



# Battledress Times

The General Newsletter of the Herts at War Project

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## In this newsletter you will find:

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As we are nearly at Christmas and the end of the year, I would like to start this newsletter by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year.

I would also like to thank all our supporters. All of you who follow the Project, who attend our talks, but especially our members who continue to renew each year. We thank all of you for your support. I hope everyone understands our costs.



Our annual costs are usually low and are supported by memberships, any profits we can make from talks and events, plus the occasional online donation. These costs include things like:

- Website and email hosting and essential maintenance.
- Some essential software.
- Expenditure (usually temporary) in advance of events such as tours and talks.

There are general costs, e.g. hall hire, speakers and refreshments for our Talks, which we need the related donations to meet.

Occasionally we also have larger costs for website or database development or for when we must move to updated platforms to keep the database live. We hope these can be met by the reserves that we try to build.

You can support us, and please do, by any combination of the following:

- taking an interest in the Project and attending our talks
- making a donation at the talks. We suggest £5 each or what you can afford – *which seems reasonable for an hour and a half of interesting subject matter and a drink.*
- becoming a member via: [www.hertsatwar.co.uk/members](http://www.hertsatwar.co.uk/members).
- making a donation (of any amount) via [www.hertsatwar.co.uk/help-us/donate](http://www.hertsatwar.co.uk/help-us/donate).

## Our Talks

I hope that we all appreciate the efforts of Paul Johnson, and his team, if so please support them and us by attending on the third Thursday each month. Paul his working hard to establish the 2025 programme, so far these are the talks booked:

- 19-Dec-24 - Peter Hart & Gary Bain - "Laugh or Fly - The Air War"
- 16-Jan-25 - Paul Johnson - "Behind The Wire - The Life & Times of Captain John Blomfield Dixon - A Hertfordshire POW in WW2"
- 20-Feb-25 - Roy Larkin - "London Omnibuses on the Western Front"
- 20-Mar-25 - Dr Richard Marks - "Iron Dragons: British Tanks in the First World War"
- 17 July 25 - Chris Leworthy - "Disaster and Bravery At Dieppe - 19 August 1942"

As always the latest details appear at [www.hertsatwar.co.uk/events](http://www.hertsatwar.co.uk/events) as soon as they are available.





## Battlefield Tour News

I am pleased to say that our tour planned in conjunction with our friends at the Herts Constabulary Great War Society in September 2025 was filled quickly. However, it is still possible to add a name or two to the waiting list in case of drop outs (email [jontywild@hertsatwar.co.uk](mailto:jontywild@hertsatwar.co.uk)). I am particularly looking forward to this one because I really like Ypres, and it is a while since I last stopped there, but also because I have friends going who have a relative buried in Ypres Reservoir Cemetery. They do not think any family member has ever visited the grave, so I am looking forward to taking them to that cemetery to visit his headstone. Mind you it still seems such a long way off, so I may have to pop over in the Spring for another battlefield 'fix'! Suggestions for the next tour are welcomed.



## Special Call Outs and Achievements

During research we sometimes find errors in the Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWGC) information. The following are examples, corrected after we supplied relevant evidence. I would like to add that the CWGC are always grateful to receive corrections – as are we!:

- For Private 38860 John Farr the number should be 33860. The CWGC have said: "From the evidence you have provided and further research, we can confirm that Private Farr's service number has been amended and a new headstone requested. As the documentation you sent us showed his forename, we have also added this to his record."
- Thanks to Stuart Osborne, Private Mark Gurney MM (Wigginton), who was not included in the CWGC database, has now been added and will also appear on the Addenda panel on the Tyne Cot Memorial.
- Also thanks to Stuart: For Corporal 415701 Henry Green, the CWGC have corrected his service number to 4/5701.

We have a backlog of these to deal with, so if anyone with research ability would be interested in liaising with the CWGC, please volunteer.

The following is fairly typical of messages that we receive and which we rarely advertise: "*A big thank you for your email and for updating your Herts at War website with Fred's biography, I and my family fully appreciate your efforts in keeping the names and the stories of the fallen alive for future generations to come.*"

## Research News & Stats (all numbers approximate)

I am never sure how much interest there is in these reports for our 'average' audience, i.e. those not actively involved in research (and perhaps even them!). What I will say is that, for me, the commemoration of these men and women is the most important aspect of the Herts At War Project.

Here I also normally thank all our volunteers who do this, and indeed I certainly do, but I have a renewed respect for their efforts. Most of the time my role is to help 'sense check' what they submit and add it to the website, or add photographs and information emailed in by relatives, or found in newspaper articles etc, and even I lose sight of how far we have come in the last decade. However, it has been a while since I undertook research in the volume our researchers often do. Recently though, I have been revisiting Hitchin again – something I promised David Baines I would do occasionally, after he gave me his research. His was an





exceptional effort, because it was done before the availability of data online that we enjoy today. Frankly, I had forgotten how much work is involved for the larger locations (e.g. Hitchin has over 500 men). Mind you I had not forgotten how much pleasure and sense of achievement it gives as you find and add information to their biographies - especially those that prove difficult.

In terms of overall progress, we are generally beyond discovering 'new' names and are now researching those with little information or adding to what is there. So the total for war dead hovers around 12,725 as a few new names are added and some are removed through combining duplications. What is impressive - to me at least - is the number of biographies that we have created or added information to, since July 2024. As a team we have done that to 787 biographies – some 16% of the total.

I am still trying to establish a reliable way of reporting the quality of the biographies we have – we grade them as 0 to 5 – 0 being 'not yet positively identified' to 5 being 'very extensively researched' – usually for a book or a family history. One and twos are okay, but we want all 'our' men and women to have biographies of at least 3 or 4. Readers may remember that, after a database glitch, we lost most of the gradings, so slowly but surely I have been adding them again, usually after a biography has been edited and 6,069 have now been graded. I suspect that these are probably representative of the total (we'll see) and so they are currently: grade 0 - 5%, 1 – 32%, 2 – 9%, 3 - 13%, 4 -40% and 5 – 1%.

We always welcome research help – whether it be to look at a few names or many, please get in touch. As an example it would often be relatively easy to add a grades to 1, 2 and 3 with targeted research such as:

- Headstone inscriptions - available using free online access.
- Adding newspaper information, from image copies, or
- by adding census information using Ancestry or FindMyPast.

### Top Tips

After a bit of a gap, I have started listening (again) to the BattleGuide podcasts for the Great War and Second World War, known respectively as "Not All Quiet On The Western Front" with Dan Hill and Dr Spencer Jones and "Both Sides Of The Wire" with Jesse Alexander and Prof. Matthias Strohn. Frankly, I had forgotten how good, interesting and informative they are. They can be found on YouTube (and other podcast channels) or via [www.battleguide.co.uk/shows](http://www.battleguide.co.uk/shows).



**This Image was scanned in 2004 from a village scrapbook and was from contemporary Christmas Card and, as I have only just realised, is the same as a full sized version on the wall of my study!**

*Jonty Wild*