

THE NEW HOGHTONIAN

*The magazine of Preston Grammar School Association,
uniting Old Boys, former staff and friends*

Issue 7, January 2017

EDITORIAL

Still no graphics, moving pictures or other highfalutin things, but please may I welcome you to another edition of the New Hoghtonian whilst wishing you all the best for a happy and prosperous 2017? Wow, another year, and the School has been closed for nearly 48 of them!

I joined the Association in the early 1970s as a Subscription Member, just as the 'Old Boys' was becoming the "Association". I suppose this makes me a relative 'new boy' and I certainly wasn't able to afford the eight guineas' Life Membership until 1981. What always struck me was the 'camaraderie' and friendship within the Association, which stretched across all age groups. Some Old Boys had been around since the Headship of Brooks (who succeeded the infamous Beaven Beaven two centuries ago), whilst others had barely left School. There was no doubt that we would all look out for each other – I hesitate to label it the 'Old Boys' Network' – and this fine tradition has been maintained to this day. The secret? A sound education, shared experiences (some bad) and a high level of communication. All these 'gelling' qualities are to be found in this Newsletter.

Later you will find some Old Boys' memories of Bill Stansfield, a very popular and highly-regarded Member, who lived in Carcassonne and who passed away recently. I think I only met Bill once (at the School visit in 2013), but because we communicated about anything and everything by email on a weekly basis, I felt I knew him well. Franklyn Jackson (Miller, 1954-59) also came to know Bill well, because he too lived in Carcassonne and got in touch via the Newsletter. In his turn, Frank was recently pleased to hear from Derek Pearson (whom he hadn't seen since PGS), who, browsing the Website, had come across Frank's book "Loopholes" and got in touch (from Carlisle).

Symptomatic of this feeling of brotherhood was Geoff Dawes (Miller, 1955-62), who lives in Leighton Buzzard and had this to say in an email: "We have recently enjoyed our Golden Wedding and were visited by Roland Nicholson (Goodair, 1951-57), who was my best man and came for the full weekend, and Stephen Turner (Miller, 1956-63), who drove all the way down from New Longton for a day, then all the way back, completing both journeys without a break! What dedication!" Quite! Both Geoff and Franklyn are hoping to attend a future event (the Dinner?).

Just before Christmas I was contacted by Ian Mather (Miller, 1948-55), whom I have got to know well over the past few years, and we arranged to meet up for a couple of hours in the Old Vic (opposite Preston Railway Station). Ian was passing through to catch a train, and we had a very pleasant and lively discussion in the company of "Flat Cap", an enticing libation from the Bank Top Brewery, Bolton. Ian has just published another book, "Hot War Cold War – History from a Reporter's Notebooks", based on the 600 notebooks that he kept throughout his career as an international journalist. This is Volume One, covering all the major conflicts from 1967 to 1980, a period that Ian considers to a golden era in print journalism. There is a very interesting preface outlining Ian's early years, and including his time at PGS. The cost of the book is £10.00 plus £3.45 p+p, and copies can be obtained directly from Ian's website at ianmather.co.uk, or by writing to 7 Grand Avenue, Muswell Hill, London N10 3AY. Ian will be quite happy to sign copies and write any dedication or message as requested, and I can heartily recommend the book.

Further to a phone call, a few weeks ago I paid another visit to Ron Walsh (Thornley 1941-47). It is always a pleasure to see Ronnie, who has tremendous recall and a wealth of stories about PGS to go with it. We spent some time studying an image from an ATC Camp in 1944, with many Old Boys on it, including Jim Paddock (Goodair, 1940-45), who passed away recently, and his best friend Don Steele (Harris, 1940-?). This seems to have temporarily disappeared from the Website but it will be restored (with names) as soon as possible. Amongst many Old Boys we discussed

was Keith Hudson, who was a Brigadier and the Director of Catering for the British Army at one time, and also a Freeman of the City of London. Another image, sadly a photocopy which won't reproduce online, not only had Ronnie Walsh on it but also Tony Joy and Cyril 'Squib' Bamber, who were great friends of Don Steele and my uncle Ron Simpson (Miller, 1940-46), all of whom I knew well when they were alive. Trevor Dandy (1940-47) is also on this image (and if anyone has an original...?). All fascinating, and a great example of how good communication, sharing and friendship cuts through all generations of Old Boys in the Association.

Of course communication can work in different ways. During my time as Secretary I have had a couple of fierce critics who would seek at every opportunity to 'shred' whatever I did, especially Newsletters. I suppose this goes with the territory and you learn to live with it. However, I do make one request. Would the Member who has insisted on sending me regular anonymous poison-pen letters for the past twelve months please get my address right, as the gratuitous bile contained therein clearly upsets my neighbours?

Charlie Billington.

SOME THOUGHTS FROM HAROLD JEPSON

Harold Jepson (Harris, 1942-50), who lives in Calgary, sent me an email saying, "(I) enjoyed the read of the New Hoghtonian. (I) agree strongly with the comment about the high quality of the teaching staff we were blessed with, even during the war years. Outstanding in my memory were Messrs Woodall (Sulla), Foreman, Dodgson, Hall and others whose faces and voices I remember well but whose names have escaped me with the passing of the years. Some I recall only nicknames – Froggy Martin, Fat Chats, Dumbell, - all excellent, but my memory is weak. I left in 1950. Any chance you could list some of the teaching staff? My great friend Les Wilson, whose passing you mention, could remember them all with graphic detail of various escapades and anecdotes. School Camp – what a marvellous institution! What was the name of the pub where we all shared a gill or a shandy with the teachers?"

In answer to your first question Harold, the Association doesn't have an easily-accessible record of the teaching staff prior to 1950. There are records in unsorted boxes in the Lancashire Archive, and there may well be something in one of our boxes (which will be sorted soon), but teachers were not listed on Speech Day programmes until 1950. A complete set is on the Website. Secondly, ignoring the Temperance Bar in Nether Wasdale, two pubs sold alcoholic beverages. These were/are The Strands (Nether Wasdale) and The Wasdale Head at the top of the lake.

BRIAN ROBERTS' DEBT TO PGS

I recently received an email from Brian Roberts (Thornley, 1942-50), who lives in Witney, Oxfordshire, in which he regretted not being able to attend meetings or functions, but did appreciate the work of the Association and being kept informed by the New Hoghtonian. He was keen to point out that what he had done in life he did as a result of his education at Preston Grammar School.

"In 1950 for National Service I was lucky enough to be selected to become a pilot, which meant a complete career change taking in training, fighter command, Coronation flypast, British European Airways then British Airways, ending up flying a few times for Bernie Ecclestone and much more." Very modestly Brian added, "Altogether I was extremely lucky. It was really a case of being in the right place at the right time with the right education." Very succinctly put Brian, many thanks.

DEREK'S DARING DIVE

After the issue of the last Newsletter Derek Wrathall (Thornley 1944-51) contacted me to say that in a rash moment he had committed himself to a tandem skydive. This was to raise funds for ABF The Soldiers' Charity, and he was looking for sponsorship. Those of you with email addresses will already be aware of this, but on the appointed day, Sunday 18th September, the weather was favourable at Flookburgh, Derek duly completed his jump, and even managed to look like he was enjoying himself on the photo! At the Hot Pot Supper he told me that it had been a wonderful and very worthwhile experience and that he would do it all over again despite his initial trepidation. We as Members of the Association offer him our sincerest congratulations for the skydive and his fundraising, whilst basking in the reassurance that Old Boys remain inexorably linked with life's great adventures! Should anyone still wish to sponsor Derek's "madness" (his word), there is a Just Giving page at www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Derek-WrathallforABFthesoldierscharity He would also like to thank those Members who have already supported such a worthy cause.

THE PGS SILVER ATHLETICS MEDALS

In Issue 6 of the New Hoghtonian, "The Mystery of the School Medals" told the story of four hallmarked silver athletics medals (one Sports Day 1938 and three 1939) that had been awarded to an outstanding School athlete, who, upon investigation turned out to be E. Hall. We have never established what happened to him, nor why his medals should have turned up in Dorset, where they were found by a retired WO1 RSM, Dave Roberts. Having been identified they were made available for purchase, and were offered at a very favourable rate to the Association as Mr Roberts wished to see them return 'home'. The offer was accepted and the cost was met by a PGSA donor who wishes to remain anonymous. They are now in our possession, and I have to say that they are remarkable items – still boxed – which I've no doubt our Archivist Brian Rigby will be proud to display at the first available opportunity (notices for the Annual Dinner will be going out soon!).

Charlie Billington.

MEMBERSHIP

Since the September edition of the New Hoghtonian I have been notified that the following Members have passed away:

CROSS, Dr, Norman	Miller	1940 – 1948
PEARSON, Frank	Goodair	1955 – 1961
STANSFIELD, William Charles (Bill)	Harris	1952 – 1959
THOMAS, Norman James	Harris	1936 – 1941
WILKINSON, Peter Richard (Dick)	Miller	1938 – 1944

Notifications and obituaries were sent out at the time and they are also on the Website. However, I received more information on two of these Members and this will be reproduced below.

In addition, Graham Dixon (Miller, 1965-70) informed me in September that Douglas Scoular (Goodair, 1965-1972?) had passed away at the age of 62. Known as "Navy" or "Taff" (he was after all a Scot!), he had gone to PGS from Greenlands Primary School and was apparently a very good footballer. Arthur Sinclair (similar years) confirmed that Dougie was also an avid Beatles fan and a very popular student at School. He was in the penultimate intake of pupils, and whilst not a Member of the Association he was still very much an Old Boy.

There are no new Members, although a couple of applications are outstanding. The Association currently has 297 active Members, of whom 52 receive communications in hard copy. Please may I remind you again to notify me if you acquire an email address or if you change your existing one.

Charlie Billington.

MEMORIES OF BILL STANSFIELD

Most of you will know that William Charles (Bill) Stansfield passed away on 2nd December last, with the funeral being held in Carcassonne, his place of residence for many years. Bill was at PGS from 1952 to 1959 and was in Harris House. He was a renowned and very popular academic and sportsman, and featured heavily in the Newsletter either as a contributor or the subject of others' reminiscences. He was obviously held in great esteem and affection. Whilst we had been in close contact for several years, ill health meant that he couldn't attend Annual Dinners and he always felt particularly deprived when Hot Pot Suppers came around!

He had many friends in the Association with whom he corresponded, and several contacted me to express their shock and sadness, whilst others offered up some memories of him.

For Bob Hesketh (Goodair, 1952-59), 'Stanny' "was a very good friend and a fine person, highly regarded from his school years and throughout his life...he fought cancer for a number of years but during remission and when treatment did not prevent it, he still walked or cycled for several miles each day until a few weeks ago.

He entered the School in 1952. We were in the same Form until the Sixth when he did Classics. We did not keep in touch as much when we went to University but we were always aware of each other's progress. Stanny went to Manchester to read Classics, and then he spent a year in Leeds at Carnegie College School of Sport where he did his teacher and PE training.

Bill was a great character in school, after school and in the holidays; I was with him for many enjoyable ATC Camps. I know he also enjoyed the Lake District Camp where Reg (Hesketh, Goodair, 1953-61) spent time with him. He even cycled up to the Lakes to join the School Camp Group after he had left PGS. He was an excellent gymnast and a member of the 1st XV and School Athletics Team. Others may add to the list.

Academically he was rarely surpassed in any subject but this never affected his popularity. He was 'slipperd' more than most but claimed never to use the slipper or to hand out impositions when a prefect.

After University Bill married Janine, a French girl from Carcassonne. They lived in France for a short time but then came back to Lancashire to teach. Bill taught Classics and Gymnastics at the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School and Janine taught French in a local secondary School.

Eventually they returned to Carcassonne where Bill had difficulty in registering to teach in the French system. This was a waste of his talents so he then turned to teaching at gymnastic clubs. Not only did he teach but he had a wider administrative and developmental role. Some of his trainees reached a high level of performance at a national level. Bill also did a great deal of voluntary work, particularly with the church which he and Janine attended. His career was ultimately interrupted by a number of serious illnesses which he bore with great courage."

Bob later added, "Our Reg remembers one time walking along Wastwater at the start of the day's walk with Bill doing hand stands and saying, '...for my next trick!' He also used to spend a lot of his summer holidays at Elswick Grange Farm with a mutual farming friend, David Thistlethwaite (Kirkham GS), for whom he was later Best Man. We also spent part of our holidays at Elswick Grange and I remember Stanny always full of tricks, being a crack shot with a .22 rifle."

Franklyn Jackson (Miller, 1954-59) met Bill and Janine in a completely different way, some ten years ago, through the Association and living in Carcassonne. They quickly became friends, and "...although Bill was just two years ahead of me at PGS, I don't think we ever met and therefore had much to catch up on. We regularly visited each other's houses in Carcassonne, when at least one bottle of wine would be consumed. About five years ago Bill's health troubles started...

Nevertheless, he always remained cheerful, very positive and never complained... He was very proud of his academic achievements at PGS, and regularly recalled his many trips to Summer Camp and walks in the Lake District. He met his future wife Janine when on a hitch-hiking holiday to France. They were married a few years later, and Bill was thought to be the first Englishman to be married to a French girl in Carcassonne. After a short spell teaching in Blackburn, when Janine acquired and still retains to this day, a delightful Lancashire/French accent, they returned to Carcassonne where Bill continued his career as a sports teacher... We shall miss Bill very much."

Bill will also be missed by other Members I have spoken to, as well as the Association itself.

Charlie Billington.

DR NORMAN CROSS MB ChB

In November I received an email from Barbara Cross to tell me (and to inform the Association) that her husband, Norman, had passed away a couple of months previously: I sent out a belated obituary with the promise to publish Barbara's text:

"Born in Preston in 1930, Norman attended PGS between 1940 and 1948, two years behind his brother Fred. He was in Miller House. He died at home on Friday Sept 17 2016. Norman excelled at sport being Captain of the Football & Cricket teams and was awarded the Foster Athletics 1948 Cup for being the Senior Athletics Champion (he could still do a hand-spring at sixty!). He held school records for running 440yds (53.3sec) and throwing-the-cricket-ball (99yds 4"), and won senior events at running (880yds) and putting the shot. Called to National Service after school, he entered the Royal Navy and was stationed at HMS Arthur (a naval hospital), Plymouth ...he never went to sea! He had gained Higher School Certificates in Latin, French and History but decided to change to Medicine. At Leeds University (1951) he undertook a 1 year conversion course to sciences. For this reason he abandoned sport and concentrated on study.

I, Barbara, entered the French Department in 1952 and met Norman in the Christian Union. We were married in 1955. Norman qualified in 1957 and worked as a GP at Holmfirth, then Whitehaven and finally in 1963 at Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, until he retired in 1990. For the next five years he did other medical work. His hobbies included wood-working with a lathe, book-binding, embroidery (!), piano-playing and DIY. He practised the latter at home and at the homes of his son and three daughters. His life was centred on his family and as an active Christian he was involved in the work of the Gideons (donating New Testaments to hospitals, hotels, etc.) and he enjoyed welcoming into his home students from many countries. During his final two years he was lovingly looked after by his family, always at home. He is sadly missed as a husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather."

Barbara Cross

PRIZE GIVING AT MOOR PARK HIGH SCHOOL

In September John Whalley and I were honoured to be asked to attend, as representatives of the Association, the Annual Prize Giving Awards Evening at Moor Park High School and Sixth Form. As Keith Nightingale, Tony Olivine and Ian Yates were already in attendance as Governors, it felt a bit like home from home. However, I don't remember the last time I shared wine and various delicacies with the Headmaster in his own study!

To complete the set of Members, Councillor John Collins (Thornley, 1954-61), Mayor of Preston, was on hand to give the prizes out. And I must admit that this was no mean feat, as there were lots of recipients. Interspersed with this were musical performances by various pupils (students?), which pointed to high levels of confidence and skill, and which included (with the help of a teacher) a number from the Red Hot Chilli Peppers' songbook. Central to the proceedings was a speech by the Head, Peter Cunningham, who talked about his forthcoming retirement and what he thought had been the main achievements during his time there, and indeed what they meant to him and the future of the School. And to round it off two former Sixth Form students outlined what they were doing now and what they believed they owed to the School. It was all very moving, but of course the night belonged to the prize winners, who not only included the high achievers but also those who had made significant progress during the academic year, which has to be an encouragement.

As I reflected on this and glanced through the latest edition of 'Moornews', the glossy School magazine, I came across an article about twenty-one Moor Park students successfully completing their Duke of Edinburgh Silver Awards. I promise not to mention School Camp, but I wonder how many of these students will go on to achieve their Gold Awards and then talk fondly about it over 50, 60, 70, 80... years later?

Our three Governors will have had some input into the appointment of a new Headmaster, and I hope the relationship with the Association is maintained. In the meantime we congratulate Peter on his and the School's achievements and thank him for the last ten years or more. We also wish him well in his retirement (when he'll find he's less time!) and hope that he'll remain part of the PGSA!

Charlie Billington.

THE GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERY AND NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

Members of the Association, together with friends from the Preston Historical Society, left Preston by coach at 7.30am on Thursday 15th September 2016, bound for the German Military Cemetery situated in Cannock Chase.

We arrived at the Cemetery at 9.45am and were met and greeted by our former President, John Whalley, who was in Birmingham on business. John was the Landscape Architect who designed this Cemetery and he gave us a very interesting account of how he planned the site. In addition we were joined by one of our Members, Bob Hesketh, who drove from his home in the Hereford area to be with us.

The Cemetery lies in a low valley, bordered to the south by a pine forest. Most of those German servicemen who lie here in peace died in prisoner-of-war camps. Others were airmen killed when their airships and aircraft were brought down or sailors whose bodies were washed ashore. Of the total of 4,941 war dead, 2,143 died during World War I and 2,798 during World War II.

John escorted us into the Cemetery via the reception area. The burials of WWI and WWII are separated by a sunken walkway. The character of the Cemetery is determined as much by its birch and pine trees as by the heather planted along the rows of Belgian granite headstones.

Shortly after we arrived the morning mist started to rise and the late summer/early autumn sunshine created a tranquil and reflective atmosphere. It was one of the most peaceful places I have visited. John should be very proud of what he created.

After approximately two hours we bade our farewells to John and headed for the National Memorial Arboretum.

The NMA is built on a 150-acre site planted with over 50,000 trees, and all but one British species are represented (I do not know the odd one out!). It is the home to over 300 thought-provoking memorials covering both military and civilian associations, along with tributes for individuals. Rich in design and symbolism, and sympathetic to the beautiful gardens they inhabit, the memorials each have fascinating stories to explore.

Some of us set off on foot to explore the site, whilst others got a 'feel' for the place by having a train tour around all the memorials before deciding what they wanted to see. We left for home at 4pm, and everybody appeared to have had an interesting, enjoyable and thought-proving day. Finally on behalf of all Members and friends I would like to thank Jim Goring for organising the visits, and John Whalley for his time and interesting input at the German Cemetery.

Trevor Sergeant

ST JOHN'S MINSTER AND ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, A GUIDED TOUR

If you should receive this Newsletter in time, the Rev Canon Timothy Lipscomb has kindly invited the Association to have a guided tour of both St George's Church and St John's Minster on the afternoon of Wednesday January 11th 2017. This is a fascinating event with lots of new discoveries, and we shall be meeting at St George's for a 2.30pm start. If anyone has mobility problems transport can be arranged between the two churches.

Refreshments will be served after the Minster tour, and a collection will be made for a donation towards church funds. The event should end around 4.30pm and Ladies and Guests will be most welcome. There is ample car parking at the rear of the Minster. If there is time please contact Jim Goring on 01772 615746, 07856 824163 or at jimgormail@btinternet.com

THE 'REMEMBERING THE SOMME' TOUR 2016

Eight intrepid travellers set off before 5am on 30 September on a long coach journey from Preston to Dover, where they were joined by yours truly, who lives in the Soft South, for an intensive visit to the battlefield of the Somme in northern France in the 100th anniversary year of the greatest disaster in the history of the British Army.

Although most of us were aware of the overall figures for casualties – more than 57,000 British killed or wounded in a single day, 1 July 1916, and more than a million troops killed in the entire battle – it was only by standing on the ground on which so many had suffered, and walking quietly around just a few of the 200 cemeteries dotting the rolling landscape, that the dreadful reality struck home. For the Battle of the Somme consisted of a long line of neighbouring battles that all started at 7.30am on that fateful day when the British and their allies advanced out of their trenches towards the German lines. In virtually every case, the consequences were dire. A preceding artillery barrage that had lasted seven days had failed to silence the German guns, and as soon as the British climbed out of their trenches they were cut down in their thousands by murderous machine-gun fire. Time after time we were told by our guide that thousands of men had come down a particular slope on which we were standing, and within minutes most of them were dead, dying or wounded. Although the Somme was peaceful now, ghostly figures carrying guns and barely discernible through the morning mist because of their camouflage clothing, could be glimpsed moving in small groups across the wide open fields that had once been No Man's Land, just as the British troops had done. Shots rang out, and it was slightly unsettling. But these were not, of course, soldiers who had risen from the grave, but local hunters, as it was the start of the regular shooting season.

We began at the village of Gommecourt, where a diversionary attack took place, intended to draw German forces away from the area of the main assault to the south. It followed the same grim pattern that was to become familiar to us. The heavy bombardment had failed to destroy the German defences, as the top brass had believed it would, with the result that the British and allied troops climbed out of their trenches and walked straight into scything machine-gun fire, with the dire consequences that have made the Somme infamous in the history of warfare.

Then, near Serre, another German fortified village, we saw where many of the Pals battalions had fought and died. The Pals battalions were part of the volunteer Army of General Kitchener – he of the "Your Country Needs You" advertisements – and were recruited in specific towns or cities, where battalions of local men enlisted together and fought together. The casualties were so enormous that whole communities were devastated. Among the many memorials to the Pals from nearby towns and cities, we found no reference to the Preston Pals. This was because, firstly, they had a lucky escape, in that they were due to join the battle in the afternoon, by which time it was clear the attack had been a catastrophic failure. Secondly, they were called the "Preston Businessmen and Clerks' Company", and were given the Pals name retrospectively. The Prestonians were attached to the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, and went into action on the Somme on 23 July at Bazentin-le-Petit, where 223 of them were lost in a single advance. We requested a detour to the cemetery at Bazentin-le-Petit to see if we could find any headstones relating to the Preston Pals or the Loyals. In the event, there were no Pals there, and just one Loyal, Lance-Cpl T Davenport, who was killed on 11 August 1916 in a later action. There was one unknown Lancashire Fusilier (date of death not stated). The burial grounds for the Pals/Loyals must be somewhere else. More research is required. A memorial to the "Preston Pals" was erected on Preston Railway Station in recent years.

Two cinematographers covered the Somme, Geoffrey Malins and J B McDowell - no relation to Jim, apparently, despite the almost identical spelling. At one point we stood at the exact spot from which Malins filmed one of the most iconic images of the Somme battle, the dynamiting of the German redoubt at Hawthorn Ridge, which blasted tons of earth thousands of feet into the air – together with between 300 and 700 German defenders – forming a gigantic mushroom. The next day we stared down into the jungly depths of the vast crater caused by the explosion. Another location of Malin's iconic photography was particularly poignant and closer to home. At what has become known as Sunken Lane we stood next to the grassy bank where Malins' film shows a group of 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, bayonets at the ready, chatting and smiling a few minutes before the whistle for the attack blew and they climbed out into the open fields to try to take Beaumont Hamel, another German fortress village located just behind the German front line. This was yet

another calamity, and most of the men seen on the film met their deaths from German machine gun fire within minutes of the footage being shot. A ten-minute time gap between the detonation of the Hawthorn Ridge redoubt and the start of the attack had alerted the Germans that an attack was coming and given their machine-gunners time to get back to their posts. Then we moved on to an even larger crater, Lochnagar, the largest on the Western Front, which looks like it was made by a meteorite and is a major tourist destination. It is there today thanks to the generosity of British businessman Richard Dunning, who prevented it from being filled in, bought it and maintains the site through the charity Friends of Lochnagar.

Everywhere we looked we saw cemeteries, mostly British. Each one consisted of perfectly-formed and perfectly-maintained rows of white-painted stone graves, with the name of the soldier, if known, plus a few details, or, if not, a simple inscription: "Known Unto God". The graves were set among lawns and gardens, facing a large white Cross of Sacrifice and usually a Stone of Remembrance carved with the words: "Their Name Liveth For Evermore", as proposed by Rudyard Kipling. The only exception was the German cemetery at Fricourt, the resting place for more than 17,000 German soldiers, where the atmosphere appeared more foreboding, perhaps because the crosses were all painted black, and it was virtually deserted. Apparently, few Germans visit the Somme, though there were two German-registered cars there at the time of our visit.

By far the biggest and the most shocking cemetery is the Thiepval Memorial, Sir Edwin Lutyens' vast and complex memorial arch, 140 feet high. Built on high ground and visible for miles around it is inscribed with the names over 73,000 British soldiers whose bodies were never found. It was some consolation to those of the group whose ancestors' were among the missing that their names are inscribed on the Thiepval memorial for all to see. Even now, names are erased from time to time when a body is recovered, as happened in 1998 after the body of a British private was found when someone noticed a skeletal finger protruding from the earth near the Lochnagar Crater. But, it was a chastening thought that the remains of over 73,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers still lay beneath the ground on which we trod.

The town of Albert, three miles back from the front line, which was the staging post for hundreds of thousands of British troops, seemed to have turned its back on the Great War. It should be sitting on a gold mine nowadays, given the large numbers of battlefield tourists that trek around the area. But the only gold in sight was the paint on the statue of the Virgin Mary, known as the Golden Virgin, which gleamed in the sun on top of the rebuilt basilica. Down on the ground, not much moved as the town was celebrating a Saint's day, that of Thérèse of the Infant Jesus, and all the shops were shut. In general, apart from the Museum, the town appeared to be taking little advantage of its unique geographical position and association with the Great War. However, the tour organisers, Leger, happened to have hit on an excellent base for us this time. Even though it was next to a motorway intersection with a splendid view of a filling station, the Ibis Styles at Assevillers, near Peronne, proved to be a brilliant hotel, the bar of which was sorely needed, both mentally and physically, after long days contemplating the killing fields.

At the very end, the group came face to face with modern day reality in Europe. At Calais, the coach drove past The Jungle, where thousands of refugees trying to reach the UK are holed up. It looked like a vast Third World slum, and was surrounded by miles of barbed wire fencing. The group saw French police chasing a would-be immigrant across a field in an attempted escape that caused part of the port of Calais to be closed and a lengthy and tedious wait in the coach, which those heading back north could well have done without.

The overall impression was one of sadness, futility and even anger. Yours truly certainly can understand the reaction of the British poet Siegfried Sassoon, who having won the Military Cross for carrying a wounded colleague in from No Man's Land, later threw it into the River Mersey in protest against the Great War and the Somme in particular.

The members of the group were Charlie Billington, Brian Hall, Jim Goring, Jim McDowall, Roger Smithson, Roland Nicholson, Trevor Sergeant, Bob Helm (ex-Hutton Grammar School) and yours truly, Ian Mather.

Ian Mather.

(Ed. Revd Roland Nicholson provided the spiritual guidance, Brian Hall the spiritual capacity)

“Des anciens élèves ‘PGS’ terrorisés par un agriculteur enragé”

On a completely different tack (or should I say “track” as you’ll soon see), with regard to the WW1 Tour, the above words could quite easily have made up the headline in the Courrier Picard (Haute Somme). Further, I’m still not quite sure whether I mean “enragé” or “fou”, if you get my drift.

The Sunday Mail described the type of scene we encountered as the “New Battle of the Somme”.

Near to the village of Serre there are memorials to the Pals Battalions at the Sheffield Memorial Park, as well as four other cemeteries. To reach the site, which is owned by Sheffield City Council and maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, visitors have to use a 200-yard unmade track that runs beside a farmhouse and sugar beet fields owned by Jean Louis Legrand. Apparently he is angry about people driving along the track and then parking, as he is getting no money and believes that anyone who cannot walk up the track should stay at home. At the time we were there it was claimed he was becoming increasingly aggressive, shouting at people, threatening one visitor with a pair of tree-loppers and setting bales of hay on fire to scare away a woman. He had also been seen speeding up and down the narrow track in a van as visitors tried to make their way to the site. The group managed to scatter in time but he then repeated the process in reverse. Yes, this could have been us!

Behind the scenes a skirmish had broken out between the CWGC, The Mayor of Serre (who claims that the track is owned by the Local Council) and the farmer, who believes he’s got every right to go on the attack and set fire to his hay when he wants to. The Tour Guide to be fair, did vaguely mention a few “problems”, but it was still quite a surprise to see a van hurtling towards us at speed, and frankly, we would have been hurt had we not got out of the way rather quickly. The irony was that Jim Goring, who gave a ‘friendly’ tap on the side of the van as he side-stepped it, was not mown down by the ire of the farmer but by the wrath of the Tour Guide!

But perhaps more worryingly, on the approach part of the track, there were three shells by the side. On the way back there were two. Who says that we don’t see life?

Charlie Billington.

POSTSCRIPT TO THE SOMME TOUR

As Ian pointed out in his Somme report, Lochnagar Crater is the largest on the Western front, and really is a sight/site to behold. To describe the experience as “awesome” is an understatement. Somehow it is appropriate that it is owned and maintained by a British man, and we noticed that several improvements had been carried out since our last visit. One of these was a duck-board walkway round the edge of the crater, consisting of individual planks laid side-by-side. For a small fee a plank can be sponsored, and a commemorative plaque is then engraved and fastened to it.

At a recent meeting of the Executive Council, and at the suggestion of members of the party who went to France, it was decided to investigate the possibility of a PGSA plaque in commemoration of those Old Boys who died in the First World War. At the moment the Friends of Lochnagar are insisting that the plaques are for individuals, and we do have Old Boy Clive Whittle (a Preston Pal) who was killed at nearby Bazentin-le-Petit, but I have made the enquiry and I’m waiting for a reply.

Charlie Billington.

OTHER EVENTS

Remembrance Service

Once again the weather was kind for Remembrance Sunday, and numbers were actually up for the PGSA Service. It was good to see one or two Old Boys who hadn't been for a while, and in particular to welcome Jackie Brandwood and her daughter following the death of John less than a year ago.

In greeting the congregation, the Rev Canon Timothy Lipscomb remarked that it was truly amazing that nearly fifty years after the closure of the Grammar School, there was still an Association through which Old Boys could regularly meet up to discuss old times. He continued this theme in his homily by comparing old friends at a funeral, gathering afterwards to swap "Tales from the Kindergarten". It was the sense of people having been together from a very early age, and still being together. It was one thing to make friends in one's 70s and 80s – and people do – but it was something else when you had shared a classroom with others. In this respect PGS had become a "legend in its own time". Not only could old friends celebrate together, they could also come together to commemorate those they had lost, especially in conflict, which is why we were sharing the Remembrance Service. It was important to use the two minutes' silence well, and what was it about those people who are present at Remembrance? What made it so sorrowful? It was the fact that conflicts and death and destruction were still going on. Remembrance was a chance to cherish, as Old Boys, what we had together, and to remember those who had died.

The hymns were sung with gusto, and the Reading from Revelation was by David Swindlehurst. The Kohima Address was perfectly carried out by Jim Goring and Trevor Sergeant, and the congregation returned to their seats for the Blessing in the full knowledge that they had just experienced something special. This 'sharing' was still apparent as the Members and Guests mingled to partake of the excellent buffet that Timothy Lipscomb and his volunteers (including the Organ Scholar, Sam Walmsley) had so generously provided. The Association expresses its gratitude to all concerned for a day to remember in more ways than one.

The Hot Pot Supper

This could only go ahead once we had confirmed that the Fulwood Conservative Club had re-opened following major repair work. Some weeks previously thieves had stolen the lead from the roof just prior to a torrential rainstorm, with the consequence that the roof had collapsed and the Club had been flooded. It was on this account that we had had to postpone the Trench Warfare Presentation, which will now be re-arranged for another date.

As it turned out not only did we have a venue, but more Members and Guests turned up than we had catered for! Still, the food went round without any problem (thanks to Jim Goring's mathematically precise divisions), and everyone had a great time. Des Dobson had come from Rhyll, Derek Wrathall from Keighley, and Alan Jones from Heddon on the Wall, near Newcastle (sorry I didn't get the chance to speak much Alan), all of which almost defined Reg Hesketh (Burton-in-Kendal), Jim Dobson (Ainsdale), Brian McVann (Maghull) and even Jim McDowall (Crosby) as locals! It was really encouraging to see everyone (as ever) getting on so famously.

The highlight of the evening was a presentation by Bob Helm (Guest Speaker at the Annual Dinner), ably heckled by Brian McVann who gave us his own bonus presentation. However, Bob had the last laugh as he walked off with the bottle of whisky, won in a raffle so well organised by Brian Hall and John Dempsey. Others walked off with a piece of wood – why, you might ask? Well, one of the corridor floors had recently been lifted in the old School, and Tony Olivine came up with the idea of cutting some of the boards up and selling them on to bolster Association funds. A stroke of genius and a piece of history in the hand! Added to which, the Association **did** do well out of this and the raffle, so smiles all round (especially from the Treasurer), coupled with the plea to bring some change to the Annual Dinner should you wish to share in such a bonanza/slice of history!

Our thanks go to Jim Goring and all who helped out on the night, and not forgetting Steve Kay and his staff at the Club. An' a reet gud do it war!
Charlie Billington.