

Meeting notes for BMS 3rd November, 2022.

'Bablake's Last Casualty' by Martin Harrison.

President invited Martin to give his talk and thanked him for agreeing to do this at short notice.

Martin introduced his talk which he had originally planned for the month of November and felt it entirely appropriate for it to have been moved from July.

Martin quoted the oft-repeated John Tamplin quote 'Research never ends'. Speaking as a generalisation, he felt strongly about the important role of collectors as custodians and often active researchers of medals in contrast maybe with 'passive' guardianship of museums. He emphasised this about the awards featured in tonight's presentation.

The group had been purchased in 2010 and consisted of a simple WWI pair and Death Plaque to a Reginald Thomas Beaufoy. **[see photographs below]**



There was no photo or details of the recipient but there was one photo of his sister Alice born 1902. Reginald was born 18th September, 1898 in Lockhurst Lane, Coventry to parents Thomas and Lucy Beaufoy. Reginald lived at several Coventry addresses in the north-east of the city. He attended the prestigious Bablake School in Coventry. His family attended the local Methodist Church on Station Street West in Coventry. This Church has now become the 'Bethel New Life Apostolic Church'. Photos of the church were shown.

Quite typically in this era, families stayed fairly close to their 'roots'. Coventry at the time was associated with heavy industry and, later, car building. A map of the area from the 1960's was revealing in that it showed the various works in the locality e.g. Triumph, Dunlop and Courtaulds which are now long gone.

Martin contextualised the circumstances of the origins of WWI focussing on the ill-advised visit of Archduke Franz Ferdinand to Sarajevo 28th June, 1914. He was able to bring added relevance to this section of the presentation with colourised motion pictures of the Austrian army on parade and a

colourised still of one of the last photos of Franz Ferdinand with his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg. One can only speculate what might have turned out differently had Ferdinand's car taken a different journey or had the chauffeur not stalled the car...

Martin referred to talented comedian and writer Ben Elton's science fiction book 'Time and Time Again' where the main character is sent back from modern times to stop the Great War in 1914 and strongly recommended the book.

Martin briefly touched on the initial sequence of events triggering the start of the war, the countries involved, the various mobilisations of armies, declarations of war and the destruction of four empires as a consequence of the war [the Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires]. He quoted Sir Edward Gray [British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1905-1916] who had famously said on the evening of 3rd August, 1914 'The lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our time.'

At the beginning of the war, Reginald Beaufoy was 16 years old and still too young to enlist. After leaving Bablake School, he worked as a grinder till he was aged 18 years when he enlisted as 57254 Private R. Beaufoy in the Warwickshire Regiment. Transferring to the 1st Battalion Norfolk Regiment, he was given a new number 45073 and entered France in June, 1918.

There followed some images of the front and the injured.

On 4th November, 1918, Beaufoy was involved in the Second Battle of the Sambre on the Western Front which was part of a combined Anglo-French assault on the Condé Canal. The British attacked from the north and the French from the south across a front of some thirty miles towards Mauberge-Mons. The attack was vigorously defended resulting in 1150 casualties just crossing the canal. Amongst the dead was the celebrated war poet 2nd Lieutenant Wilfred Owen MC. Several titles of his works were mentioned including 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' and 'Futility'.

The attack progressed becoming a two mile by fifteen mile salient by 5th November, 1918 with the 1st Norfolks then the Bedfords making progress in the heavy rain. Much detail was given from the regimental War Diaries. Beaufoy had been killed in action [KIA] on 8th November, 1918 near Mauberge. He was just over twenty years old. He was the last Western Front casualty of Bablake School only three days before the Armistice.

Beaufoy is buried at Bachant Community Cemetery in Northern France. There are four Commonwealth War Graves [CWG] servicemen are interred there: Two from 1914 and two from the end of the war. Photos were shown of his headstone [\[see image below\]](#) and inscription which was read out 'The thread of a young life broken but golden memories remain'.



Photos of the graves were shown which, because of different colours of the stones, suggested that maybe these graves had been moved.

Beaufoy features on a commemorative wall plaque to the fallen at Bablake School, Coventry.



Photos above left and right: Bablake School Coventry and Commemorative Wall Plaque at the school with Beaufoy's name.

He is mentioned in a book of the fallen of Coventry but, the city had decided to have no war memorial, instead having a 'cenotaph'.

The Methodist Church which the family attended has now become the 'Bethel New Life Apostolic Church'. Beaufoy's name is on the commemorative wall plaque to the fallen.



Photograph above left: Bethel New Life Apostolic Church [Previously the Methodist Church Station Street West].

Photograph above right: Beaufoy and others on the commemorative wall plaque inside the Church.

In Coventry, those KIA could be commemorated in their 'War Memorial Park' where individual named plaques were placed under trees in memoriam. A local historian had mapped all the trees

and memorial plaques in the park some years ago. With this information, Martin established that, although the tree and stone were there, Beaufoy's plaque had been stolen. It was possible to fund a replacement plaque but the cost in 2010 was a considerable £250. This appeared to be the end of the research... or was it?

It was possible to trace the family on the 1939 census in that Beaufoy's parents and spinster sister Alice were still living in Coventry. Alice, who died in 1990 aged 88 years, had been an ARP in WWII. Quite possibly, she may have qualified for the Defence Medal [DM] though this is unproven.

Moving on to 2021, Martin had been contacted by the Council which had decided, as part of the centenary of the War Memorial Park in September, 2021, to remap the plaques and provide replacements [at the City Council's expense] for those which were missing or damaged. Martin's email correspondence had remained on file from 2011 and he became involved in the process of manufacture, installation and dedication of the replacement plaque for Beaufoy.



Photographs above left and right: Beaufoy's tree and stone with missing and replacement plaques and **photograph below** showing the new plaque in detail.

During the works, Martin was, by chance, able to rescue a box of about eight old and damaged plaques which were otherwise destined to be thrown away! [\[see image of examples below\]](#).



The details of some of these were briefly researched and now discussed.

Gunner Herbert James Collingbourne of the 1/1st Warwick Royal Horse Artillery: He was KIA 4th January, 1916 in France and buried at Longuenesse St Omer Cemetery. He is also commemorated in the London Road Cemetery, Coventry where his name can still be seen on the Post Office's commemorative plaque at the Post Office building in Coventry.

Lance Corporal Sydney James Riley: He was in the 7th Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment. He was KIA 12th October, 1917 and his body never found. He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial.

Bombardier Jack England: He had been a POW of the Japanese 1942 -45 but was KIA 9th April, 1945 as a result of American bombing. In 1952, his widow Mrs Hilda England had remarried to Donats Zelks who died 27th August, 1977 and is also commemorated there next to the plaque of Jack England. The park has other dedications and was not exclusively for war casualties.

In July, 2021, there was a service of rededication of all the plaques in the War Memorial Park which Martin was invited to attend.

A short but emotional service of commemoration and dedication for Reginald Beaufoy KIA Monday 8th November, 1918 was held at the War Memorial Park. Quite fittingly, it was led by the current

Minister of the Bethel New Life Apostolic Church where Beaufoy's name remains commemorated. Those present at tonight's meeting stood for the exhortation and the last post that was played on the video screen. **[Photos below:** From the rededication service for Reginal Beaufoy held 8th November, 2022 at the War Memorial Park, Coventry. Martin Harrison is standing in the centre of the image].



Other summarised discussion:

The CWG has more information for example *on graves which are moved*. Some are recorded as being moved as late as the 1960's. Some are recorded as being *moved more than once*. Possibly, headstones and graves could be moved for reason of easier ground maintenance.

More information or photographs may be from local papers may be available eg the 'Coventry Evening Telegraph' or possibly via the archivist at Bablake School.

The headstones can be marked by heavy rain over time creating soil 'tide' marks. They can sink and need resetting.

One member suggested the names from the recovered plaques should be circulated in case any members actually have the recipient's medals in their collections.

Further medallic contributions:

A medal group to a Cameron Highlander Private James Wood were shown. The medals were a four clasp Queen's South Africa ['QSA'] and WWI trio. He had enlisted on 29th October, 1900 being sent to Gibraltar as part of the 2nd Battalion in March, 1901. In April, 1902, he was posted to South Africa as part of the 1st battalion. Before the peace treaty of Vereeniging was signed 31st May, 1902, he had three state clasps ['Cape Colony', 'Orange Free State' and 'Transvaal'] and 'South Africa 1902' for his Queen's South Africa medal [QSA]. Transferring to the Army reserve in 1904, he was recalled to the colours in early August, 1914 going to France 13th August, 1914. The following month, he sustained

a gunshot wound ['GSW'] to the left leg and was invalided home in December, 1914. He returned to the 1st Battalion in France in late September, 1915 before further injuries by shell fragment and by being gassed in 1st August 1917. Once again he was invalided home being declared unfit for further service on 28th January, 1918.

Although the 1914 Star medal ribbon bar below is shown with rosette [for the 5th Aug-22nd Nov 1914 clasp], Wood although entitled to this clasp had never claimed it. Also, he had three wound stripes and the silver war badge [SWB] which was not shown tonight.



Photo above: Medal group and wound stripes to Private James Wood, Cameron Highlanders – Full details in text above



Pictured above: Naming of James Wood's Great War medal. [with apologies for image quality].

Next up was the WWI casualty trio, scroll [with handwritten adjustment of rank from 'Private' to 'Sergeant'] and plaque in original envelope to 1993 Sergeant Ernest Frederick Bush, Welch Regiment. He was KIA on the Somme 25th January, 1916. The member's grandfather had served on the Somme which had been the main appeal of the items. The medals had arrived with box file crammed with paperwork raising the usual question of what to do with the ephemera which included a mixture of cremation notices, paperwork and unmarked photos. The information about the Bush, photo of the medallic items and recipient photo had been offered to an 'Ancestry' family tree for the Bush family but so far had elicited no response. Also, Bush's nephew Lance Corporal R.J. Sears was KIA in Normandy retrieving a casualty on 10th June, 1944.



Photograph above left: 1914-15 Star Trio to Sergeant E.F.Bush, Welsh Regiment.

Photograph above centre: Photo of Sergeant E.F.Bush.

Photograph above right: Memorial Plaque to Ernest Frederick Bush.

Also shown were a large selection of medals and memorial plaques some of which are shown below.



Pictured above: left to right: Montage of some of the Memorial Plaques on display with close-ups of Memorial Plaques to Charles Finch and to Horace Gray.

Mr President thanked our speaker for a stimulating presentation and for all contributions to the post talk discussion.

The meeting was closed at 21.03hrs.

Typed 17.11-25.11.2022.

Chris Davies.

BMS Secretary.

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Further details on the main talk are available on Martin Harrison's Medal Research Website.

With my usual apologies for any typos, errors and omissions.

