

Research undertaken by Mr. G. Chambers – summary of entries in the Stamford Mercury pertaining to WW1. Entry codes pertain to the cumulative data record sheet for the WW1 project eg O3/O9-SMA-GSC-SOC = date of event/source/researcher/category

## Stamford Mercury 1915

07/10-SMA-GSC-OLDHAM W.

On p4 of the paper of 8/01/1915 under the heading, "Stamford Man and Germans Exchange Seasons Greetings. Private W. Oldham whose relatives reside at 8, Bath Row....goes onto describe how he spent Christmas...On Christmas Eve things were generally quiet so we started singing songs and carols as though there was no war on and we were in the trenches for a picnic. The Germans started shouting a happy Christmas to us, and we replied. The Germans were only 150 yards of us in places. One of our chaps went out and met five Germans and exchanged a cake for a bottle of wine, and also photos .....he had about 15 minutes talk and came back quite safely....On Christmas day a good lot of us went out and talked with the Germans in the middle, between the trenches. I had three cigars and a cigarette from them. Most of us were after souvenirs, and some swapped their big jack knives for the German small ones.

We have had Queen Mary's gift dished out. It consists of a pipe, tobacco and cigarettes in a brass box. The cigarette card is a photo of Princess Mary...I had a nice Christmas card from the King and Queen which I will try and keep clean.

Senior Officers were horrified to learn British soldiers were fraternising with the enemy. How much worse it must have been to know it was available for public consumption on the home front!

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***The British army relied on volunteers to boost its numbers but by 1915 the numbers of new recruits was falling. Here was one incentive to encourage more people to join up.***

09/10-SMA-GSC-RECRUIT

Under the title, "Teeth for Recruits" on p4 on 26<sup>th</sup> February " Under a new Order, men who are ineligible for the army owing to bad teeth will now be provided with false sets....Full particulars will be given at any recruiting office."

***By 1915 stalemate on the Western Front had developed and battles were fought with high losses on both sides. Readers would be aware of the dangers and the random nature of survival.***

09/10-SMA-GSC-EDINBOROUGH.B

On p4 of the Mercury of 19<sup>th</sup> March under the title, "Stamford Yeomans Experiences at Neuve Chapelle", Lance Corporal B. Edinborough, Northants Yeomanry wrote in a letter to his parents....our regiment has got out of the trenches after taking part in the battle...but I am sorry to say we lost three officers, two killed and one wounded very badly and in men we have lost more in this "do" than we have before. One of the officers killed was Mr. Brassey's estate agent...The writer mentions a chum named Ward(who was engaged to a Stamford lady) who was killed by a shell. Five of them was at the HQ asleep and they all got blown up....Some of the fellows had marvellous sscapes. One was in the doctors room when a shell burst and blew him up in the air; his tunic was in pieces but he was not scratched...

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**It was not just the men who did their bit..**

09/10-SMA-GSC-WAITE M.

In the Mercury of the 16<sup>th</sup> April, p4 it states, "Miss Margaret Waite,(a neice of Mr. H.B. Waite of the Stamford and County Club) is one of the three English nurses to whom the King of the Belgians recently presented the Order of Leopold for their bravery in attending wounded men in the trenches under shell fire. Miss Waite who is only 22 years old, is a skilful and daring horse-woman."

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05/11-SMA-GSC-BAKER C. and MASON H

#### Two Stamford Territorials Killed in Action

The unfortunate men are Private Cecil Baker, aged 18, son of Mr.Nugent Baker, 17, Adelaide St., and Private Harry Gordon Mason, aged 18, son of Mr. W.H. Mason, a partner in the firm of Messrs. Reedman, Son and Mason, auctioneers, Broad St.....The intelligence concerning Pte. Baker was conveyed to his father from Major O. Cooper in a letter, under date April 11<sup>th</sup>....I deeply regret to inform you that your son was killed in action this afternoon about 2.o'clock. He was hit in the head when doing sentry duty in the trenches and died in a few minutes without gaining consciousness...In the case of Pte. Mason... they first received intimation referring to a casualty in another company..however..a letter from Major Cooper confirmed previous fears. The latter stated that the deceased was shot in the head when on sentry duty and lived about 3 hours but did not regain consciousness.

Sergeant E. Peasgood whose home is 42, St. Paul's St.,writing from Belgium says, "I have to sleep in the daytime as my work is at night..I would like to tell you more, but you will understand when I tell you that I saw poor young Mason brought in and was near him when he died...Poor young boy...It seems so sad. I am still in a stable here, but I am as comfortable as any of them. I have a bedstead made of biscuit boxes and straw...a refugee was telling me how his wife and children were murdered in front of his eyes..another told me of how they fastened him to the ground and fixed a machine gun over his chest...however they could expect to win after such atrocities I do not know for they have not fought fairly..."

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***In the following extracts there are some good descriptions of the conditions the soldiers experienced in and out of the trenches.***

05/11-SMA-GSC-CONDITIONS

#### Stamford Territorials' Experiences .Improvised Hosiery.

(SM 30/4p4) Writing from the front, under date 22<sup>nd</sup> April, one of the Stamford "boys" says, we didn't go into the trenches on Saturday night owing to the attack on Hill 60 (Ypres Salient)...we were standing by all night...we came in on Sunday night and our Company is in reserve this time. We are billeted in various buildings and our platoon is quite comfortable in an ancient cottage. We were turned out at 1.30 on Monday morning...We had a warm 5 minutes crossing some open ground, and then entered a communicating trench, the floor of which consisted of a foot and a half of mud in some places and three and a half feet of water in others...we were in a frightful mess on arrival at the firing line and about half the men didn't arrive at all. I had to throw my socks away and made some more out of a sandbag...We came out at 8 o'clock and I was one of six taken as a stretcher bearing party.. we got back to our cottage about 7 o'clock and had a total rest until 1.30am on Wednesday, as it was not safe to go out of doors during the daytime.

05/11-SMA-GSC-OLDHAM. W.

#### Stamford Soldier at "Buckingham Palace."

In a letter dated April 18<sup>th</sup> to his relatives at 8, Bath Row, Private W. Oldham, who is serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Westminster Rifles says...We have had some grand weather just lately. I am sitting in the sun in my shirt sleeves writing this letter...I do not know why \_\_\_\_\_ is surprised

at our cleanliness. The first thing almost on coming out is to start and clean our things up. Of course we are not in such bad circumstances as we were before Christmas...Even in this trench I have a wash about once a day in a stream, and when at "Bucks Palace" (the name given to part of this trench) there is a pump....

06/11-SMA-GSC-EVANS. A.C.

#### Torture for the Regulars

...Private A.C. Evans, 4<sup>th</sup> Lincs. Regiment, says: Another spell in the trenches has just ended.. We had quite an interesting time marred by the fact that a young officer we thought a lot of, lost his life a mile from the firing line. Except when trenches are under accurate artillery fire, there are spots behind the line that are more dangerous than when close to the enemy...in some places it is very exciting..One experience of ours was distinctly unpleasant-wading for half a mile through a trench hip high in winter slush and water...It was bad enough to wade through, but to have to stand in such a trench for days must have been fearful...

06/11-SMA-GSC-CASUALTIES

#### (SM 21/5p4) Fresh Arrivals of Wounded.

During the past few days nearly 40 more wounded soldiers arrived for treatment..14 have been received at BurghleyHouse...10 more are being cared for at Lady Battie-Wrightsons private hospital at Wothorpe. The wounds of some of these latter are exceedingly bad...one man's arm has been shattered by an explosive bullet.

18/11-SMA-GSC-CUNNINGTON. P.

#### (SM 28/5p4) A Lucky Northants Man. Thrice Wounded but in the Pink.

An interesting letter has been received by his relatives from Private T Cunnington, 16706, 1<sup>st</sup> Northants Regiment (son of Mr. Chas. Cunnington, George Farm, Stamford) who gives a graphic account of his regiments part in the Battle of Aubers Ridge...Though the Northants were very badly cut up, Pte. Cunnington was fortunate enough to escape with three slight flesh wounds. He was at the time of writing in the York County Hospital.. "We were on the left of La Bassee, and one and a half miles to the right of Neuve Chapelle at a village called Richebourg St. Vaast. We relieved the Black Watch..and we had a job to get into position, as they had Maxims(machine guns) and rifles well trained on the Rue De Bois, a road running parallel with our trenches. I think they... expected us as all night they kept sending up rockets, about three yards apart. We got in about 11.00pm and didn't get much sleep, as it was too cold. We all had the order to stand to about 3.00am..After this our guns started and it was just like a violent thunder breaking over; this was continued until about 4.30am. of course they sent us some back. We then had the order to pull down the sacks off the parapet and charge and this we did in fine style. I got on well until about twenty yards from their wire though "bags" of our men had fallen. There was fire from the right and left, as well as the front. We were lying in front of their wire when a piece of heavy shrapnel came under my nose. It didn't touch my face but tore my pouches and equipment, and caught my right hand just on the second finger...About ten minutes after this there was an order to advance, so we got up and were just rushing them when our artillery started..I laid down and a piece of shrapnel fell across my shoulders, but luck again it caught and fell flat on my haversack..so only caused a flesh wound...We could not advance, and didn't take their first trench, so we had to lie until dark at night..about thirteen hours. All day long there was heavy bombardment, and as you laid there you could feel the earth trembling. About 6.00pm at night a bullet went through my bully beef tin and caught me in the shoulder and then turned and caught me on the back of the leg and made a clean cut. As you will read from this I had some narrow shaves and was about the luckiest in the mob...Don't worry, I am in the pink..."

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***As fighting on the Western Front settled into a war of attrition so the demands for volunteers increased at home. Young and old were encouraged to join up and other theatres of war opened up.***

23/11-SMA-GSC-RECRUITS

SM-28/5p4 Lincolns Recruiting March

...Stamford was the last town to be visited by detachments of the 2<sup>nd</sup> /4<sup>th</sup> and 3rd/4<sup>th</sup> Lincolnshire Regiment. The men arrived on Friday about 1.00pm and were met by the combined bands of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> regiments stationed here, who played them by way of High St. and Red Lion Square to Broad St. On entering the latter thoroughfare the Lincs. Regt. struck up the ever popular "Lincolnshire Poacher." The streets were gaily bedecked with bunting...The men were drawn up opposite the Corn Exchange and speeches were delivered from the terrace of Browne's Hospital. The Mayor offered the Lincolns a hearty welcome...and said he was rather diffident in appealing to a Stamford audience for recruits, for their roll of honour contained, he believed, the names of 1300 to 1400 men, some of whom had made the greatest of all sacrifices by giving their lives for their King and country...Captain Phillips (replying) said they had already secured well over 200 recruits...No better men could be found for the army than in an agricultural county...The men were entertained to a substantial repast in the Assembly rooms and ...took their departure on Saturday.

22/11-SMA-GSC-STRINGER

SM4/6p4...Private Stringer whose home is at 21, East Street, where also reside his wife and three children, had seen service previously having been in the 1<sup>st</sup> Bedfords Regiment, but despite his 40years service he volunteered again about nine months ago and was attached to the 3rd Battalion, South Staffs. Regiment...he had taken part in several hot engagements and had emerged unscathed but during the British advance on Festubert..he had sustained a shrapnel wound in his left shoulder. He was now in hospital at Cambridge...the shrapnel has been removed and he is progressing well. On the back of his letter someone unknown had taken the liberty of writing, "god Bless the boy! May the soul of that dirty villain the Kaiser split forever on the rock of damnation."

22/11-SMA-GSC-GREEN S.

SM/11/6p4

Stamford Man Killed at the Dardanelles.

...Able Seaman Joseph Edward Green,...was killed in action while serving on HMS Harpy, now operating in the Dardanelles. Sincere sympathy is felt for his parents, Mr and Mrs Joseph Green of 18, Austin St...A/S Green was 23 years old on the 19<sup>th</sup> January...

22/11-SMA-GSC-RECrUITS

SM/9/7p4

Munitions Volunteers.

For the past week a War Munitions Bureau...has been open at the Town Hall...for the purpose of enrolling skilled workers under the Minister of Munitions new scheme. Locally there has been an excellent response of skilled mechanics comparing most favourably numerically with other towns..

22/11-SMA-GSC-BLANSHARD W.

SM/13/8p4

Recruiting Sergeant Re-enlists

..After being stationed at Stamford since August 15<sup>th</sup> 1914, as officer in charge of the recruiting depot, Walter Blanshard has enlisted in the RFA and left on Thursday morning. By his genial disposition Sgt. Blanshard has, during his time in Stamford, become very popular. That his assiduity to his duties has been appreciated is marked by the fact that on Wednesday morning he was the recipient of a letter from Lord Kitchener in which... he said, "I wish to express to you personally...my best thanks for the energy that has been displayed by you in your recruiting work..." During his stay at the Drill Hall, the sergeant has done remarkably well...440 recruits enrolled in Kitcheners Army, 201 in the Territorials and 200 rejected as medically unfit..

22/11-SMA-GSC-PITT. L.

SM/27/8p4

#### Death of a Grammar School Master.

We regret to announce the sad news that Mr. L.J. Pitt who was chief assistant at the Stamford Grammar School till he joined the army last August, has been killed at the front. He came to the school as science master about 1909, after taking first class honours at the London University...his death is a personal loss to the Rev. J.D. Day (Headmaster)...Mr Pitt joined the Rifle Brigade last August, gained rapid promotion, and was Platoon Sergeant in the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion...It is reported that his battalion was turned out of its trenches by liquid fire, and made a gallant effort to capture the opposing lines of the Germans. The following account ...was sent by an officer of his company to Mr Pitt's father: "He died as only as a gallant soldier and English gentleman can, leading a charge against great odds. He was my platoon sergeant since the battalion was formed, and a better sergeant and friend no one could desire...His place will be hard to fill. Yours very truly, Kenneth Gladstone, Lieutenant."

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#### **Some Stamford families had more than one son to worry about.**

26/11-SMA-GSC-BETTS W.

SM/3/9p4

Mr and Mrs H. Betts of 5, Duncombes Yard, Water St., who have four sons serving with H.M. forces abroad have received a letter from their second son, Private Wilfred Betts who enlisted in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Lincs.Regiment (Kitcheners Army) at the commencement of hostilities and proceeded to the Dardanelles a few weeks ago, in which he states that he has been been struck by five bullets, only one of which inflicted a wound...one bullet struck the peak of his cap, another his bayonet, another the butt end of his rifle, the fourth his water bottle and the other entered his back. He is now in an Egyptian hospital... Pte. Betts who is 29 years old, was a bricklayer before joining the Colours.

26/11-SMA-GSC-HUGHES L.E.

SM/8/10p4

#### More Stamford Soldiers Killed.

...On Sunday morning a letter was received by Mr and Mrs W. Hughes of Elm House in which a stretcher bearer informed them that their youngest son had been wounded while in action with the Stamford Territorials. A letter from the matron of the 20<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, Camiers, in which she stated that Lance Corporal Lewis Edward Hughes was..suffering from gunshot wounds in both legs. It was followed by a telegram..stating he was dangerously wounded and on Tuesday morning the matron wrote again saying it had been necessary to amputate the gallant young fellow's left leg...less than a quarter of an hour afterwards a further telegram was received intimating that he had passed away...Before enlisting L.Cpl. Hughes, an unassuming but popular lad, was a member of staff of Mr E.E. Howes, builder and as a mark of esteem, before he set sail three months ago, his fellow employees presented him with a purse of money and a box of cigarettes. He was 21 years of age...

26/11-SMA-GSC-RILEY H.W.

SM/15/10p4

Anxious to get to the Front.

In order to be able to proceed to the Front, Private Hubert William Riley, aged 23, son of the late Mr F.W. and Mrs Riley of "Rocott" Northfields, a member of the Stamford Territorials, who was found to be suffering from what is known as "hammer-toe" has voluntarily undergone an operation having the middle toe of each foot amputated. He is going on satisfactorily.

26/11-SMA-GSC-GRAY C.S.

SM/22/10p4

Wounded and Missing.

...Captain Charles Shortland Gray, son of Mr and Mrs Charles Gray of St. Mary's Hill is reported wounded and missing. Captain Gray who is only 24 years of age was educated at Oundle School and entered the firm of ironmongers merchants known as Chas. Gray...He was appointed Lieutenant soon after the outbreak of war and was gazetted Captain while at the Front. He was in command of A Company.. and led his unit in a charge on the 13<sup>th</sup> inst... and has been missing since that date.

**(His story continues in the Mercury dated the 5/11p4.)**

Captain Gray Killed.

...Although official intimation had been received that Captain Charles Shortland Gray was missing...all hopes were removed when a letter was received from Colonel Heathcote stating that his body had been recovered. He heroically led his men in a charge on the 13<sup>th</sup> inst., and the fact his body was found in the foremost part of the ground over which his Company had advanced bears out the colonel's tribute to his heroism...News of his death at the early age of 24 came as a tragic blow to his relatives..

26/11-SMA-GSC-LORD KESTEVEN

SM/12/11p4

Lord Kesteven Fatally Wounded.

The sad news reached Stamford on Monday of the death of Lord Kesteven of Casewick Park. His Lordship succeeded to the barony on the death of his uncle, the 2<sup>nd</sup> baron in July last. About six years ago he joined the Lincolnshire .Yeomanry...and was gazetted Captain in October 1914. He had seen service in France...It was only a few weeks ago he was in Stamford prior to leaving for the Eastern theatre of war.

The Late Lord Kesteven. Memorial Service at Uffington. (SM/19/11p4)

An impressive service in memory of the late Lord Kesteven who died at Oran, Algiers on November 5<sup>th</sup> from wounds received through an attack by an enemy submarine of November 3<sup>rd</sup> on the transport Mercian in the Mediterranean, was held in Uffington on Monday afternoon...the Reverend H.F.Ostreham, in the course of his address..said he met a soldiers death before he reached the field of battle..the Reverend gentleman read from a letter from the officer commanding the regiment..he stated that Lord Kesteven was severely wounded by shellfire. He would not however, allow his wounds to be dressed until attention had been given to the other wounded.. "No one could have been more popular and a better second in command I could not possibly had. He died as one would expect a gallant Englishman to die..."

26/11-SMA-GSC-PEASGOOD A.;WATCHORN R.M.;STAPLETON A.

SM/12/11p4

#### Stamford's Third War Decoration.

...Company Sergeant Major A. Peasgood of the Stamford Company ¼ Lincs. Regiment, writing to his wife...announces though he has not received the medal (DCM), he is permitted to wear the ribbon signifying that he is the holder of the distinction...CSM Peasgood...joined the Stamford Corps. When the volunteer system was still in vogue, about fifteen years ago.

Another holder of the same decoration is Sergeant R. M. Watchorn, only surviving son of Mr A. Watchorn of Wakerley, who is well known in Stamford, being until a recent date an assistant to Mr F. Dickinson, Chemist, St. Mary's St.. He enlisted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Welsh RAMC fifteen months ago...At present he is attached to the RFC. The incident for which he was recommended for distinction occurred a far back as last April. A number of wounded being in urgent need of attention and there being no dressings at hand, he volunteered to ride to the dressing station for a supply and was fortunately spared to return safely, though under heavy fire for a considerable distance.

Lieutenant A. Stapleton, is another holder of a decoration gained during the present conflict, he having won the Military Cross...At the time he held the rank of RSM and was subsequently raised to commissioned rank. It's noteworthy that all three of these gallant soldiers were educated at the same school-the Endowed School for Boys, St. Peter's Hill.

26/11-SMA-GSC-BUTLER J.W.

SM/12/11p4

#### Stamford Man's Experiences in the Great Charge.

Writing from Number 3 Convalescent Depot, France where he is recovering from the effects of being partially buried by shell explosion and also gas poisoning, Private J.W. Butler of the Stamford Company ¼ Lincs. Regiment makes the following very interesting remarks...At 12 o' clock(mid-day) anyone would think hell had been let loose, for suddenly a few hundred British guns started throwing "Lloyd George" shells over the German trenches...It seemed every yard of their trench was hit. This continued until 2 o'clock...At about half past one we let go some gas...and it travelled beautifully-one mass of a pretty light brown colour floating over with the breeze like an early morning mist. Well of course we had some of their stuff back. There were whizz-bangs by the dozen, "Jack Johnsons" in smaller numbers, "coal-boxes" in still smaller numbers...we put on our respirators at about ten to two and fixed our bayonets.

Enfiladed by Maxim Fire. We were not the first to go over...you would have laughed to see us scramble over. Off we went at the double about 150 yards. I stopped by a pal who was hit and put him in a shell hole, bandaged his leg for him and told him to crawl back...In doing this I lost my platoon, and found myself among some others in the first line. There we stayed a bit until the artillery lengthened their fuses and played onto their third line. Then off we went...heedless of their maxims on our right and left enfilading us... we came across some dugouts but didn't trouble to look in them-just placed a bomb or two in each...and had the satisfaction of knowing we had "done some in."

Unforgettable Scenes...One German got down on his knees saying, "Mercy, Kamerad"...we took it as an insult to be called a comrade by a German and the chap behind me with his bayonet, finished him off...One German was strapped to a machine gun...He had run out of ammunition and just sat there...I don't know what happened to him.

The Writers Remarkable Escape....It was still light (about quarter past five) and bullets and shells were whizzing about. I heard a shell coming and tried to reach cover...There was a

deuce of an explosion and I was thrown yards and covered...I came round to find I was in a trench and an officer was dropping rum into my mouth...I was carried to a dressing station.

27/11-SMA-GSC-ROLLOFHONOUR

SM/3/12p4

250 Soldiers From One Parish.

The artistic roll of honour containing the names of nearly 250 All Saints parishioners who are serving with the Colours has been executed by Miss Browning, is to be placed in the Church.

27/11-SMA-GSC-ORGANIS

SM/3/12p4

Lady Postman on Duty in Stamford

The staff at the head pot office in Stamford has already been considerably depleted of male members by enlistment and the future holds prospect of further reduction...Four ladies have temporarily been appointed "postmen."