

Notes from Local Interest Group Meeting 29th November 2018

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Wendy and Dainis Ozols (DO), Amanda and Phillip Jones, John Price (Rhosgoch), Cherry and Victor Williams, Roy Lloyd, Grace Davies, Margaret and John Price (Hay), Edwina Griffiths, Tim Francis, Jenny Francis, Carole Gibbs, Neville Harley, Colin and Heather Pink, Deri Jones, Sue Farmer, Richard Thomas.

Apologies: Avryl Lloyd, Evelyn Bally, Richard Harris, Joan Lloyd, Pauline & Peter Spode.

ML welcomed everyone and explained that the focus of the evening was WWI and the local men who went off to fight. She explained that she had produced a display (on boards at the back of the hall) and thanked the following people for the help they had given in providing information during its preparation: Edwina Griffiths, Margaret Evans, Diana Lloyd, Ruby Bagley, Helen Prosser, Joan Lloyd, Peggy Lloyd, Carole Gibbs, John Meredith, John Price (Rhosgoch), John Price (Hay), Cherry Williams, Tom Nicholls, Rob Tyler, Billy Bridgewater, Bill Morris, Rosie Lloyd and Mike Ricketts Hein from Maesyronnen. She also thanked Dainis Ozols, who has researched the men from Crickadarn, Bryngwyn and Llandeilo Graban who were killed. He has put together some documentation for people to peruse.

She then went on to introduce the speaker for the evening, Phillip Jones from the Radnorshire Museum in Llandrindod Wells, and his wife, Amanda.

Radnorshire Remembers, with particular reference to men from our local area.

Phillip began by explaining the background to his interest in this topic, which culminated in his putting together an exhibition, "Radnorshire Remembers", to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1. The exhibition opened on 3rd November at the Museum in Llandrindod Wells; it runs until 31st January 2019.

By the time the exhibition opened, Phillip already had 531 names on his list of Radnorshire men who had gone off to fight and he had written up the "stories" for many of these. This was proving to be a much larger project than he had anticipated.

Although his talk would deal primarily with the men from our local area who were killed in the war, Phillip firstly took us through some background information. He explained that, as Radnorshire was a mainly rural county, prior to WW1 joining the military was not a natural choice for ordinary young men and many were content with being employed on the land. However, by August and September of 1914, a "rush of patriotic fervour" led to thousands enlisting to do their bit for King and country. At the time, there was no TV and so people got their information from newspapers, by word of mouth or from the many propaganda posters that started to appear. These encouraged young men to enlist to do their bit, especially since (they were told) the war was likely to be over by Christmas. The Territorial Army men were the first to be mobilised, but in 1914 and 1915 men who were not already in the army were not compelled to join up.

The Derby Scheme of late 1915 was a last-ditch attempt to get men to enlist voluntarily; men were no longer enlisting in adequate numbers because the War had gone on much longer than had been expected and almost everyone knew someone who had been killed or injured, and so this put many off. In simple terms, this scheme meant that those who declared that they were willing to join up would be put into a group according to age and circumstances. Basically, if you were young and single you would be called up first and, as the army needed more men, then the older men and

those with families would be enlisted. This scheme was not wholly successful – many men got married simply to get themselves further down the list!

By January 1916, there were still not enough men joining up and so conscription was introduced. This meant that, unless you had a very good reason not to enlist, you were automatically signed up to the army. Local tribunals heard the cases of those who wished to earn an exemption. Since Radnorshire was a predominantly farming area, many of the appeals that were lodged were on agricultural grounds – the young men were needed to keep the farms running and to maintain food production. This is the reason why some communities within Radnorshire, including our local parishes, lost so few men in WW1.

The first man from Radnorshire to be killed in WW1 was Walter de Winton from the Maesllwch estate. He had joined the army prior to the war as a 2nd Lt in the Coldstream Guards; this was not an unusual choice for the sons of the landed gentry at the time. Walter had gone to France with the British Expeditionary Force in August 1914; he was killed one month later, on 6th September 1914. As the only son and heir of the de Winton family, his death meant that there was no-one to manage the estate and, after the war (in 1918), the estate was sold off. (ML interjected at this point to remind us that many of our local families benefited from this because a lot of the local farms used to be part of the Maesllwch estate, eg Pendre Farm, Castle Farm & New House Farm all bought by their tenants). A similar fate would befall the Baskerville family from Clyro when Ralph Hopton Baskerville was also killed.

Phillip showed us a photograph of the Llandeilo Graban war memorial, which can be found in St Teilo's Church. Such memorials can give useful information, but they are not always accurate. He told us the story of one of the men named, David John Pugh, who is listed as "also served", which implies that he came home from the war. This is in fact not true and, after a great deal of complicated research, Phillip discovered that he had been killed. He had eventually found information about David in a battalion war diary. These diaries are extremely useful sources of information and they are available from the National Archives (for a small fee); most regiments had them. David had attained the rank of Corporal in the 2nd Bn of the Welsh Regiment, but the war diary showed that he was actually attached to a Trench Mortar Battery. Phillip showed us a photograph of the type of weapon that David would have been using. The Commonwealth War Graves website told him that David had died on 27th May 1918 and so Phillip examined the diary to see whether he could ascertain the cause of his death. An entry on that date clearly states that David, and a fellow soldier called Thomas Turner, were killed when one of the rounds from the mortar they were firing exploded prematurely. David Pugh was buried in Cambrin Cemetery close to where he died.

Phillip then showed us a picture of the gun on top of the Garth and reminded us that it had been bought by Nessa Williams Vaughan as a memorial to her brother, John Christopher Arthur William Vaughan, who died in WW1; she had also intended it as a memorial to all of the soldiers from the local area who had died in the conflict. John was born on 23rd July 1891 and had been educated at Eton and Oxford. Because he had broken a leg in a car accident in summer 1914, he did not join up until early 1915, when he gained a commission in the South Wales Borderers (Breconshire Bn), which was a reserve training battalion. He arrived in France in early June 1916 as part of the Machine Gun Corps. Having investigated the relevant war diary, Phillip found out that John had been involved in the fighting around High Wood, part of the Somme offensive. This was a pretty grim place to be and the men were constantly on the move, often at very short notice. John was in command of a small machine gun section when an attack on High Wood began at 5am, on 15th July. The section was heavily shelled and casualties in John's section were high, but he led his remaining

men to another part of the wood. At 9am, the only other officer in his section was wounded and evacuated and John and Pt Snow kept the gun firing at the enemy. At 2.30pm, a shell exploded nearby, injuring them both in the face and so they moved the gun to another position. By 8pm that evening, it is recorded that Pt Snow had been found injured and that John was already dead; the precise time of his death is not known. John was buried in France initially and his original grave cross is now located in Llandeilo Graban church. However, it is not known where his final resting place is located; his body may have been moved to another cemetery. Many bodies were relocated as a result of shelling of their original resting places or simply because of a desire to have graves concentrated together for ease of maintenance. His name is inscribed on the Thiepval memorial for those who died in the Battle of the Somme and for whom there is no known grave.

John Charles Chetwynd is one of those named on the memorial in Llandeilo Graban church (along with his three brothers). Phillip told us that he was the son of Edward and Sarah Chetwynd; Edward was the schoolmaster at Llandeilo Graban school. It was only John who was killed in the war, his three brothers all returned home. When he was 18 years old, in May 1909, John had enlisted in Worcester. He was quite bright and was soon promoted, eventually reaching the rank of Lance Sergeant, before the war had started. Within weeks of the start of hostilities, he was in France, serving with the Yorks and Lancs Regiment, landing on 9th September 1914. By 25th September, following a court martial for misconduct, he had been demoted to Corporal. In late October/early November, John had been wounded and sent home to recuperate. In April 1915, he rejoined his unit and eventually arrived back in Europe on 1st May 1915. His regiment was in a poor state and billeted in huts near Zonnebeke, right in the middle of the 2nd Battle of Ypres (22nd April – 25th May 1915). He spent his first five days back in the chaos caused by German attacks (including the use of gas); they had all but taken the town of Zonnebeke and British communications had been cut. Things eventually quietened down by 7th May, although there were still bursts of enemy artillery, and it was on this date that John was found to be missing and listed as a prisoner of war. However, he was never found and he was listed as having died, his date of death being fixed as May 8th 1915.

George Grubb is the last man listed as having died on the Llandeilo Graban memorial. His was a complex family background and Phillip has not quite finished writing up his history yet. George was a wagoner by trade and lived in Llandeilo Graban, working a route between there and Erwood. He met and fell in love with Margaret Ellen Jones of Cwrt y Cribin, near Erwood. When conscription was introduced in 1916, George had to enlist, but he knew by that time that Margaret was pregnant. Their baby girl (Harriet Grace) was born on 21st August 1916 and, on 23rd September, George and Margaret were married in Hay on Wye. Six months later, his call-up papers arrived and George joined the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, arriving at their depot on 1st March 1917. In his initial medical, he was found to be suffering from influenza and viral laryngitis and he was sent to a military hospital in Pembroke Dock. By 6th June, he was deemed fit enough to resume training and he was eventually posted overseas on 19th October 1917, arriving in Rouen in France on 25th October, and joining the 16th Bn Cheshire Regiment. The regiment was disbanded on 6th February 1918 and George was transferred to Number 12 Entrenching Battalion. These battalions were pools of men, some with special skills, who could be sent to where they were needed. On 21st March, his battalion were in Frieres Wood, near La Fasanderie, where they were engaged in mending the barbed wire and fixing posts. That evening, they were sent forward to man posts along the canal where the Royal Engineers were preparing to blow up the bridges to slow the Germans down. By the early hours of 23rd March, the battalion was overrun by the enemy, they suffered heavy casualties and many were taken prisoner. Ten officers and around 300 men were lost and the battalion was left in disarray; the war diary was lost and what is known of the events comes from notes written in 1925 by one of the Commanding Officers. On 24th March, George Grubb was listed as missing and

eventually his death was recorded as that date (for official purposes). Margaret was left with a small baby and, because Harriet had been born "out of wedlock", the military would not automatically pay out George's remaining salary or issue his medals, etc, without proof of kinship. Margaret had to testify before a judge that Harriet was George's daughter and she did eventually receive what was rightfully hers. George's name is recorded on the Pozieres memorial.

Phillip told us that when he was in Belgium this summer (2018) doing research for his project, he had found, in Brandhoek Cemetery, two Radnorshire men who had been buried side by side. They were Charles Bradley from Llandrindod Wells and David Watkins from Bryngwyn. This was quite a coincidence; there is no evidence that the men had served together, or that they even knew one another. Also, in the same cemetery, he found the grave of Captain Noel Chavasse who had trained with the Royal Army Medical Corps in Llandrindod. He was the only man in WW1 to be awarded the Victoria Cross twice.

Phillip concluded his talk by showing us a short video that had been made when he and the Mayor of Llandrindod Wells had attended the last post ceremony, which is held at 8pm every evening under the Menin Gate in Ypres, in July 2018. He had laid a wreath for the men of Radnorshire who had died, whilst the mayor had laid one for the men of Llandrindod. The Menin Gate is inscribed with the names of 54,609 men who died in the Ypres Salient and for whom there is no known grave. The gate was unveiled in 1925 and the ceremony began in 1928, the only interruption being during the German occupation in WW2 when the ceremony was held at Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey.

In answer to a question from Richard Thomas about how one can investigate the war record of relatives, Phillip told us that the best places to start are the Find My Past and Ancestry websites. Information can be found in the Military Records section of these sites, but you need to know the name and regiment of the person whose records you are looking for. He said that there is more information about the men who died than there is for those who returned from the war and that it is not an easy task.

ML thanked Phillip for his excellent, interesting and illuminating talk, and also Amanda for assisting with the slide show. She thanked them both for giving so generously of their time to come to talk to us. She encouraged us all to visit the exhibition at the museum in Llandrindod, saying that one visit was probably not enough. She also reminded us to look at the display of information that she and DO had provided at the back of the hall.

The evening concluded, as always, with refreshments kindly made by Edwina Griffiths.