



St Helens Townships Family History Society

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Founder And President-Richard Waring

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Pals Project Update



Oh! What an evening we had on 21st November when we were given a veritable update on the St Helens' Pals Project which is being undertaken to commemorate the World War I centenary anniversary next year, along with some recitals and a sing along!

Peter Harvey commenced the evening with an update on what the project has achieved so far from gathering information through research and public heritage open days held at the Volunteer Hall, home of the Sea Cadets, and Langtree Park to disseminating information to local schools and more poignantly a Remembrance Service. He informed us that the Pals colours went missing and to date have still not been found. To their great credit Peter along with Richard Waring took this important chapter of local history into six of our primary schools where it received such rave reviews from OFSTED that it is now to form part of the primary curriculum.

Richard Waring then continued the presentation with a very enlightening insight into the work of the Pals battalion from its inception at the Theatre Royal in September 1914 to its cease in 1919.

The Pals went over to France in November 1914 and Richard told us of a number of men who were shot by snipers because they did not adhere to the trench discipline they had been instructed in – a lesson that was swiftly learnt. The Pals were largely put to work on roads and digging trenches and Richard described the terrible conditions endured in these trenches. The Pals were involved in the major battles of the war including The Battle of the Somme and the third battle of Ypres at Passchendaele where they lost a lot of men.

Dave Risely concluded the presentation with an intriguing look at Major Alan Treweeke Champion who was an officer in the Pals. He had been personally selected by Lord Derby for the battalion. Dave had managed to secure a two-volume personal diary account from the Lancashire Infantry Regiment Museum which he is still transcribing and which contains some fascinating details of life with the Pals including an entry that describes officers staying at the Fleece Hotel but then moving on to the Raven because of “uncleanliness”!

If you want to know more, the fine details of this very important part of St Helens' local history will be published in a book next year and we applaud those who have dedicated such time and effort to ensure that the St Helens Pals, 11th Bn. South Lancashire Regiment are never forgotten.

As an addendum to this report by **Sue Davies**, **Margaret Crosbie** has carried out some research into the history of the Champion family mentioned above. She has been able to identify “Uncle Fred” mentioned in Major Champion's diary, and has produced a family tree. She has also been able to establish the St Helens connection. This information has been passed to Peter Harvey for inclusion in the Pals project.

MEDIEVAL PILGRIMAGE

On October 17th we enjoyed the company of Tom Hughes, resplendent in his medieval pilgrim's attire, who took us on a fascinating journey of the medieval pilgrim. He started by showing us a 5th century ampulla found on the Wirral which had its origins in Alexandria, Egypt indicating that pilgrimages could be traced back that far. He went on to explain that the practice of pilgrimage, a journey to a holy or spiritual place, was born out of the belief in purgatory, a place between heaven and hell where the soul would need to be cleansed before it might go to heaven. It was calculated that the time that could be spent in purgatory was 40,000 years but this could be reduced by gaining indulgences whilst on earth. Pilgrimage to a holy place was a way to gain indulgences.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was considered to be the holiest place in Christendom and a pilgrimage here would gain a plenary indulgence and, when the time came, would allow you to pass straight to heaven. The second holiest shrine was Rome which would gain 12,000 years, unless you lived in Rome and then it was considered less of a hardship to visit so only gained 3,000 years. The third holiest shrine was Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain which was the shrine to St James and was also a plenary indulgence.

Closer to home, a pilgrimage to St David's shrine in Wales would gain 3,000 years. Every cathedral and abbey had its own saint, which on their feast day would be an attraction for pilgrims. Pilgrims would often visit the holy places of the patron saints of their profession such as St Dunstan, patron Saint of blacksmiths.

Pilgrims could often be identified by their attire which consisted of a wide-brimmed hat, turned back to display the pilgrim badges they had collected.

They would also have a sturdy staff which was not only used to help them walk the difficult roads and ford rivers but also the top was weighted and could be used for protection against would-be thieves or animals.

All pilgrims would need to have permission from their lord of the manor before engaging on a pilgrimage. This was written down on a manuscript along with where they were going and why, some may be looking for salvation or healing or forgiveness for a crime. The script was like a passport and was carefully protected usually in a shoulder bag or 'script' bag. When the pilgrim stopped at churches or religious houses along his way he could show his script and he would be given food, drink and shelter.

Tom went on to tell us about Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in 1387 where a group of pilgrims each tell a tale of their pilgrimage to Canterbury. The Miller was one such pilgrim complete with his bag pipes, which were very popular in England at that time, particularly in Lancashire. He also described the 'Pardoner' priests who sold pardons and relics to pilgrims. Some would have 'pig bones' in a glass jar claiming to be religious relics and at one point there were reported to be four heads of John the Baptist in Europe! There were also some perpetual pilgrims who went by proxy for someone else! These practices began to be questioned by the Lollards who considered them a corruption of church.

It was customary for pilgrims to bring back a souvenir of their journey to a holy shrine so Pilgrim Badges were made, often from pewter, and worn on hats or attached to capes along with a scallop shell as a symbol of St James. As well as 'proof' of having been on the pilgrimage they were also believed to have amuletic properties which could invoke the powers of the saint they represented. Holy shrines had to have candles lit and also sold beeswax offerings for pilgrims to buy.

Our journey with the medieval pilgrim was certainly very enlightening!

Sue Davies



It Took 70 years

It was probably 21st October 1943 When a boy dressed in a navy blue uniform, and wearing a pillbox hat arrived on our doorstep with a tiny yellow envelope in his hand.

My mother instantly identified that the envelope contained a telegram, and that it brought bad news.

My father was in the RAF, serving in India at this time, The news was that he had been killed in an accident.

Our lives were completely torn apart, all thoughts of a better life after the war was over were dashed in that one moment. Mum's dreams of a new beginning, died also; she never recovered from the shock. From that moment on, she devoted her whole being to giving my sister and I the best upbringing she could. She lived another sixty years, and kept her memories of Dad in the forefront of her mind for all of those years.

I tried many times to persuade Mum to travel to India to visit Dad's grave, but she never felt able to face the long journey. When she passed away in 2002, we added an inscription on her headstone, about Dad's resting place in India. Although this served as a permanent reminder, I have always felt that I needed to see his grave myself to finally achieve closure.

I decided to go to India in order to be at the graveside on the 70th Anniversary of my father's death on 29th October 2013. I arranged to take one of my grandsons, Martin to act as my "minder".

We left Manchester on Qatar Airlines on 19th October arriving in Delhi 13 hours later at 8:00 am on the morning of Sunday 20th October. After a shower and a change of clothes, we met our driver Sodhi and our Sikh guide. We set off through the chaos of the Delhi traffic, dodging rickshaws, tuk tuks, motor bikes, cars, vans, trucks and buses. An hour and a half later having covered 7 miles, and collecting flowers from a roadside seller, we arrived at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery.

Aided by the map in our cemetery guide book, Dad's grave was easy to find. And as with all war graves cemeteries this one is kept in immaculate condition. There are just 1100 graves, looked after by one very humble Indian gentleman, who was very proud of his domain. He brought us the grave record book, but although it was beautifully written in Hindi Sanskrit, even our Sikh guide was unable to find Dad's name. I stood for some time looking at the so familiar name and felt so close to him, even after 70years the memory of him is still powerful.

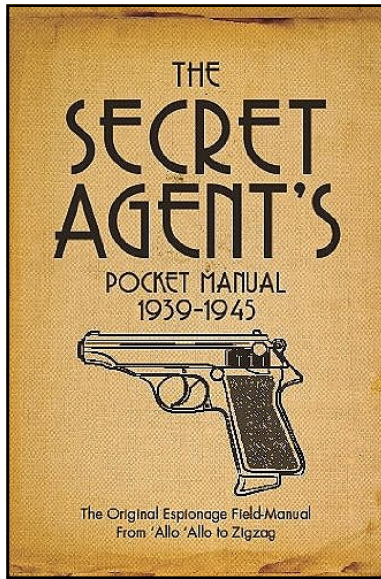
I had taken with me a small ceramic plaque with an image of the last photograph taken of Dad in his RAF uniform, this I glued to the gravestone. I have not seen another attached to a war grave, I hope the War Graves Commission approve. Although whatever they think, I won't be back to apologise. Our final act at the cemetery was to sign the visitors book, the last entry was in July 2013. As we left the cemetery I felt at peace and content that I had achieved closure.

Our Indian adventure continued for two more weeks, covering many bumpy miles, safely thanks to our faithful driver Sodhi, whose recipe for driving in India is **"A good horn, good brakes and good luck"**

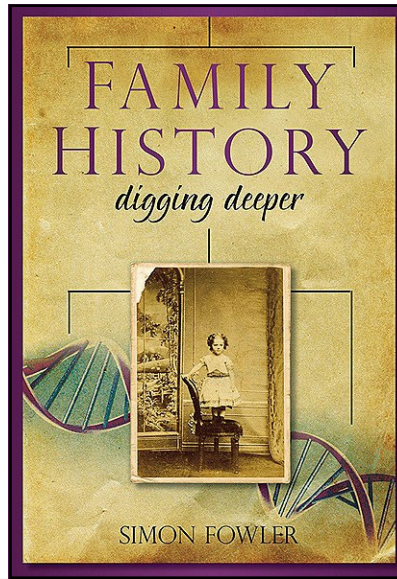
Peter and Martin Crossie



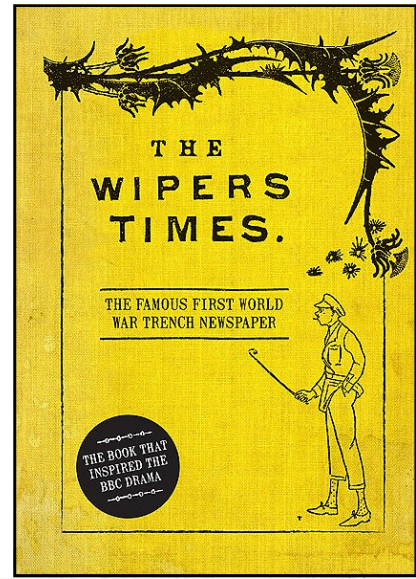
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You might also like to try my recipe for Christmas cheer

Peter's Party Punch

- 4 Lts Dry still Cider
- 2 Lts Unsweetened Orange Juice
- 300 ml Cointreau
- 250 gs Demerara Sugar
- 2 Sticks of Cinnamon
- 12 Cloves
- 2 Oranges



**Put Cider, Orange Juice, Cointreau, and Sugar in a large pan and warm slowly till all the sugar is dissolved.
Add the Cinnamon sticks**

Press the cloves into one of the oranges and float in the punch

Just before serving add the other orange, sliced Cheers!

On behalf of the President and the committee of the St Helens Townships Family History Society

I wish you all A Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year