



## Newsletter May 2018

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### **Branch News**

#### **Our Last Meeting**

**Saturday 14th April**

#### **Edwin Waugh**

Speaker : Sid Calderbank

Sid is President of the Lancashire Authors' Association, Chairman of the Edwin Waugh Dialect Society and a member of The Lancashire Society.

Edwin Waugh was born on 29th January 1817 in Rochdale. On the bicentennial of his birth Sid led a celebration of Waugh's life at Rochdale Town Hall. Today's talk, with extracts of poems, stories and a song, was an abridged version of that event.

Waugh or Ned, as he was known, was only 9 when his father died plunging the family into poverty. However his mother didn't send him to work in the factory but instead she saw that he was educated and then secured an apprenticeship for him with a printer which put him into the company of literary men. Eventually he became a printer himself and a bit later became Assistant Secretary of The Lancashire Public Schools Organisation (which provided education for the masses). This gave him the flexibility to write so he started to experiment with the Lancashire dialect by trying to set down on paper how to pronounce the words.

In 1856 he wrote the poem which made him famous, "Come Whoam To Thi Childer An' Me." Sid recited this to us. The poem went viral at the time and was published in various forms as well as being sung in the musical halls. The poem crossed the class divide and the gentry became interested in his work.

After this he began to produce his works in different forms to suit his various audiences. Sid showed us some of his own collection of Ned's works to illustrate this such as an edition of "Lancashire Songs," which was published as a six penny pocket book, and a bigger book, "Poems and Lancashire Songs" which contained the same songs but published for gentlemen in a more expensive book.

Ned soon became very popular and was known as "the Lancashire Burns." However, like Burns, he was flawed being a heavy drinker and he often retreated to his house near Edenfield to dry out. He also spent time there writing and Waugh's Well, which was constructed in 1866, can be visited in that location. His huge popularity came from the fact that he wrote about the countryside and about what life used to be like for his readers of that time such as his poem "Here's To My Native Land."

He also became known for his stories and, as public readings became a popular pastime for many, he became very well known. His stories lasted a long time for example, "The King and the Volunteer," a humorous tale, had similarities to Stanley Holloway's later recitation - "Sam, Sam, Pick Oop Tha' Musket."

However not everything he wrote was humorous. In the 1860's Lancashire was torn apart by the cotton famine. Ned travelled to Blackburn, Preston and Wigan, supported by the workhouse Guardians, collecting speeches, anecdotes and other information about the conditions of the people during that time. He recorded them all in "Home Life of the Lancashire Factory Folk During the Cotton Famine." He died in 1890 from cancer of the mouth - probably caused by excesses of alcohol and snuff. He is buried at St Paul's Church, Kersall Moor.

It was very good to welcome Sid back to Oldham and we hope it won't be long until he returns.

by Sue Forshaw

## **Our Next Meeting**

**Saturday 12th May**

### **Courage of Cowardice**

A talk by John Fidler looking at the stories of Oldhamers in World War One who were reluctant or who refused to take up arms.

This meeting will start at 2.00 pm in The Lees Suite, Civic Centre, Oldham.

Free to members

Non-members £2.50

Free car parking on Oldham Civic car park for 3 hours but please get a ticket.

For more information see our website.

<http://www.oldham.mlfhs.org.uk>

## **Tracing Your Female Ancestors Blog**

Dorothy Bintley has published a blog on the Manchester Archives + site entitled **Tracing Your Female Ancestors in the Military**. You can read it at

<https://manchesterarchiveplus.wordpress.com/2018/04/22/tracing-your-female-ancestors-in-the-military/>

## **Society News**

### **Saturday 5th May 10.30am: Beginners' Talk - 19th and 20th Century Sources**

The 19th century saw an explosion in the publication of material which can be of considerable value to family historians. In this session John Marsden looks specifically at Newspapers, Trade Directories, Poll Books and Rate Books and examines the information they can provide and suggests where they might be located.

These talks are aimed at people new to family history research or those who simply wish to refresh their knowledge.

This talk will be held in the Performance Space at Manchester Central Library.

The talk is free to members. A fee of £3.00 will be charged to non-members but this is refundable if the individual joins the Society on the day of the talk.

Booking is required.

Please book by Eventbrite on the Society's home page.

### **The Earwaker Prize**

The Society launched the Earwaker Prize in the spring of 1991. The prize, named for a 19<sup>th</sup> century Manchester antiquarian, John Parsons Earwaker, awards a book token to the author of the best article in the four journals published in the previous year.

The judging panel has decided that the winner of the 2017 award is Douglas Hamilton's article entitled Archibald Hamilton 1898-1916: The Highland Cycle Battalion and the Highland Light Infantry. This appeared in volume 53, no. 2 in 2017.

Douglas will not be available to receive his award at the Annual General Meeting later this month, and so it is my pleasure to present a £50 book token to Douglas and pass on the congratulations of the trustees and the judging panel.

by David Muil



### **Explorers and Manchester Hill**

Leslie Turner and I were recently asked to provide some teaching materials for schools to assist them in a creative writing project about the Battle of Manchester Hill on 21st March 1918. These resources be seen on our Explorers website.

<http://www.explorers.mlfhs.org.uk/>

The poems written by the students were displayed in Manchester Central Library. As a result of our contribution we were invited to two events which commemorated the battle.

The first event was on Friday 13th April in Manchester Cathedral and was a mixture of new music, poetry, spoken word and visuals from young musicians and artists, relating the story of Manchester Hill, presented by Brighter Sounds, Manchester Histories and Manchester City Council. It was very moving to listen to the poems and songs written by these emerging artists.

On the Sunday there was a wreath laying ceremony at the Cenotaph followed by a parade by the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment through Manchester then a commemoration service at Manchester Cathedral. It was one hundred years since the first commemoration service was held on April 15th 1918 in memory of the men of the Manchester Regiment killed at Manchester Hill.

The service was conducted by The Very Reverend Rogers Gonender, Dean of Manchester and was sung by the Choir of Manchester Cathedral. The Colours of The Second Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment was accompanied by the Regimental Band playing the Regiment Slow March. Well loved hymns were sung and there were readings from the Bible as well the reading of Wilfred Owen's famous poem "Spring Offensive." Towards the end of the service the Victoria Cross citation of Lieutenant -Colonel Elstob was read to the congregation.



The 79 men of the 16th Manchesters who died on Manchester Hill are listed on the MLFHS website :

[http://www.explorers.mlfhs.org.uk/manchester\\_hill\\_casualties.htm](http://www.explorers.mlfhs.org.uk/manchester_hill_casualties.htm)

## **Those who came from around Oldham were :**

Pt. 39652 Ernest Armitage, 16 Beech St., Oldham

Ernest was born on 22nd March 1891 in Stockport, Cheshire, the only child of Irvin and Eliza Eleanor Armitage (nee Cardwell.) Irvin was a wallpaper designer and by 1911 the family were living in Austerlands where Ernest was a grocer's assistant. By the time he joined up in November 1915 Ernest was living at Beech Street, Oldham.

Pt. 36276 Timothy Curtin [Curtain] 10, Maple St., Oldham

Timothy was born in Earlstown in the third quarter of 1878, the son of Timothy, a tailor, and Mary O'Brine. Sometime after 1881 the family moved to Oldham. By 1911 his father had died and he was listed as the head of the household at 10 Maple Street, Hollinwood. Living with him were his mother Mary, his two brothers, John and Cornelius and his mother's sister Ellen. His occupation was a stove grate fitter.

Cpl. 28248 John Willie Hall, 126 Chapel Rd., Oldham

John was born in Moorside, Oldham in 1889 the son of Joseph Hall, a coal mine hewer and Hannah Mary Wild. His occupation in 1911 was a cotton spinner and he was living at home in Moorside with his parents, two brothers and a sister. In the third quarter of 1917 he married Sarah Ann Chapman at St Thomas Moorside and was living in Hollinwood by the time he was killed.

Pt. 48590 Richard Mills, 75, Shaw Rd., Oldham

Richard, a piecer in a spinning room, was born on 4th February 1886 at Wrigley Yard, Heap Street, and was baptised at St Peter's Oldham, the son of Joseph, a self actor minder, and Catherine (nee Leeming.) After the death of his mother in 1895 his father married Mary Hannah Kershaw in 1899 and by 1901 the family were living in the Waterhead area. In 1911 the family were now living in Shaw Road. His stepmother had also died and the family consisted of Richard's father Joseph, his brother John, his half brother Joseph, his paternal Grandmother Sarah and his aunt Sarah Mills.

Pt 46817 (signaller) Alfred Holt Hopkinson M.M. 396 Manchester Rd Oldham

Alfred was born on 19th June 1893 at 81 Abbey Hill Road the son of Charles, a warehouse man, and Alice (nee Holt). He was baptised on August 22nd 1893 at Glodwick Trinity Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Waterloo Street. His parents had 5 children of whom only 3 were living in 1911 - Alfred, Alice and Samuel. By now

they were living at 491 Manchester Road, Royton. Alfred's occupation was a cotton mule piecer.

Alfred joined up in October 1915. and he was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry in action on 6th January 1918.

His military record contains a desperate letter from his mother Alice dated 31st April 1918 , a month after the battle, asking if there is any news of her son. In another part of the record there is a witness account of another soldier dated 19.3.19 in which this soldier states he was with Alfred in the battle and that he was severely wounded in the head and that he believed he died shortly afterwards.

Pt. 37648 John Wasley Pickering, 52, Cranbrook St., Oldham

John was born on 1st December 1895 in Clayton Bridge, the only child of William, a railway porter and Emma Wasley. He was baptised at the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Droylsden. The family seemed to move around and were living in Blackpool in 1901. However by 1911 John was living with his Aunt Amelia Goulden, his mother's sister, and his five cousins at 51 Roundthorn Road. His occupation at this time was a speed fitter ironworker. .

Pt 302736 Samuel Steel, 3, Joel Place, Oldham

Samuel was born in 1895 in Chadderton, the son of Samuel B Steel, a card room hand, and Hannah Davies. His parents also had a daughter Alice. Samuel's occupation was a spinner in a cotton mill.

On 27th December he married Alice Egerton at St Matthew's Chadderton. Sister Alice was a witness. The couple had two children - Fred, born in 1915 and daughter Elsie born in 1917. Sadly Elsie died a year later, a few months after the death of her father. Alice continued living at 3 Joel Place until she married Frank Barlow in August 1923.

Lance Corporal 29617 William Thompson, M.M., 4, Nova Scotia St., Failsworth

William was born on 15th March 1891 at no 4 Starting Chair off Hollins Road, Hollinwood, the son of Joseph, a coal dealer and Harriet (nee Barber). He was the eldest of 11 children. He was baptised at St Margaret's Hollinwood on April 22nd 1891. By 1911 the family had moved to Failsworth and William had a job as a cotton piecer in one of the mills in that area.

By 1916 William had moved to Newton Heath where he married Emily Greenhouse at All Saints' Church on 9th September. By now he was working as



a stripper and a grinder maintaining the cotton machinery. Their son, Frederick, had been born on 30th August of that year.

William probably joined up around June 1916. He was awarded the Military Medal for his gallant actions on the attack on Zillebeke Bund on 31st July 1917.

All the above men are commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial and at local memorials around Oldham.

See our website for details.

[http://mlfhs.org.uk/data/war\\_memorials.php](http://mlfhs.org.uk/data/war_memorials.php)

If anyone is related to any of the above men I would be very interested to know.

by Sue Forshaw

### **The 16th(S) Battalion, Manchester Regiment at Manchester Hill, 21st March, 1918**

The long list of important battles in WW1 is full of names familiar to most of us ... Mons, Somme, Gallipoli, Passchendaele, Cambrai ... to name just a few; and we've all heard of Gallipoli and Jutland. Even as locals we might be forgiven, for not being aware of the Battle of Manchester Hill, in 1918 (so named because in April 1917 the position had been taken from the enemy, at great cost, by the 2nd Manchesters). However, for the City of Manchester, and at least 79 families, 8 of which came from around Oldham, the centenary, in 2018, has painful significance.

To go back to 1914 ... the 16th(S) Battalion of the Manchester Regiment was one of Kitchener's New Army Battalions. It was the 1st City 'Pals' Battalion and, with the 17th, 18th and 19th Manchester 'Pals', was part of the 1st City Brigade. It was formed in August 1914 and, after training, arrived in France in November 1915, with the Brigade, as part of the 30th Division. By March 1918, the Battalion was no longer comprised of just local men, as the previous two and a half years of active service, in France, had taken a substantial toll on their numbers and was not always brought back to strength with local men.

Putting Manchester Hill into context, for what was to come in 1918, we know that in December 1917, following the October Revolution, Russia agreed a ceasefire with Germany. This enabled Germany to rush back great numbers of soldiers from the Eastern Front and reinforce its army on the Western Front. In early 1918, and aware of this, the Allies expected Germany to make an all-out attack on the Western Front, with the intention of over-running a great part of France

and taking key strategic areas. The Allied Command expected the offensive to be sooner rather than later, and were conscious of the fact that they had to hold on at all costs until American reinforcements could arrive in numbers significant enough to make a difference to the outcome. The German command also knew this and realised that it might be their last chance to gain control of key areas.

To counter the anticipated attack, the greatly overstretched allied line relied on a series of forward positions incorporating strongly defended redoubts, within a defensive area surrounded by a continuous belt of barbed wire and covered by observation posts. The main line of allied defence was about a mile further back and the aim was to break up the attacking wave of enemy troops, and create as much havoc and disorder as possible, before they reached the main allied battle zone.

This attack would become known as the German Spring Offensive, and lasted, on 4 connecting stretches of the Western Front, from March 21st to July 1918. The main areas of attack stretched from the River Somme to the north of Ypres.

From CWGC website : <https://www.cwgc.org/history-and-archives/first-world-war/campaigns/western-front/german-spring-offensive/operation-michael>

*"On 21 March 1918, the German army launched its Spring Offensive with Operation Michael. The Germans massed some 65 divisions and more than 6,600 artillery guns along the 46 mile front from Arras to Le Fère. At first just 26 British divisions were holding the line".*

Initially, the planned offensive was successful, breaking through the allied lines and sweeping into France, although with heavy casualties sustained on both sides.

Over 8,000 British soldiers lost their lives on the first day of the Spring Offensive.

However, the offensive was so successful that it became a victim of its own success as the German army over-reached itself and out-ran its supply lines and necessary reinforcements. The turning point came in August when, with the American reinforcements arriving, the Allies launched a successful counter-offensive, rolling back the German troops until their surrender and the subsequent Armistice in November.

Just days before the anticipated attack, the 16th Manchesters had been given the task of defending Manchester Hill. Just a mile and a half to the east, St Quentin was held by the Germans. I've found no better description of the position than the following two extracts from :



*'Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth Battalions : the Manchester Regiment : 1st City Brigade : A Record of 1914 - 1918', published in 1923.*

*[in St. Quentin] "... the Germans had made a tremendous concentration of guns to support the coming grand attack. Safe in the hollow the vast army of storm troopers waited, for our artillery had been instructed not to shell this large and important French town heavily."*

and

*"... Manchester Hill was a tactical feature of great strength. It was not a high eminence, but rather a bare swelling undulation, commanding an admirable field of fire in every direction. It was backed by the 'Brown Quarry' on its reverse slope which afforded excellent cover and location for dugouts. On either side clearly defined valleys were commanded by machine guns. It was a position naturally strong, and the trace of its trenches, the location of its posts, the organisation of its cross fire and the strength of its wire rendered it, for a clear day, almost impregnable. Mere penetration on a narrow front is of little value to the enemy if the garrison of important tactical localities hold their ground.*

*The principle of defence and depth combined with the system of redoubts on the back area of the Battalion led to very extended areas being given to Battalions to hold, and the sector held by the 16th had a frontage of 2,000 yards and a depth of nearly 2 miles."*

The Battalion was deployed as follows:

'A' Company was on the Right Front.

'B' Company was on the Left Front.

'C' Company, 2 Platoons, in support of the Right Front.

'C' Company, 2 Platoons, in support of the Left Front.

'D' Company with Manchester Hill Redoubt: Battalion H.Q., under the immediate command of the Battalion Commander, Col. Wilfrith Elstob.

Critically, the weather would play a devastating part in the events of that day, the first of the German Spring Offensive. All was quiet during the clear, moonlit night before the attack but, at 6:30am, the Germans began artillery bombardment of the Allied position. Disastrously, by this time, the valleys overlooked by the Manchester Hill machine gun posts, were shrouded in thick morning fog giving the enemy soldiers all the cover they would need. At 7:30 there still appeared to be

no troop movement from the enemy lines and the German shells were landing behind the allied sectors. Just after 8am the bombardment increased, destroying some internal communication telephone lines on the Hill. At 8:30 came the first news that the attack had started ... that 'A' Company HQ, and then 'B' Company HQ, were practically surrounded. The thick fog had given the attackers all the help they needed to approach completely unseen ... but the defenders were not prepared to surrender until all hope was lost ... they could disrupt the German advance even if they couldn't halt it.

At 9am came the news that the soldiers on the left flank of the redoubt were fighting "at close quarters with the enemy", and was repeated again in respect of the right flank. Desperate fighting raged on, as the fog lifted in the late morning, and the enemy could be seen breaking through the line on both sides of the Hill, isolating it, and leaving enough troopers behind to "settle with Manchester Hill."

But the defenders would not capitulate ... led by Col. Elstob, and surrounded, they fought against tremendous odds as every man in the redoubt rallied around the Colonel. He was already the holder of the M.C. and D.S.C. and, despite being injured 3 times, continued to lead them until he was shot, and killed instantly, in the late afternoon. The remnants of the garrison in the redoubt, wounded, exhausted and now leaderless, surrendered.

From : *'Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth Battalions : the Manchester Regiment : 1st City Brigade : A Record of 1914 - 1918'*, published in 1923

*"Though Manchester Redoubt was surrounded in the first wave of the attack (and Lt. Col. Elstob was thus prevented from exerting command over the rest of the Battalion) it held out until late in the afternoon ... Sometime after this (3:20pm) the post fell, overcome by vastly superior forces, supported by guns, brought close up. Of the original garrison of 8 officers and 160 other ranks, only 2 officers and 15 other ranks survived."*

Lt. Col. Elstob was awarded the Victoria Cross, posthumously, in 1919. His body was never recovered and, as with a number of others who fought alongside him and whose bodies were not recovered, he is remembered on the Pozieres Memorial.

by Sheila Goodyear (17245)  
Oldham Historical Research Group  
<http://www.pixnet.co.uk/Oldham-hrg/>

## **Resources and Links**

Manchester Hill Page, as above, with map & diagram, at:

<http://www.pixnet.co.uk/Oldham-hrg/World-War1/manchester-hill/a-narrative.html>

Museum of the Manchester Regiment - The Men Behind the Medals with Wilfrith Elstob's V.C. citation

[http://www.themenbehindthemedals.org.uk/index.asp?page=full&mwsquery=\(%7BPerson%20identity%7D=%7BElstob,%20W%7D\)](http://www.themenbehindthemedals.org.uk/index.asp?page=full&mwsquery=(%7BPerson%20identity%7D=%7BElstob,%20W%7D))

Manchester Hill 21st March 1918

<https://www.themanchesters.org/Manchester%20Hill.htm>

Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth Battalions : the Manchester Regiment : 1st City Brigade : A Record of 1914 - 1918 published in 1923

**Talks by Other Groups** (which are not part of our society)

### **Royton Local History Society**

#### **The Mossley Military Hospital**

A talk by Rita Vaughan at Downey House, Church Street, Royton on **Monday 14th May** at 7.30pm.

### **Saddleworth Historical Society**

#### **The Church at the Park Gate: the Anglican Industrial Squirearchy in Victorian Manchester**

An illustrated presentation given by Dr Meriel Boyd at Saddleworth Museum on **Wednesday 9th May** at 7.30pm.

All welcome but a charge of £3.00 on the night for non-members. Refreshments available.

### **Oldham Historical Research Group**

#### **Sarah Hallam: An Oldham-born nurse who went to Belgium in 1914**

A talk by Dorothy Bintley at Oldham Local Studies and Archives on **Wednesday 16th May** at 7.00pm.

### **Moorside and District Historical Society**

#### **Miscellany**

Update on previous meetings with new information and latest local news

#### **Ada Kay - A First World War 1 Nurse.**

At St Thomas' Church Hall Lounge, Moorside on **Monday 21st May** at 7.30pm.

**Written and edited by Sue Forshaw.** Assisted editing by Irene Whitby