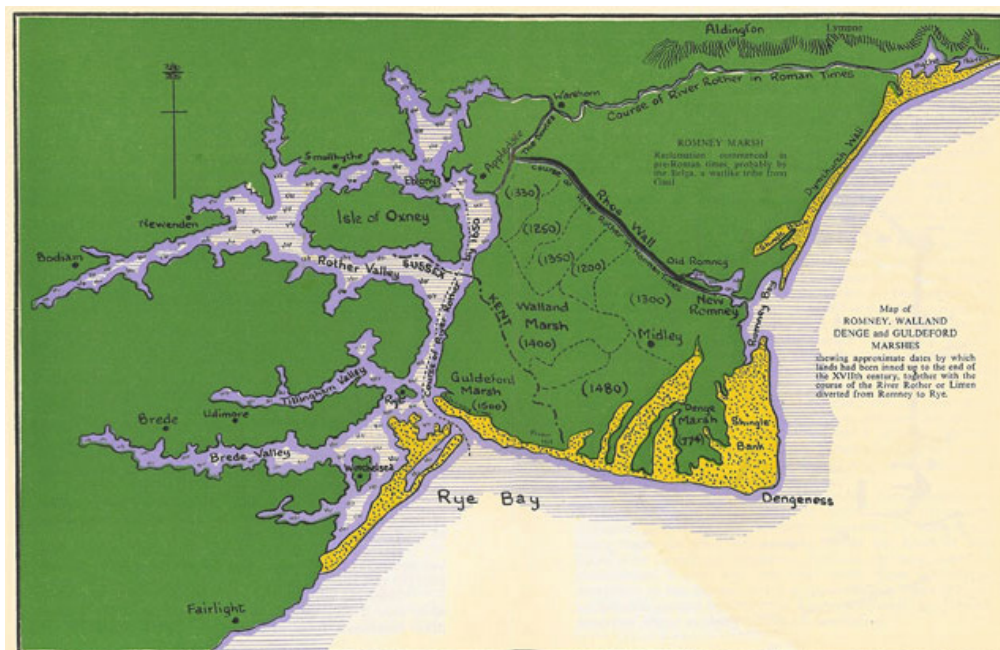
Mr Peter Cole

19th February 2015

Peter Cole gave us an interesting talk helpfully illustrated by a number of maps, photographs and building plans. Some of it was based on the 1981 book of the same name by Gregory Blaxland. It ranged over a very long period of time – from the Romans to Napoleon – and showed not only how vulnerable this part of England was, but also how it sought to defend itself from the incomer. It was therefore necessarily brief in its treatment of the various episodes of real or threatened warfare, but was concentrated on the still-extant Royal Military Canal.

South-east England – in this sense Kent and Sussex – was always the most accessible point of this island to those intending to invade it, from well before the Romans. Julius Caesar arrived in 55 BCE; his landing place is generally accepted as Reculver in north Kent but other possibilities have been canvassed from time to time, including some in Sussex. Our coastline has changed very much since then, and we were able to see a map of the Hastings-to-Romney Marsh area that illustrated the major gains of land from the sea and the changing courses of the rivers with (for example) Appledore and Boreham Street having harbours and the Lydd area being an island like the Isle of Oxney. Caesar's invasion was followed by a full Roman occupation in the following century, and the course of Roman roads can still be traced, particularly from the north to Westfield and from the west to Pevensey. The main Roman fleet was based in Kent but a subsidiary fleet had its home at Pevensey.

Later there came the Germanic invasions, some Norse activity and later still William the Conqueror. There was some resistance to the first two of these, but at least in this geographical area William established himself very quickly after Senlac. The Middle Ages saw considerable military activity, French raids being common and often successful, but the French were never in a position to make a sustained attempt at occupation. Faced with the same threat in the sixteenth century, Henry VIII built castles of a design advanced for the time, to deter and repel them. Among these castles the most notable local survivor is Camber, just south of Rye.

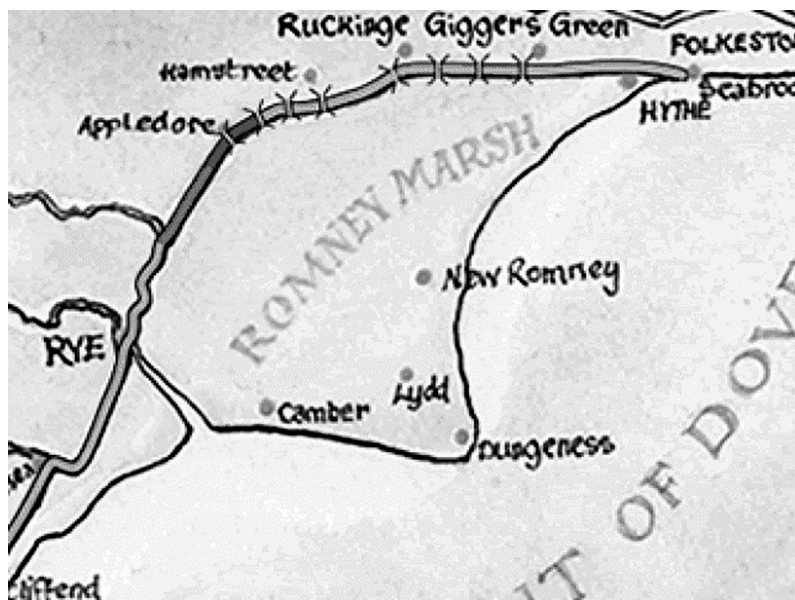




There were of course later alarms. Early in the nineteenth century the French again threatened invasion, this time under Napoleon Bonaparte, particularly when the war was renewed in 1803. This led to the digging of the Royal Military Canal running from just west of Winchelsea to Hythe, running well inland except for its end-points. Combined with the string of Martello towers on the coast (a new invention, based on British admiration of such a fort in enemy hands in the Mediterranean at the end of the previous century), the canal would have represented a major obstacle to any invader. It was built at the foot of land rising to the north, giving the defenders an advantage; it was designed to allow for enfilading fire as enemies tried to cross it; much of the seaward land could have been flooded; and there were troop emplacements at specific intervals, some for regular forces and some for militiamen. One of the three forts near Hythe developed after 1824 into the Shorncliffe base, which was a major centre of military activity for many decades.

The canal was designed by engineers working to the Royal Staff Corps (later part of the Royal Engineers). As with other canals all of the digging was by manual labour, in this case partly by soldiers and partly by labourers recruited for the purpose. Contrary to received opinion, there seems to be no evidence that French prisoners-of-war were used as part of the workforce. The diggers had some benefit from the deployment of steam engines.

By the time digging got under way the battle of Trafalgar had put an end to Napoleon's naval power but, nevertheless, it was completed in due course, no doubt as a precaution against any further thoughts of invasion from the hereditary enemy. The completed canal allowed troops (perhaps fifty in a single boat) and material to be moved by water more reliably, at much less effort and at a greater speed than would have been the case by land. Horses for towing were kept at each end of the canal – about 100 at Hythe – with a waystand at Ruckinge.



*Plan of the Canal from  
Rye Museum*

We saw plans of the Hythe and Iden forts and recent photographs of the canal and its surviving redoubts, showing that much of the canal and its associated buildings are still in existence.

Associated with the canal was a plan of defence in depth for the country between the south coast and London. It showed each point of defence, with the lines of communication between them – as well as the lines for withdrawal and attack – as far as the Streatham/Blackheath line. Conversely we also saw a German plan for Operation Sealion in 1940, von Rundstedt's assault that was never finally authorised. Then the first targets were represented by a broad band of occupation between the coast and the Weald, followed





*Aerial photograph from the kenthistoryforum.co.uk website which has many interesting images and articles on the Canal.*

by a second stage further north, with attacks being pressed west of London towards Oxford and Bristol. Also illustrated were the plans of the invasion barges already built and based at Boulogne ready for the order to proceed: low in the water and of shallow draught, each was about 15 feet in the beam and about 130 feet long. All around the south-east were 'dragons' teeth', concrete blocks sunk into the ground to hinder the passage of enemy vehicles, for example at Cripps Cross, Cooden Beach (a very much earlier defensive position) and Baldslow. The Martello towers now became artillery positions, though in the end they were never to fire a shot in anger. How far these defences could have impeded a blitzkrieg attack of the kind that had already shocked the Allies must be a matter for speculation.

Particularly in its treatment of the Royal Military Canal this was a talk of considerable interest.

George Kiloh



*Martello towers c. 1805*



# RURAL ROMANIA REVEALED: A RARE SURVIVAL OF A MEDIEVAL WAY OF LIFE

Mr Richard Filmer

16th April 2015

**D**uring most of the 19th century, Romania was under Turkish domination. British official attitudes towards the frail Turkish empire were governed by concern for the route to India. If the empire were to collapse, a hostile power, Russia, might take its place and threaten communications between Britain and its Indian empire. So the British did not encourage Romanian independence from the Turks and therefore never had then or since, the close connections with Romania which Russia had or France because of its strong cultural and political influence.

There are exceptions to this generalisation. As Richard Filmer reminded us at the beginning of his talk, there was a British-born Queen of Romania in the first half of the 20th century: a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, Marie, the daughter of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh. She married Ferdinand of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen who became King of Romania from 1914–1927.

Romania was pretty well a closed book for Western Europeans during the communist period but the fall of Ceausescu was well covered by the British media. With a few exceptions, then, the British have paid little attention to the country, although the issue of migration from Romania to the United Kingdom has meant that in the last few years we have become more aware of it, while still not knowing much about it.

Richard Filmer's lecture opened a window for us on one very important aspect of Romania, its peasants and their way of life. Just before WW2, Romania was the fourth largest food exporter in the world. During the communist era from 1947 to 1989, the government's objective was to collectivise agriculture and bring the peasants under close government control. However, collectivisation did not reach the uplands of the country where the old way of life survived and still does. Mr Filmer showed slides of the excellent photographs he had taken to illustrate the many activities in rural areas carried on as they had been in medieval times and no doubt before.

We saw pictures of butter being churned by hand in churns of wood made by coopers in each local community. Mr Filmer demonstrated how almost all the tools, clothes and other objects used in the home or in the fields were made locally and not bought in shops in the towns, from the traditional hats worn in the north western province of Maramures to the ubiquitous and enormous wooden vats in which cabbages are pickled for eating in winter, to the ploughs and harrows (made of twigs), to the wooden shingles on the roofs, to the tin funnels for pouring and to virtually anything else you can think of – except the rubber tyres on the wooden wagons pulled by horses or oxen.

He also showed us how a medieval way of life, based on self-sufficiency, still continues. Shepherds look after large flocks and transhumance, the migration of animals between high pastures in summer and lowlying land in winter, is still practised. So it is in Britain, but the sheep are taken by lorries and are looked after by farmers on quad bikes while in Romania many flocks still travel for long distances on foot with their shepherd. Maize cobs are dried in the open air and milled in water-powered mills to make *mamaliga*, the Romanian polenta and a staple food.

Other grains are milled in the same way. Plum brandy, *tsuika*, the main alcoholic drink throughout the country, is made at home as is wine from the grapes grown on vines climbing up frames in people's gardens or attached to their houses. Pork is widely eaten; pigs range freely and are slaughtered at home where the meat is cured or smoked. Almost every household keeps cows for milk which is made into cheese and butter at home.

In short, Mr Filmer showed us how many aspects of life in parts of rural Romania have survived from many centuries ago. He also made it clear how this was of particular relevance to a historical society like the BDHS because, of course, the activities he described had been practised in East Sussex for many centuries and some had only died out in living memory. And so they will die out in Romania; as one of our members remarked, Mr Filmer's pictures were almost all of old people. The young have left their villages for the towns or have emigrated to other countries. Nevertheless, I believe the old way of rural life will survive in Romania for some time yet.

Many of the men and women Mr Filmer met and photographed were in their 80s or 90s, proving that theirs is a way of life which encourages longevity so those in their 50s and 60s have some time to go. The number of tractors in the country is well below the European average so less modern methods are still widely used. The number of people employed in agriculture as a proportion of the total employed is just under 30% compared with 1% in the UK and 3% in France so it provides a living for a significant number of people. Nevertheless, if you want to see the way of life (and beautiful country) experienced at first hand and so vividly described by Mr Filmer in his superbly delivered and illustrated lecture, I suggest you go soon.

Hugh Arbuthnott











## LECTURE ON AND TOUR OF BATTLE ABBEY

Roger Clark

28 May 2015

**W**e were greeted in the Abbot's Hall with a very generous provision of coffee and cakes supplied by the Battle Abbey School.

We were told the evening would be in two halves, first an historical tour and secondly a lecture in the Library relating to the School. We broke into two parties, one of which toured other parts of the Abbey.

Our party began with our guide giving us a description of the 13th- century Abbot's Hall and told us this would have been mainly used for entertaining visitors. We were informed of the Abbot's supposed curse on Sir Antony Browne, who had acquired Battle Abbey following the dissolution, that fire and water would be his downfall. In fact there was a fire in the Abbey in 1931 when many of the Abbot's buildings were destroyed and we were shown the line in the wall showing the height of the destruction. The Hall was restored with the exception of the squint window. Our attention was then drawn to the huge painting which occupies much of the south window and wall. This portrays a view of William the Conqueror and was made by Francis Wilkin (1791–1842). It is believed to be one of the largest painted canvases. The Duchess of Cleveland did not like the painting and had it removed. It was eventually found under the floorboards in Hastings Museum, was restored by English Heritage, and in 2002 returned to its original position.

We then made our way to the Library. This is a beautiful room with a wooden ceiling. Our attention was drawn to the many portraits which surround the room, the Duke & Duchess of Cleveland on one side and many of the Webster Family on another wall. The Websters had purchased Battle Abbey from the Browne/Montague family. Unfortunately, the younger members the Webster family gambled away much of the land owned by the Abbey.

We then went into the Beggars Hall which is thought to be from where the Monks had distributed alms to the poor. We were reminded that the Monks were of a Benedictine Order who preferred quiet and had been the instigators of the building of St Mary's Church.

Our guide then took us outside to the Top Terrace, pointing out en route the many varied gargoyles which are considered to be of very high quality. The Top Terrace overlooks what is traditionally accepted to be part of the battlefield.

Investigations have been undertaken by the school with regard to the passages and cellars in the building and it is thought there is much more to be discovered with possibly an undercroft under the grass lawn. Amusing reference was made to the supposed two ghosts – one a figure in white in the main building and the second one, a monk in a black habit, in the refectory.

We then walked back to the Library for our lecture where our speaker said there although the school had been at the Abbey for 100 years, yet it had been a centre of education for nearly 950 years. He said that English Heritage were insistent on the two large entrance gates remaining closed to prevent members of the public having access to the site without paying.

The school itself began in 1912 in Bexhill as a finishing school for young ladies with a handful of foreign students. In 1914 these were all sent home because of the war. In 1922 the school had 33 girls but this had increased in 1923 to 100 boarding girls. The fire in 1931 meant the students had to be located elsewhere until the repairs had been completed in 1933.

The founder of Battle Abbey School was Sir Norman Angel, who, during his lifetime was a Nobel Peace Prize Winner, the editor of the *Daily Mail* and a Labour MP. In 1938 his son founded Vinehall School. When the Canadian Troops moved in during the 2nd World War, the girls were very excited but



## BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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were quickly evacuated until 1946. Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip visited the School in 1966 and the Queen Mother in 1986.

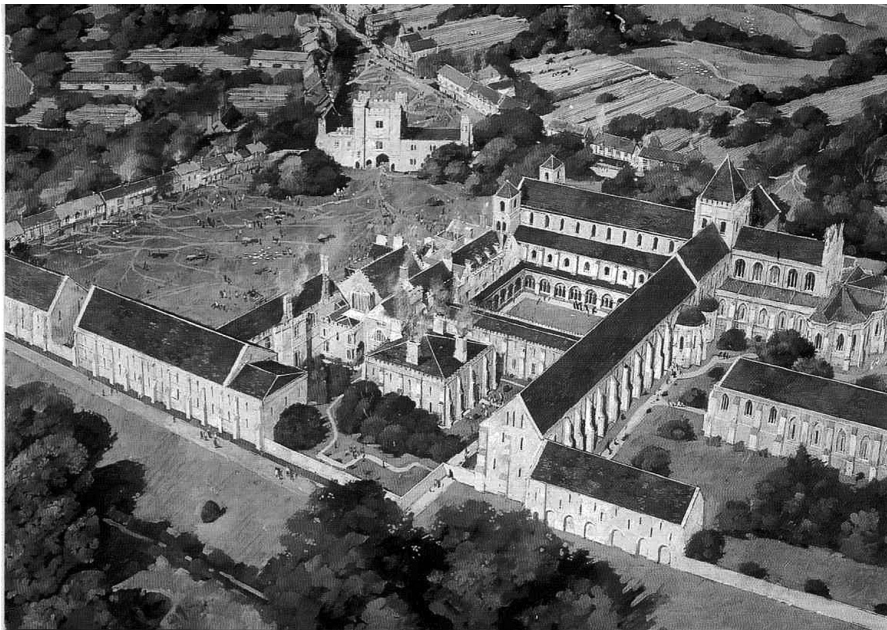
In 1976 the Battle Abbey Estate was sold. A group of philanthropic Americans bought Battle Abbey and the battlefield and presented them to the English Nation.

By 2014 it had been co-educational for 26 years. We were reminded that this is not a *posh* school and that some of the students are supported by bursaries. There are approximately 60–70 boarders, with 300 students aged between 11 and 18 years.

Inside the porch of the Abbot's Hall is the school motto the main theme being 'DO GOOD'.

In summary, a pleasant evening in Battle's finest building.

Diane Braybrooke



*Battle Abbey then and now*





## WATERLOO 18 JUNE 1815: THE ROUT OF THE FRENCH IMPERIAL GUARD BY THE 52ND LIGHT INFANTRY

Lt.-Gen. Sir Christopher Wallace

20th June 2015

**O**n 1st March 1815 Napoleon escaped from Elba and landed in France. Nineteen days later he was in Paris and resumed his title as Emperor. His army rallied to him. The soldiers who had been captured during the years of fighting had been released enabling Napoleon to reform his Grande Armée.

In response, the European allies quickly reassembled their armies and prepared to resume the war to overthrow the Emperor yet again. Napoleon resolved to attack the British, Prussian, Flemish and Dutch armies before the other Allied powers (Russia and Austria) could come to their assistance. On the 15th June 1815 Napoleon crossed the French border near Charleroi and marched into Belgium\*. His intention was to split the Prussians from the Allied Army commanded by the Duke of Wellington, and then deal with the other Austrian and Russian Armies in turn. In the first battle the Prussians under Marshal Blücher were defeated at Ligny and driven away to the East. Napoleon sent Marshal Grouchy with a strong force in pursuit while he advanced on Wellington's army. The first engagement with the English was at the crossroads at Quatre Bras, where Wellington had placed his screen to determine which way Napoleon was planning to advance, but after a hard-fought engagement the British and their allies were forced to withdraw back towards Brussels.

Assured by Blücher that he would join him for the conclusive battle, Wellington, on the afternoon of 17th June 1815, halted on the ridge astride the Brussels road south of the forest of Soignes, which he had identified previously as a good defensive position and where he now resolved to give battle to the French.

Wellington's position on the Brussels road was where it emerged from the woods of Soignes south of the village of Waterloo. The road crossed a low ridge and descended into a valley before rising on the other side to a further ridge. In the valley, below the first crest, lay La Haye Sainte Farm which for most of the battle would be staunchly held by the King's German Legion. Away to his front and right flank was the fortified farm of Hougomont which would be held by the light companies of the Coldstream and Third Guards, and where there would be fighting around the farm all day. These were critically important forward 'anchor' positions on Wellington's left and right flank, which he resolved to hold at all costs in order to channel the French Army onto his centre. To the north of the first crest the Namur road crossed the Brussels road. The main British, Hanoverian and Flemish/Dutch positions lay along the Namur road, behind the first crest, in a reverse slope position largely hidden from the view of the French and protected from their artillery. This whole front was about 2½ miles in length.

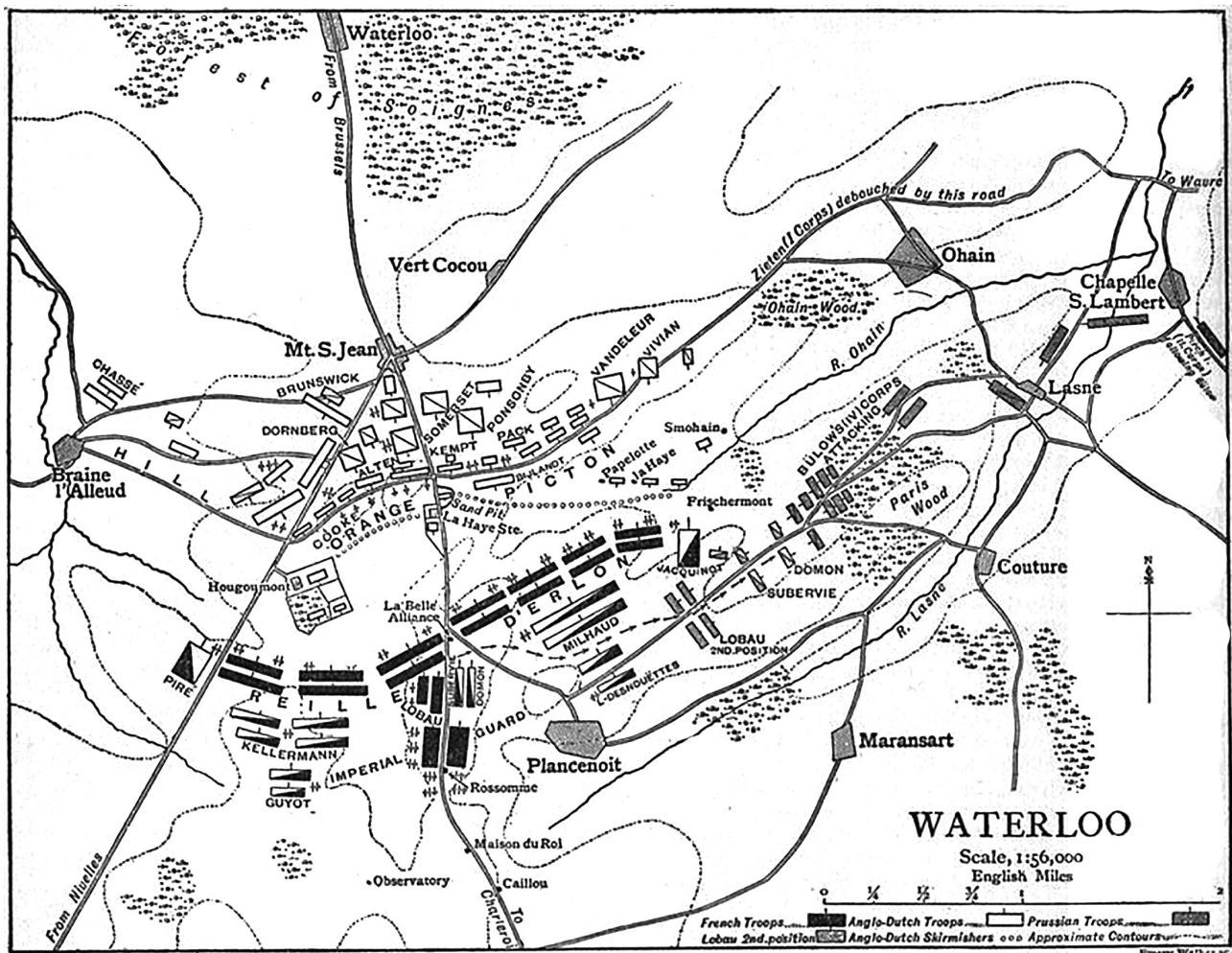
The French approached the battlefield from the country directly to the south of La Belle Alliance inn. This was on the Brussels road at the southern side of the valley, below the second crest and which would become Napoleon's headquarters. In the valley to the front of Napoleon's forces stood Hougomont Farm which marked the right wing of the Allied line, and which he knew to be the key to Wellington's right flank. Lying by the road leading to the centre of Wellington's position lay La Haye Sainte, which Napoleon determined to be a crucial objective for the French Army to capture.

To the east of Wellington's positions lay Papelotte, another farm that would be the focus of a ferocious struggle when the Prussian Army appeared on the battlefield at the end of the afternoon. Behind the Duke's centre stood the farm of Mont St Jean, which he used as a headquarters and field hospital.

Relative strengths: Wellington – 73,050 soldiers and 158 cannon. Napoléon – 77,721 soldiers and 246 cannon. Blücher – 49,101 soldiers and 134 cannon.

It rained heavily during the night of 17th June 1815. The French artillery commanders insisted that





the attack could not begin until the ground had dried out sufficiently for the guns to manoeuvre without becoming bogged down in the mud. So it was the French who opened the battle at 11am on 18th June 1815 by launching an artillery bombardment on Hougoumont Farm, on the extreme right of the Allied line. The British artillery on the ridge behind the farm replied, firing directly into the French infantry massed for the attack on the far side of the valley.

At midday Prince Jerome ordered the assault on Hougoumont and the French infantry columns of his division moved forward to begin the day-long struggle around the farm buildings.

At about 1.30pm Marshal Ney brought forward 74 French guns over the ridge opposite La Haye Sainte followed by the 17,000 infantry of D'Erlon's Corps to begin the attack on Wellington's centre and left. The French cannonade began and was later described by veterans as the heaviest they had ever experienced. The Duke ordered his infantry battalions to move behind the ridge and to lie down. This had the effect of shielding them from the worst of the cannon shot. Only Bilandt's Belgian-Dutch Brigade was left on the exposed slope and suffered heavily. After half an hour the barrage stopped, giving way to the roar of drums as Ney's columns advanced to the attack. The French infantry passed La Haye Sainte and marched up to the crest of the ridge, where Picton's 5th Division was positioned. As part of the advance a furious assault began on La Haye Sainte, held by the King's German Legion, which was to continue intermittently for the rest of the day until the German troops ran out of ammunition and were finally overwhelmed.

As the French infantry approached the sunken road at the top of the ridge, the line of British infantry stood firm, fired a volley and charged, driving back the massed French columns. Cavalry formations were then ordered to charge in support of the infantry attack: the Household Brigade (1st and 2nd



Life Guards and Royal Horse Guards), the Union Brigade (Royals, Scots Greys and Inniskillings) and Vivian's Hussar Brigade (10th and 18th Hussars and 1st Hussars, King's German Legion). It is notoriously difficult to pull up cavalry committed to an attack and the British regiments did not readily respond to the recall orders. In particular the Union Brigade continued to attack across the valley. These regiments over-reached themselves and charged up to the French gun lines on the far ridge where they were in turn overwhelmed by French cavalry. Major-General Ponsonby, commanding the Union Brigade was killed. The time was 3pm and there was now a lull in the battle; the only active fighting being the continuing attack on Hougoumont at the western end of the line which had been soaking up more and more of Reille's Corps.

As the afternoon wore on, the battle began to swing slowly in the Allies' favour as Blücher's Prussian Army arrived on the field in the southeast. Napoleon now ordered Marshal Ney to capture La Haye Sainte, unchanged in his view that the farm was the key to the Allied position. Ney launched this assault with two battalions of the Imperial Guard and their initial success led him to believe that the Allied Army was withdrawing. It is likely that the movements he saw were casualties or prisoners moving to the rear in carts and wagons. It was on this impetuous assumption that Ney launched the infamous and massive cavalry attack on the Allied line. Initially the attacking force was to be Milhaud's Cavalry Corps of Cuirassiers. But before the French cavalry regiments could reach the Allied line the infantry formed squares closely supported by artillery batteries. The French cuirassiers flowed around the squares but were unable to penetrate them.

During the next three hours some twelve French cavalry attacks were made up to the ridge and back. Napoleon had been critical of Ney's initial infantry attack, which he considered to be premature, but felt bound to commit increasing numbers of cavalry to support the assault. At around 5.30pm Ney launched his final cavalry assault but by now there were too many dead horses and dying cavalymen on the battlefield to allow room for his regiments to manoeuvre. The attack failed yet again. Napoleon's sombre mood was reported by one of his senior ADCs, Col. Crabbé. He records finding the Emperor slumped in a chair at La Belle Alliance inn both exhausted and angry. He is reported to have told Col Crabbé that, *'Marshal Ney has acted stupidly again. He has destroyed the Cavalry. He attacks the plateau obliquely and not in a complete mass.'*

Following the French cavalry's battering of the British squares over the afternoon, Adam's brigade was brought up to reinforce the right. In this position the 52nd Light Infantry endured a heavy bombardment, of which Ensign Leeke of the 52nd reported afterwards, *'The old officers, who had served during the whole of the Peninsular War, stated that they were never exposed to such a cannonade as the 52nd squares had to undergo on this occasion for 2½ hours from French artillery ½ mile to the front.'* While the 52nd's squares stood waiting, British artillery fired over their heads.

Ney now, far too late, launched the sustained infantry assault on La Haye Sainte which was successfully overwhelmed. By now the Prussian assault in the southeast on Plancenoit was seriously threatening the French position. Convinced that the Allied line was at breaking point and that this was the decisive moment, Ney sent a desperate message to the Emperor for more troops to attack. Napoleon was at this point deploying the Imperial Guard to drive the Prussians back from Plancenoit. Once this had been achieved he resolved to launch the Guard at the main Allied line. But in the meantime Wellington had reorganised his forces and the opportunity that Ney had correctly identified had now passed.

The Imperial Guard marched up to La Haye Sainte for the attack, led by Napoleon himself who later stood aside and left the command to Ney. Ney personally led the five battalions up the left-hand side of the Brussels road, but as they climbed the ridge they came under heavy fire from a curve of batteries assembled to meet them. A deserting French cavalry officer had warned the Allies of the Guard's intended advance. Despite this, the Middle Guard threw back the British battalions of Halkett's Hanoverian Brigade but were assaulted by the Belgian and Dutch troops of General Chassé and Colonel Detmers who drove them back down the hill.





*A contemporary cartoon shows Blücher and Wellington surrounding Napoleon*

Now the 3rd Regiment of Chasseurs approached the ridge opposite Maitland's Brigade of Foot Guards (2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 1st Foot Guards). Wellington called to the brigade commander '*Now Maitland. Now's your time.*' The Foot Guards stood, fired a volley and charged with the bayonet driving the French Imperial Guard back down the hill. The last of the French Guard regiments, the 4th Chasseurs came in support as the British Guards withdrew back over the ridge.

It was at this point that Colonel Sir John Colborne, commanding the 1st/52nd Light Infantry in Adam's 3rd Brigade, ordered his men forward on his own initiative to fire directly into the flank of the French column as it passed his front. A devastating volley of accurate fire was fired into the flank of the 4th Regiment of Chasseurs. William Hay, a Light Dragoon watching from the right, later recalled that '*So well-directed a fire was poured in, that down the bank the Frenchmen fell and, I may say, the battle of Waterloo was gained.*' Seeing the 52nd begin to advance, Wellington is reputed to have ordered '*Go on, Colborne, they won't stand!*' The battalion then advanced diagonally across the field. When this was later followed by a bayonet charge by General Adam's entire 3rd Brigade, the Old Guard broke, forced into full retreat. It proved to be the decisive moment of the battle leaving the whole of the Old Guard in disarray who were then driven back down the hill in a general rout to the cry of '*La Garde recule.*' Having pursued the French down the escarpment of Mont St Jean, the 52nd crossed the valley floor and on the other side attacked a square of the Old Guard and forced it to retreat.

The 1st/52nd were the largest battalion at Waterloo, and one of the few British battalions operating at full strength. Of the 1,130 men and officers present, 168 were wounded, and 38 killed.

Within fifteen minutes Wellington appeared on the skyline and waved his hat to give the signal for a general attack in pursuit of the French troops. The British, Flemish/Dutch and Hanoverian troops poured





forward and the French retreat became a general rout. Three battalions of the Old Guard fought to the end at La Belle Alliance inn to enable the Emperor to escape from the battlefield as the Allied troops, now including the Prussians, closed in. The Imperial Guard commander, General Cambronne is reputed to have answered a call to surrender with the words '*The Guard dies but does not surrender.*'

Waterloo cost Wellington approximately 15,000 dead or wounded and Blücher some 7,000. French losses were 24,000 to 26,000 killed or wounded and included 6,000 to 7,000 captured, with an additional 15,000 deserting after the battle and over the following days.

Napoleon's chances of inflicting a decisive defeat on Wellington had been lost when the French cavalry had been ruined by the futile charges of the afternoon. Nevertheless, between six and seven o'clock the chance of a limited victory had presented itself. When Ney captured La Haye Sainte and broke the Allied centre, Napoleon still had thirteen battalions of the Old and Middle Guard, over 7,000 men, fresh and ready for action with artillery to support them. Had he committed the Guard when Ney asked for it, not only could this formidable body of men have exploited the serious position in Wellington's centre, but the exhausted men of D'Erlon's Corps and the cavalry would surely have taken fresh heart at the sight of the Guard and would have found the will for a final effort to support it. And whilst the role of the 1st/52nd Light Infantry was but a small part of the overall battle, Colonel Colborne's initiative in seizing the moment without waiting for orders, has subsequently been regarded as the defining manoeuvre of the last critical moments of the battle. Unfortunately for the men of Colborne's famous regiment, Wellington failed to mention their decisive role in his despatches after the battle.

Waterloo decisively saw the end of 23 years of fighting between the European powers and France which had begun in 1792.

Hugh Willing



## KING JOHN

Robertson Memorial Lecture

Dr Marc Morris

16 July 2015

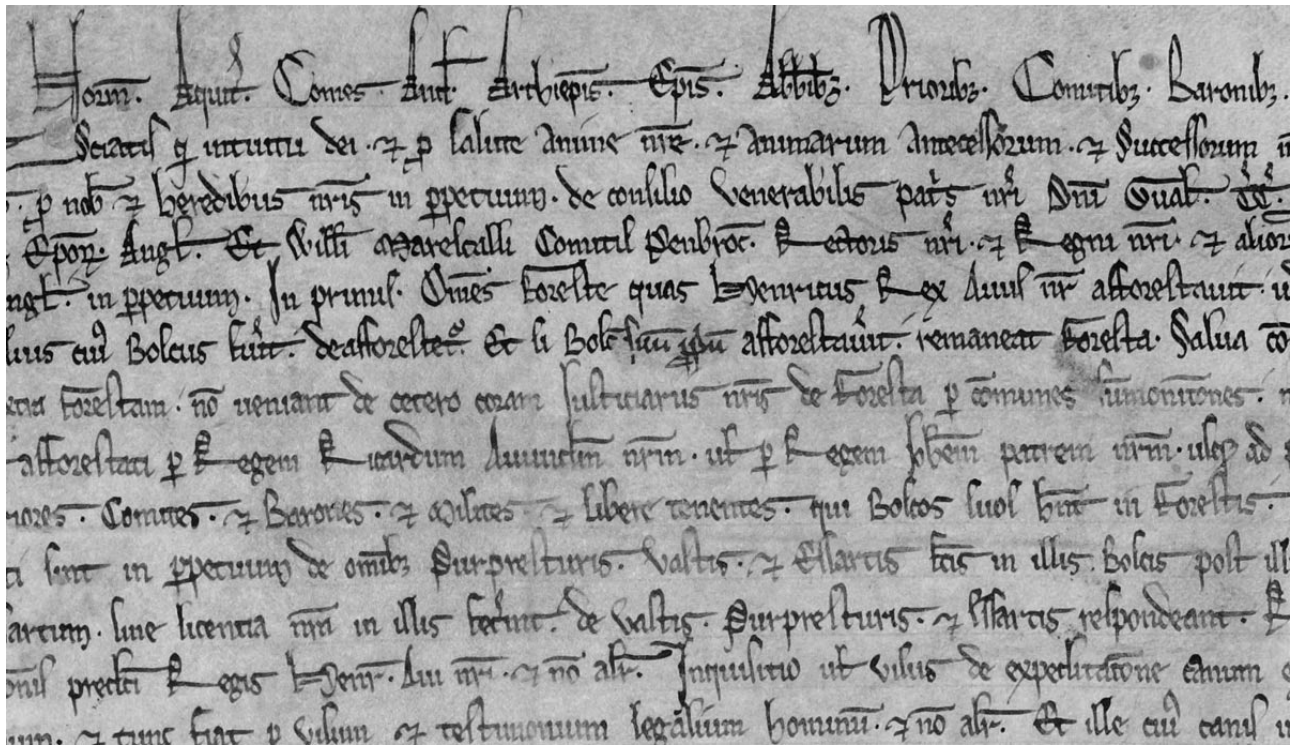
Dr Marc Morris's lecture on King John (r. 1199–1216) was both learned and fun. A friend and colleague in the study of medieval history with the Society's President, Professor Gillingham, his lecture showed attempts in the last half-century to represent King John as less bad than the reputation he bore up till the 1960s and 1970s are misguided. He demonstrated this by much quotation ending with a supporter of the King who, having praised John's hospitality, went on to list his failings of cruelty, dishonesty and cowardice. The King's enemies naturally damned him with with even fainter praise.

Dr Morris produced many examples of all these vices and showed how they shocked John's contemporaries. For instance, after 1076 when, in marked contrast to the endless killings in the feuds of Saxon nobility with Viking nobility before the Norman Conquest, no earl was executed or murdered in England until 1307 except in the reign of John. One of the King's favourite methods of disposing of his enemies or potential rivals was by imprisoning them in castle dungeons and starving them to death. Corfe Castle was the place he murdered in this way (besides at least fifteen other noblemen) Matilda, wife of William of Braose and her adult son. William died of a broken heart in consequence. He was the descendant of one of William the Conqueror's invading army and a nobleman with large properties in Normandy and even larger ones in England and Wales. Among the many other victims attributed to John in his lifetime was that of his most prominent victim, his nephew, the boy Prince Arthur. The Prince was killed by being thrown from a castle tower. His tragedy is the best part of Shakespeare's *King John* – a play not often performed, said Dr Morris, because it is not very good!

Most of King John's promises had hardly been recorded before he broke them, most famously Magna Carta sealed in June 1215 which he repudiated in September! He had hardly left Runnymede before he sent messengers to the Pope pleading that Magna Carta should be declared null and void.

As for his cowardice, he enjoyed warfare only if in command of much stronger forces than his enemies, as when besieging Rochester in 1216. When the invading French army approached, he fled without warning the forces under his command. In 1214 he had devised a skilful plan to invade France, hoping to recapture Normandy which he had lost ten years earlier, by dividing the French forces. He led his own army from Aquitaine while an Anglo-Flemish-German army invaded France from the north-east. The French duly divided their forces; the Dauphin Louis marched against John, while King Philippe Auguste opposed the invasion from Flanders. However, when the Dauphin's army approached, John fled to the harbour of La Rochelle so as to be able to escape to England. The great French victory at Bouvines where King Philippe Auguste routed the allied armies in the north-east meant that John's hopes of recovering Normandy were over. He earned the nickname 'Softsword' for his conduct of campaigns and 'Lackland' for their results. He has also been called 'Lackland' because, when dividing his dominions among his sons, Henry II had not left any to John.

King John's attempts to make war in France were the more disastrous because, to pay for them, he squeezed enormous sums from his subjects by savage taxation. He often multiplied rates of tax by as much as four and even ten times and this was the source of much of the discontent which led to the rebellion of the barons which in turn led to Magna Carta. His heavy taxation of the Church, including many properties previously exempt, led to much clerical opposition. Monks and priests were the most numerous writers of the thirteenth century, but Dr Morris's quotations describing John's misconduct were



*Magna Carta*

drawn largely from laymen's writings.

This indicates that recent attempts to represent John as being the victim of clerical prejudice is mistaken. As was the custom of too many medieval monarchs, John also confiscated much of the money of the English Jews.

Given John's notoriety – it is significant that no subsequent king of England was named John – why, in the mid-twentieth century, was there a fashion among historians to portray him more favourably?

Dr Morris pointed out that his elder brother Richard I was an absentee monarch, spending only about six months of his reign (1189–1199) in England. He was busy leading the Third Crusade or fighting in France where he was mortally wounded besieging the castle of Challus. Richard Coeur de Lion was highly regarded by his contemporaries, but to modern minds appears as an adventurer who neglected his realm while the whole concept of Crusading has fallen into disrepute. In contrast, John, who ruled England in Richard's absence and, strangely, was the favourite son of Henry II the greatest Plantagenet king, is seen more favourably. Henry II is said to have died of a broken heart when told that John was plotting against him.

I must say, I found it reassuring that Dr Morris confirmed that John was both a bad king and an extremely nasty man! Since being called Richard, in my childhood I gloried in his image and in the stories of his friendship with Robin Hood (which were in fact entirely fictitious, being invented in the sixteenth century). This meant that I have always had a dim view of King John. It was also good to be told that John really had lost the Crown of England in the Wash when fleeing from Dauphin Louis, who so nearly became King of England in 1216. We should remember, moreover, that thanks to King John's bad behaviour, we are celebrating the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta which first asserted in England the supremacy of the Rule of Law.

Richard Moore





*Two contrasting images of King John by Matthew Paris: opposite looking regal and below, somewhat dishevelled with a slipping crown. From Paris's Abbreviatio chronicorum Angliae, (1250–59).*

