PRIVATE COOPER'S WAR
1918-2018

Stephen Cooper

Arthur's medals and identity disc; and the medallion sent to his widow in 1921

For Arthur's great-great grandsons,
William & Toby
born 2012 and 2014

CONTENTS

1 'BLOWN TO BITS'

Links to the Past

My grandfather Arthur Cooper (b. 1886) was killed on the Western Front, on or around 12 April 1918. I have two letters about him, written to me by my aunt Peg some 40 years ago, when I was young and she was already old.[1] I have no letters written by Arthur himself, nor postcards. Did he write any? The answer may be no, because he was only in France and Flanders a short time, though that would not explain any failure to write home from Norfolk, where he spent some months. Certainly, no letters or postcards have survived; but Paul Fussell's book *The Great War and Modern Memory* makes it clear that I am probably not missing much. All letters and postcards written by the troops were censored; and in *Old Soldiers Never Die* Frank Richards tells how the men were 'not allowed to say what part of the Front [they] were on, or casualties, or the conditions [they] were living in, or the names of the villages or towns [they] were staying in.' In any event the Tommies communicated in clichés, partly because - true to the national stereotype - they were phlegmatic; and partly because there was a widely shared view that it didn't do any good, and certainly didn't cheer the family up, to complain about one's lot.

The letters and postcards that have survived affirm endlessly that the private soldier is either 'in the pink' or 'quite well'; and, even when recording their

[1] I can see now that my aunt's recollection was understandably defective. She thought that her Auntie May had died in 1918 whereas it was 1919. She thought her father volunteered in 1916 or 1917, whereas it was 1915. She thought he was killed in May 1918, whereas it was on 12 April. She thought that the Notts. and Derby Regiment 'might have some connection' with the Sherwood Foresters, whereas the two are one and the same. She thought he might have qualified at one time for 'a stripe'. I know that he *was* promoted to Lance-Corporal, albeit temporarily. She thought he was sent to France, whereas he was sent to the Ypres Salient, which was in Belgium. She thought that the number on his medal had some relevance to the number of soldiers killed: there is no such connection.

impressions in diary form, British officers displayed the same degree of *sang-froid*. One of the contributors to Captain J.C. Dunn's collection of memoirs describes the experience of being under enemy bombardment in Spring 1918 as 'quite unpleasant while it lasted'. He has a birthday soon afterwards, but a colleague tells him not to worry about it, 'since if Fritz attacked, [he] would not have another'.[2]

As I grew up I was given to understand that my parents had met at a dance, around 1935, and that they had been very fond of the cinema, going there and to dances before getting married in 1939; but, once they got a television – for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 – they never went to the cinema again (unless it was for *Moby Dick*, on my tenth birthday), though they did sometimes go to the theatre, and indeed that was where they were the night before my father died, in 1976, of a heart attack.

At home then we were, in 1957, watching Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, and the Hoxton Creeper, on a small black and white television. The Creeper was an apelike man who scared the living daylights out of me, as he shuffled around, muttering animal noises and breaking necks with one snap of his enormous hands. On the other hand Basil Rathbone, as Sherlock Holmes, was everyman's British hero: tall, angular, a jaw like a steel trap, but also brave, intelligent and kind. (No trace or sign of drug addiction that I can remember). Little did I know then that Rathbone was an authentic war hero, called up at the end of 1915, who served as a private with the London Scottish Regiment, before receiving a commission as a lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion of the Liverpool Scottish.

In 1964 the BBC broadcast *The Great War*, in 26-episodes. I was 16 and already knew that History was going to be 'my' subject; and the programme, especially the fruity voice of the main narrator Michael Redgrave, made a deep impression on me. The titles of the various episodes included quotations from the poets Housman and Wilfred Owen, the German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, Georges Clemenceau of France and the American President Woodrow Wilson. The series was much praised for its use of contemporary film-clips and for including interviews with old soldiers of all nations, survivors from the front who would clearly not survive much longer. The latter was a new technique then, but if I remember rightly, A.J.P. Taylor criticised the series as a whole for being unhistorical. The amount of authentic footage of infantry going 'over the top' was so limited that there was an inevitable tendency to show film that was shot in one place as illustrating the action in another.

At some point in the early 1970s, my wife and I – newly married - went to see *Journey's End* by R. C. Sherriff, in the West End. This had first been performed in 1928 but it is still doing good box office now. Set in a dugout in the trenches on the Western Front, the story plays out over four days in March 1918 – precisely when my grandfather was in France, though I didn't realise it at the time. The experience was marred for us by the fact that the principal actor 'dried' for what seemed like

[2] Dunn, 458-9.

several long minutes – though perhaps it was just a few seconds – in the middle of the performance.

Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* was first published in 1975. For Fussell, who was an American cultural historian, the collective experience of the Great War marked 'a seismic shift in aesthetic perception, from a kind of Romanticism that had guided the pre-war generation to much harsher themes which predominated thereafter'. The book was a bestseller and has long been critically acclaimed; but I have come to dislike it, and its influence. It deprecates anyone who took or takes the simple patriotic view that Britain had little choice but to declare war on Germany in August 1914, that in 1918 she and her allies defeated Germany in the field, and that, ultimately, the sacrifice was worthwhile. It takes it as axiomatic that the First World War was 'futile' and 'pointless.' A very common view to take now; but not necessarily the only one.

It seems to me that Fussell - who fought in the Second World War - had a very narrow view of the First. Essentially, like many devotees of literature, he agreed with Siegfried Sassoon, who thought in 1917 that: 'the truth about the war is that it is ruining England and has no good reason for continuing.' (Aldous Huxley wrote at the same time that 'we shall merrily go on [rejecting a compromise peace] till we are on a level with Haiti and Liberia.') It has longed seemed to me that Sassoon was simply wrong. The idea of a compromise peace in 1917 was always a pipedream, because the Germans were having none of it.

Fussell only has time and space for literary works which condemn the war – the works which in his view have 'stood the test of time'. He likes any poetry which is sad and mournful and dislikes anything cheerful or optimistic. He mentions Rupert Brooke, but does not deal with the vast mass of patriotic literature, which may well have appealed to a majority of the troops, if they read much at all; and his book is full of the most appalling generalisations. We are asked to believe that 'the troops felt estranged from everyone back in England'; and that millions of them were alienated from their wives, children, parents and relatives, as well as the from the shirkers, loafers, and war-profiteers.

I simply cannot relate my grandfather's experience to that of the literary figures who feature so large in Paul Fussell's world. Nor can I place my grandmother in that world. I would suggest that, for every British person who ever read a 'war poet', or saw *Oh What A Lovely War* or even watched *Blackadder Goes Forth*, there must have been several more who attended a service of remembrance, or took part in the two-minutes silence on Armistice Day, or visited a cemetery, where the traditional messages were repeated and appreciated: 'their memory hallowed in the land they loved'; 'for God and the King'; 'he died for freedom and for honour'.

Yet there is one part of Fussell's book that echoes in my 'memory' of the Great War. He refers to phrases which passed into the language, in particular 'No Man's Land' – which described the space between the rival trenches on the Western Front. NOMAN'S LAND is the phrase we used as children, in 1950s Liverpool, to describe a narrow strip which lay alongside THE HOCKEY and the R.U.F.C. (the Rugby

Union Football Ground. Next to it ran THE DITCH, which was some kind of minor drain, but which resembled Offa's Dyke in our imagination.

Echoes of a later war become mixed with those of the earlier. There was a gang led by a boy of about my brother's age (about 12?) and he used to wear an old German helmet, brought back by his father during or after the Second World War. The helmet carried with it a good deal of sinister authority and Graham Balfour (I remember his name now) would act as *Obergruppenführer*. As such, he once ordered a working party of us boys to dam The Ditch, where it flowed out of Noman's land, and this we eagerly hastened to do (though with less than Teutonic efficiency). Still, when we had finished, there was no ditch left on one side of the dam, and a considerable body of water on the other.

It was a long summer evening, and it was some time before the Police arrived. When they did, we fled before their advance, like Rommel's *Afrika Korps* before Monty's Desert Rats, while the strategic importance of the ditch for the local drainage system was revealed to an unsuspecting world, or rather to our parents.[3]

Looking back, I suppose Noman's land did resemble the space between the trenches in the earlier of the two World Wars. It did not seem to belong to anyone. It was muddy, and as I have said there was a ditch, sometimes with water in it. There were broken bits of railing, fence, pipe, even barbed wire, strewn about the place; and quite a lot of shit, both canine and human. But it was overgrown. Though many trees and shrubs were broken, this can have been nothing like the Western Front in terms of destruction. And, unlike the real Noman's Land, ours was inhabited, by children who dwelt there in dens. On one occasion, as I was making my intrepid way alone through Noman's land, I was accosted by an older girl. She was sitting inside a bush, which she had made homely with some scraps of fabric and decoration. She invited me inside to taste her wares (and though I have always been a simple Simon in such matters, I think I understood her meaning). Prudish before my time, I declined and went on my innocent way. She was probably about 13 and I around 10.

Blown to Bits

My grandfather was 32 when he was sent to France in March 1918. He was killed in Belgium two weeks later, probably by shellfire. 100 years is beyond the memory of man. Since Harry Patch, 'the last fighting Tommy', died in 2009, we can no longer talk to anyone who fought in the First World War.

When I was a child in the 1950s, we used to have tea at my grandmother's house on Wednesday afternoons. We called her 'Nana' and she was very old and

[3] My elder brother tells me that there were in fact several valiant but unsuccessful attempts to dam the Ditch; and that Graham B was indeed the leader of the commando.

stout with swollen ankles and wrinkled skin, which I shrank from kissing. We had no special name for grandfather, since he had been 'blown to bits', or so they said. Nana's house lay at the top of Hillingdon Road, Liverpool, 15, on the right near Loreburn Road, and there was a cobbler who had a little shop next door and was prepared to talk to my elder brother and I, nails in mouth as he spoke. We wondered how he avoided swallowing them, and I still don't know the answer.

A large photograph of grandfather, Arthur Cooper, hung in the hallway. He had a uniform and a moustache[4], as nearly all men did in those days; and I thought he must have been very old too, like Nana.

The hallway was dark and forbidding. There was a miniature knight in armour, in dark corner, who must have served as a receptacle for umbrellas or hats; but I thought he was some kind of goblin, put there to frighten us when we went to the toilet upstairs. My brother remembers too that there was a picture of a woman dressed in widow's weeds, probably a print of *Andromache in Captivity* by Frederic Leighton. He was probably right. The theme is mourning, and Leighton painted it around 1886 (the year of my grandfather's birth).

I don't recall much of what Nana told us, except that she had been a cyclist in Knutsford before she met Arthur; and she liked us to think that this involved a degree of daring, not because she had been a reckless cyclist, but because female cyclists habitually wore bloomers. (They may not all have been suffragettes, but they could all show a heavily-disguised leg).

Nana met Arthur some years before the maiden voyage of *Titanic*, on a blind date in Knutsford. He was a postman, like his elder brother Mark, who had obtained employment in King Street Post Office, Knutsford. Mark had started courting a girl called Eva Yarwood, and on that occasion he was asked to bring his brother along, because Eva was bringing a friend. The friend was Nana, also known as Margaret Thomas of the Gas House, Gas Street, Knutsford, where her father had some sort of managerial position. (His name was Thomas Thomas).

Arthur and Margaret liked each other immediately. They soon became engaged but the engagement lasted about three years. The couple married in 1909 and had three children, Peggy, Anne and my father, born in 1911, 1913 and 1915.

My parents talked constantly about 'the War', but this meant the Second World War; and it was clear that they did not care much for the Germans or Germany. (My father was delighted when Wilhelm Bungert was beaten by the

[4] When my wife and I visited a trench system in the wood opposite the Ulster Tower near Thiepval on the Somme in March 2013, we were treated to a story about this by a guide, who was himself an Ulsterman. He told it for the benefit of the party of schoolchildren with whom we made the tour. Producing a small comb, he said that every soldier was issued with a large and a small one. He explained that the large comb was for combing the hair, then asked what the small one was for. When there was a hesitation, he remarked that he sometimes received 'some very interesting answers' to this question, before relieving the tension by giving us the answer: it was used for combing the moustache.

Australian John Newcombe, in the Wimbledon final of 1967); but my mother's earliest memory was of the First World War. She remembered that her father came home from work unexpectedly, during the middle of the afternoon. When asked why he was home so early, he said 'the War's over'. My Mum said that both her parents looked very pleased about this. Given that she was born on 5 November 1915, and that the Armistice was declared on 11 November 1918, it does not take a mathematician to work out that she was three at the time.

Grandpa Cooper was not so lucky. They never found his body. He had been 'blown to bits'. That was the phrase used in the family; but I have since learned that 'blown to small bits' is a line from Thomas Hardy's poem *The Hero*; it is also a phrase used in Max Plowman's *A Subaltern on the Somme* (1928) and by Frank Richards in *Old Soldiers Never Die*. In addition, 'blown to fucking bits' appears more than once in the unexpurgated version of Frederic Manning's novel *Her Privates We* (1930); but I have no reason to think that my parents' use of the phrase was derived from literature, or was qualified by an adjective which they would have regarded as obscene.[5]

When my father died in 1976, I inherited two photographs, an identity disc and two medals which had belonged to his father. I think that one of the photographs must have been a smaller version of the picture which hung in Nana's hall, near the fearful knight in Hillingdon Road (except that he has no moustache in the smaller photograph. Does this mean that my memory is faulty, regarding the enlargement?). It shows him wearing the stripe of a lance-corporal, a rank which he held between December 1916 and February 1918, and also a cap badge. When I visited the Regimental Headquarters of the Notts. & Derby Regiment many years later, the regimental Secretary Major Creamer told me that this badge was for some reason 'contrary to regulations'; but I am not sure he was right. (He thought it must have been taken from a helmet and put on the cap, but I doubt it). The other photo showed my grandfather in a large group of men in leotards, on the edge of an indoor swimming pool. The medals seemed unremarkable (though they have an inscription round the rim *- 3380355 pte. A. Cooper, L'pool Regiment*'). The identity disc showed that he had belonged to the Church of England, though I now know that he attended Cheetham Hill Congregational Church in Manchester in 1910. At any rate, he was clearly a Protestant, rather than a Roman Catholic – a distinction which was of some importance in Liverpool, one hundred years ago.

Amongst the other things my father I inherited from Nana there was also a bronze medallion. On one side was Britannia with a lion, and the words *He Died for Freedom and for Honour*, and on the other the words *The Great War for Civilisation.* You can see these medallions in many museums, throughout the length and breadth of Britain. They were reproduced in their hundreds of thousands and sent to the next of kin of every serviceman who was killed, in this case in December 1921, over three years after the end of the War. It was clear that Nana did not think much of

[5] Fussell.

this medallion, since it was still in the envelope it had arrived in, when it was passed to me almost sixty years later. (I had it mounted a few years ago). My mother gave me an explanation for this. She said that that Nana didn't go in for memorials or commemoration, of any kind. In particular, she didn't go to the annual remembrance service on Armistice Day. (She said "I don't need that to remind me of Arthur"). And she never mentioned the First World War in my presence, though my mother also told me that she sometimes referred to the years before 1914 as the time 'before the world went mad'. To judge by my father's attitudes, I think his mother would probably have been one of those who was in favour of hanging the Kaiser, in 1918, or at least of bringing him to trial.

My father had died suddenly, at the age of 60, when I was 28; and that hit me hard; but I had lots of other things to think about, including the arrival of my own first child. I was curious about Arthur's effects – which my mother had no further use for - but not enough to make me look further. I put my grandfather's things in a drawer somewhere, as my grandmother had evidently done; but in 1978 – when my second child was born - my Aunt 'Peg' – full name Amy Margaret, who was Arthur's eldest child sent me all the information she had. She was five years older than my father and would therefore have been about 8 when Arthur was killed. So, unlike my father, she remembered him – indeed I have a photo of them together, outside their house in Liverpool, hand in hand; and she even remembered childish rhymes which he had made up for her and her sister ('Peggy's all eggy, Annie's all jammy').

Peg had long taken an interest in family history – which my mother and father regarded as a sign of eccentricity. She told me that her father had been a very nice man, not in the least 'warlike', in fact very good natured. Nana had apparently been 'amazed' at how easy Arthur was to live with, and *her* mother had claimed 'there was nobody like him'. Peg flattered me by saying that I was like Arthur. More to the point, in terms of what was to turn into the quest, she said her Dad had volunteered for the Army, though he had been in a reserve occupation, saying when he did that 'he could not expect other men to fight for his family'. She also said that part of his training was spent in Norfolk, especially at Sheringham, where he had acted as a swimming instructor, being an excellent swimmer. He had been posted to France only a fortnight before he was reported 'missing, believed killed'. They had held out some hope that he might yet be found, but then some articles came back from France, including his identity disc. I realised that this could only have been found on or near the body (or what was left of it) and was therefore conclusive proof that he would not be coming back.

Arthur Cooper was one casualty amongst hundreds of thousands – in fact around three quarters of a million, in the British Army alone. He was a member of the Infantry, the 'P.B.I' or 'cannon-fodder' which sustained 84% of the casualties on the Western Front, compared with a casualty rate of 1% for the cavalry.[6] No

[6] Corrigan, 114.

surprise, then, that he was killed; but then he was my grandfather. From time to time – usually around Armistice Day – I took his things out of the drawer where I had placed them in 1976 and looked at them, and perhaps even shed a tear; but the idea of studying them did not occur to me for several more years. Then, one day in the 1990s, I was watching a TV programme about people who travelled to France and Flanders, to visit the graves of relatives killed in the two World Wars. Most visits now relate to the Second War, but it struck me that my grandfather could have been one of many, allegedly 'blown to bits' during the First, who nevertheless had some kind of grave or memorial. Perhaps I had been misinformed when I was told as a child that there was nothing to be found or discovered by further enquiry.

I phoned the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Maidenhead, to ask if they knew of a grave for Arthur Cooper. The surname was common, but the remarkably friendly person at the other end of the line asked if I had a number. At first I said no, but he asked me to look more carefully at the things I had and I found it on the identity disc – it was 102375. Almost immediately, he said there was no individual grave but my grandfather's name was on Panel 100 of the Memorial to the Missing at Tyne Cot Cemetery, East of Ypres.

For a fee of £15 the Ministry of Defence supplied me with a copy of his military service record. This was a lucky find, because many of the files had been totally destroyed by German bombing in 1940. As it was, the early part of the file had been destroyed and the rest badly damaged by fire and water; [7] but the Departmental Record Officer summarised what was left, in a letter to me dated 19 October 1990:

Enlisted at Seaforth as number 51134 into the King's Liverpool Regiment and relegated to reserve *10.12.15*
Mobilized *20.6.16*
Joined and posted to Royal Welch Fusiliers (3rd (Reserve) Garrison Battalion) *22.06.16*
Transferred as number 3765 to the Border Regiment, 4th Battalion *26.06.16*
Posted to Provost Battalion *27.06.16*
Appointed Unpaid Lance Corporal *01.12.16*
Transferred as Number 102375 to the 25th King's Liverpool Regiment, Territorial Force *01.01.17*
Appointed Paid Lance Corporal *07.02.17*
Reverted to Private on posting to 7th Reserve Battalion *04.02.18*
Posted to Base Depot *27.03.18*
Posted to 8th Battalion *27.03.18*
Transferred to Notts. and Derby Regiment and posted to 7th Battalion, Sherwood Foresters

[7] On 7 and 8 September 1940 a War Office repository in London was destroyed by the *Luftwaffe*, but some 10 million soldiers' records were salvaged. These have subsequently been divided into the 'burnt' and 'unburnt' records, and transferred to the National Archives: Spencer, 32.

	29.03.18
Reported missing	*12.04.18*
Reported killed in action	*12.04.18*

Overseas Service: British Expeditionary Force, France *27.03.18 to 12.04.18*

Medals awarded: British War Medal, Victory Medal.

The medals are of the kind Robert Graves described in *Goodbye To All That*: 'we were warned that none of us must expect to be recommended for orders or decorations. An ordinary campaigning medal, inscribed with a record of battalion service, should suffice as a reward'. Graves was also informed that decorations for extraordinary valour were kept for professional soldiers, who would find them useful as aids to extra-regimental promotion.[8]

After consulting the City of Derby Museum (who pointed out that Arthur was mentioned in a book entitled *Soldiers Killed in the First World War*) the next step was to visit the Regimental Headquarters in Triumph Road Lenton, Nottingham. There, I was allowed to consult the Roll of Honour, a War Diary of the battalion in which my grandfather had served, and a history of the battalion written by the officers and published in 1921.[9] These works do not name individual private soldiers but they do say where the battalion was at any particular time, and the fighting it was involved in.

Major Creamer had written to me on 12 July 1990 to say that 'Private Cooper… died during the defence of Mount Kemmel in the *Neuve Église* area'; and, by placing the information I gathered in Nottingham, I was able to reconstruct some of his movements in the two short weeks he spent in France and Flanders. I was able to work out that he had been swept up by the German spring offensives of March and April 1918, collectively known as the *Kaiserschlacht*. It struck me very forcefully that although he had joined the Army in December 1915, he had only been sent to the Front in March 1918.

The Germans had decided to launch a massive attack on the B.E.F. and the British sector of the Western Front on 21 March. As a result, the Robin Hood Rifles (the 1/7th battalion of the Notts. and Derby Regiment) came under extreme pressure and had to be reinforced.[10] On 1st April 1918 the Rifles had moved to Road Camp 'St

[8] Graves, 77-8.

[9] *The Robin Hoods, 1/7th, 2/7th & 3/7th Battalions Sherwood Foresters 1914-1918, written by the officers of the battalion, pub. J & H Bell Ltd* (Nottingham 1921). This mentions a memorial in St Mary's Church Nottingham. The names of 65 officers and 928 other ranks engrossed on vellum are deposited in the bronze safe below the memorial. These names ought to include that of Arthur Cooper.

Janter Biezen', 3 miles west of Poperinghe (known to the Tommies as 'Pop'). The Diary confirms

Proven.
1st April 11 pm the Battalion arrived here by train from Aubigny marching the latter place from Hermin and encamped at Road Camp F 25 d 6 3 in huts.

On the journey several drafts totalling about 300 men were picked up, and the next day a further contingent of 400 brought the battalion practically up to strength. The men were mainly from Lancashire and Yorkshire Regiments… there were among them a number of recruits newly arrived in France from the training batallions at home and these young soldiers… were as keen and steady in action as the veterans.

This is confirmed by the Diary

2 April 9 a.m. a draft of 410 NCOs and men arrived and were distributed amongst companies.

Was my grandfather amongst this draft? It is quite likely. He was not so 'young' as to attract attention on that account; but he was certainly newly arrived in France, and he was clearly no veteran, having worked in the Post Office at Liverpool as a sorting clerk.

The Diary records that on 3 April at 3 pm *General Plumer, commanding 2nd Army inspected the 178 Brigade and addressed the officers*. This was Field Marshal Herbert Charles Onslow Plumer, GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE (1857 – 1932), a graduate of Eton and Sandhurst, who had been created Viscount Plumer of Messines because of his overall responsibility for the successful mine attacks there in June 1917. He had been sent to Italy after the disaster at Caporetto in November 1917 and now commanded the British Second Army; and must have seemed a very grand figure indeed to raw recruits from Lancashire. (He was also the model for David Low's Colonel Blimp).

On 7 April my grandfather's battalion went into billets (on isolated farms in no 3 area) at Winnezeele. On the 9th, the operation which the battalion's historian called 'the great German attack' was launched from Bailleul[11] and La Bassée, and the next day the Battalion was rushed up by train to Poperinghe, and marched to Toronto camp to form a reserve at Brandhoek. There they participated in what a

[10] In 1914 there was only one battalion known as 'the Robin Hoods'. During the War, this was expanded to first seventh (1/7th), second seventh (2/7th) and so on; but in January 1918 they were reformed as one battalion.

[11] Bailleul is the origin of the surname Balliol. See J.R. Jones, *History of Balliol College*.

marginal note called 'the defence of Wulveringhem and Mount Kemmel April 12th to 20th 1918'. Both these places are situated a few miles to the South of Ypres, near the French border and Armentières.

When I visited the area in March 2013, I found that St Jan Ter Biezen was to the West of Poperinghe, Brandhoek to the East. They were both tiny hamlets, which explains why the Army had found it necessary to build temporary camps, such as the one at 'Toronto', whose position can still be found on old maps. There must have been thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of men, who found shelter in places this like, under canvas or in huts, as they made their way to the Front. There is an entry in Dunn's *The War the Infantry Knew* for 3 January 1918 which describes 'Toronto East' camp as a 'poor camp'; and there is a description of 'B' Camp in Roberts's history of the 9th Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment

Here the officers and men were accommodated in very comfortable (!) wooden huts, from which Poperinghe, with its shops and cafés, could easily be reached. Attention should be directed to the rigorous sanitary measures which obtained in this Corps, chiefly due to the insistence of the Corps Commander. Great progress had been made in this direction since the beginning of the war. Latrines and ablution places were kept scrupulously clean and tidy. On relief each unit had to obtain a certificate from the relieving unit to the effect that the billets had been left in a clean and sanitary condition. These measures, though rigid, were beneficial and kept down sickness to a large extent.[12]

I am not sure why it was necessary to travel from St Jan Ter Biezen to Poperinghe by train, since it is a no more than a couple of miles, and one would have thought that it would require no more than a brisk march for an hour or two. Perhaps it indicates a sense of urgency, even panic, in the face of the German onslaught; but, more probably, it demonstrates that the Army had been able to construct a very comprehensive network of railways, which enabled it to rush reserves to more or less any point in the Front. It is interesting that in *The War the Infantry Knew*, Dunn recorded both an outward journey from Ypres to St Lawrence Camp, Brandhoek and a return journey three days later, by means of a light railway and in open trucks. Dunn's compilation also tells us that the Germans had a 'splendid flexible light-railway and trolley system to supply every bit of their front.'[13] A.J.P.Taylor thought it was the ability of both sides to transport troops from the reserve to the front by rail, quickly and in large numbers, which explained the prolonged and arduous stalemate on the Western Front between late 1914 and early 1918 - and indeed the defeat of successive Allied and German offensives. The Imperial War Museum in London[14] has photographs of these narrow gauge railways, and I have since discovered that these were built in large numbers in 1917

[12] Dunn, 431; Roberts, 65.

[13] Dunn, 432-3, 476.

[14] Visited in March 2018.

and 1918:

In 1916 it was agreed that the British Army could operate on French standard gauge lines, and in December 1916 there was a further agreement for the British Army to import locomotives and wagons for these lines. The agreement also led to the building and operating in Belgium, Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Somme of military standard gauge railways exclusive to the British Army. An increase in the rate of railway building and upgrading followed, culminating in an enormous effort in 1917 and 1918.[15]

The overall picture is clear. Like hundreds of thousands of others, my grandfather was caught up in a massive German attack on allied and more especially British positions, in March and April 1918. The Germans almost outflanked the Ypres Salient by attacking in overwhelming numbers to the South of it and, on 11 April – the day before my grandfather went missing - Field-Marshal Haig issued the extraordinary 'backs to the wall order' from his Headquarters in Montreuil-sur-Mer:

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY
By FIELD-MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG
K.T., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.I.E.
Commander-in-Chief, British Armies in France

To ALL RANKS OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS

Three weeks ago to-day the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a fifty-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel Ports and destroy the British Army.

In spite of throwing already 106 Divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals.

We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

Many amongst us now are tired. To those I would say that Victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

[15] *Allied Railways of the Western Front - Narrow Gauge in the Arras Sector: Before, During and After the First World War*, Martin J. B. Farebrother & Joan S. Farebrother, (*Pen & Sword*, 2015).

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.

(Signed) D. Haig F.M.
Commander-in-Chief
British Armies in France
General Headquarters
Tuesday, April 11th, 1918

Not everyone thought it a good idea to issue this order. Charteris, who was in charge of Intelligence, wished Haig had not done so, since the British did not need to hear it to make them fight, while the Germans would be 'immensely heartened' by it. John Terraine thought that it must have had a powerful effect on the British; but Harris cites it as evidence of panic.[16] Personally, when I read it, the order still brings a tear to my eye.

My grandfather's regimental history records that

On the 12th after two days of air bombing and long-range shell-fire, battle orders were received to the effect that the 178 Brigade was to move at once to the Kemmel area where they would be attached to the 19th Division.

The Diary now records that

12th April 12 noon Battalion received immediate orders to entrain at Brandhoek. It detrained at La Clytte and marched to crossroads N 20 b 9 7. After several hours the Battalion marched to camp at N 14 6 8 5 and passed the night there.

The officers remembered what they saw when they detrained at La Clytte

It was obvious that things were going very badly. Our new division had suffered cruel losses and the enemy had advanced so rapidly that everything was in confusion. Camp and battery positions had been abandoned, guns were firing in the open, and the whole countryside, not yet clear of civilians, was under shellfire

At Kemmel – the village at the bottom of the hill where I had a delicious (but over-generous) ham sandwich in March 2013 - the men were billeted in the outbuildings of a large farm. The officers recorded that

[16] Terraine, Haig, 433.

The only occupant of the farmhouse was the patronne or farmer's wife, 'a brave Belgian lady who deserves special mention… for the noble manner in which she supplied the officers and a number of the men with an excellent supper of omelettes, bread and butter and coffee.

During the night of 12 and 13 April 1918 the farmhouse was shelled intermittently, and the next morning this brave Belgian *patronne*

set off on her dismal journey westward, leaving her shattered home to take care of itself.

Meanwhile, on 12 April my grandfather was reported missing and later 'killed in action'. Perhaps he was killed during the bombing and shelling at Brandhoek, or perhaps he got as far as Kemmel and shared in that last supper, though somehow I doubt that a single Belgian farmer's wife would have been capable of serving omelettes to other ranks as well as officers.

My grandfather was a Private soldier, and his Regimental Diary deals exclusively with the activities of the officers. I cannot tell whether he was really 'blown to bits' or was shot, or died in some other way; but I think it was probably shellfire which killed him. The reason the Germans were initially so successful in the Spring of 1918 was because they managed to fool the Allies as to the exact location of 'the big push'. They also preceded it with a new kind of artillery bombardment, very precise, but relatively short, known as the *Feuerwalz*. This eventually enabled them to capture Mount Kemmel, which was held by Portuguese troops, reinforced by French and then British, who arrived too late to prevent its fall. The fact that Arthur Cooper's body was never found, but that an identity disc was, would seem to confirm this. Contrary to what is commonly believed, more men fell victim to high-explosive during the First World War than were killed by machine-gun fire.

John Terraine wrote that the Battle of the Lys was a small affair, in the context of the wider offensive which the Germans had launched on 21 March; but it was fought further north than the British had expected, and in an area where they could not afford to give ground, because of the threat to their communications with the Channel ports. *The main threat… bursting through the weak defences of the Portuguese Corps (just about to be relieved) pointed straight at the vital rail centre of Hazebrouck, which was to the British what Roulers was to the Germans*.[17] The returns presented to Haig when the battle was over showed that during the 40 days of the German offensive 9,074 officers and 230,089 other ranks of the British Army had become casualties. A small affair, then? Only when compared with larger horrors.

Such was the story I had in some part of my mind for more than 20 years; and I must say that I had assumed that, when the Ministry of Defence sent me that letter of 19 October 1990, this was pretty much all there was to know; but it turned out that I was wrong. The civil servants at the M.O.D. had been summarising the contents of

[17] Terraine, Haig, 431.

a file; but at some point after they wrote to me, that file must have been transferred to the Public Record Office, and when that body became The National Archives, it must have been transferred from Chancery Lane to Kew, and then digitalised.

On a Sunday afternoon, 28 July 2013 I was browsing the internet and came across the website ancestry.co.uk. During the course of a few minutes, as part of a free trial and with only a few particulars about by grandfather, I was able to access the file of 'Burnt Documents' (The National Archives Microfilm Publication WO 363). This contained 24 images, though only 13 documents. Items 4, 5 and 6 came as a puzzle and a shock: they were my father's birth certificate (1915) my own birth certificate (1948) and my father's probate (1976). I started to wonder if the *Stasi* had been at work, rather than the benign British Civil Service; but then I remembered that when I had applied to the M.O.D. for details of grandfather's military service record in 1990, I was required to file proof of my relationship to him, and had supplied these documents myself. There they were, all neatly photocopied and placed on my grandfather's file.

The rest of the file contained the Attestation and Descriptive Report on Enlistment; the Statement of Services, between Engagement and Death; the Casualty Form (Army Form B.103); the Medical History; a letter regarding Arthur Cooper's personal effects (Form 118A) and a receipt signed by my grandmother for the same in 1918 (Army Form B 104); a similar receipt for two medals (1921)[18]; and a form headed 'Widows – Form 3' in which the Ministry of Pensions informed the relevant officer of the Notts. & Derby Regiment in Lichfield on 9 December 1918 that Margaret Cooper had been awarded a pension of 29 shillings and 7 (old) pence a week for herself and her three children from 6 January 1919. Not a fortune, but not a pittance either.

I finally felt that my search had come to an end. It was the information contained in this file, so patiently compiled and so fortuitously preserved from the effects of German bombing, which enabled me to write a much fuller account of my grandfather's experiences than I could ever have imagined would be possible.

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[18] This had been stapled onto the descriptive form on enlistment part of the first document.

2 THE KING'S LIVERPOOL REGIMENT

Enlistment

Why did Arthur Cooper join the Army when he did, in December 1915? My Aunt told me that it was simply patriotism at work; and perhaps that is all there is to it; but much has been written in recent decades about official recruitment techniques, peer group pressure, economic motives and even mere impulse.[19] As a result, I think that the precise timing of my grandfather's enlistment needs to be looked at more carefully.

When Lord Kitchener issued his famous call to arms in August 1914, he asked for 100,000 volunteers, specifying 'general service for the period of the war only', age on enlistment between 19 and 30, and a minimum height requirement of 5ft 6in. My grandfather would qualify on this basis – he was only 28 and he was almost 6ft tall. It was also stated that 'married men or widowers with children will be accepted, and will draw separation allowance under Army conditions.' The upper age limit was subsequently raised to 38 and then on 19 May 1915 to 40, while height requirement was reduced to 5ft 4 inches, 5ft 3 inches and then to 5ft 2 inches.[20]

The government stuck by the policy of voluntary recruitment until 1916: there was always a number of Liberals in the Cabinet who were opposed to conscription, notwithstanding the problems that the use of volunteers produced, including the removal of hundreds of thousands of eager recruits from vital industries; but, at first, Kitchener's appeal was remarkably successful. Indeed, there was a recruiting 'boom' in August and September 1914, partly in reaction to the many stories about the atrocities committed by the German Army in Belgium, and the heroism displayed by the British Expeditionary Force, during its fighting retreat from Mons.

It is a mistake to think that all the troops who joined up after the outbreak of war enlisted in Kitchener's New Armies. Some 5,700,000 men served in the British Army during the First World War (compared to 3,788,000 during the Second) and

[19] F, POW, 205-7.
[20] Simkins, 127.

nearly half of these were volunteers. Many of them joined the Regular Army or the Territorials, which were distinct. In particular the Territorial battalions between 1914 and 1918 numbered 692 (of whom 318 saw front-line or garrison service abroad), compared with 404 Service battalions and 153 reserve battalions in the Kitchener Army. If I have understood the position correctly, my grandfather seems to have been in the King's Liverpool Regiment, and specifically in the Territorial division of that regiment throughout the war, except for brief periods when he was in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, the Border Regiment and latterly the Notts. and Derby Regiment.[21]

Lord Derby had many ideas about recruitment, and considerable influence on Merseyside, helped to raise the First Service battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment;. Employers, and proprietors of cinemas, were encouraged to disseminate information about the whereabouts of local recruiting offices which were at Seaforth Barracks (the regimental depot) and in the town halls at Bootle and Southport, in the Corn Hall, Ormskirk, Warbreck House at Aintree, and a technical school at Garston. Between 23 and 29 August alone, 1,469 men joined up in Liverpool. In fact the press was so great everywhere that, in the first week of September, Kitchener's colleagues in the War Office persuaded him to institute a scheme of deferred enlistment under which the new recruits, once attested, would pass into the reserve and be allowed to return home with a subsistence allowance of 6d a day until the army was ready to take them. The idea was that the flow of men would be controlled, because the attested men would be called up in this way in successive quotas.[22] However, although the initial boom tailed off in October 1914, the numbers of men who had joined were already more than the War Office could cope with; and this led to new arrangements with local civilian organisations, in particular the formation of the famous Pals Battalions, in which Lord Derby again played an important part.

The need for men seemed to grow exponentially. The paper size of the army was increased by 500,000 on 6 August 1914, but on 10 September the Prime Minister H.H.Asquith asked Parliament to approve another 500,000 and on 16 November he asked for another 1,000,000. On 18 May 1915 Kitchener appealed in the House of Lords for another 300,000 volunteers. There was considerable moral pressure to join up, even on married men. Pamphlets and posters abounded. Speakers at public recruitment meetings whipped up the crowds. Recruiting sergeants attended football matches; and women distributed white feathers, often indiscriminately. A Parliamentary recruiting poster attempted to make men with sons who had not enlisted feel uncomfortable by depicting a boy asking his father 'Father, what did you do to help, when Britain fought for freedom in 1915?'

My grandfather's enlistment in December 1915 is probably explained by concern about his position as a married man with children. I say this because it is clear that married men in general were worried about the inefficiency of the

[21] Simkins, 46.

[22] Simkins, 57,59,64,73.

machinery for paying separation allowances to wives and dependants, given that there was originally only one body responsible for this, and that was in Chelsea. In August 1914 the basic separation allowance payable to a private was 7s 7d per week with an additional 1s 2d for each girl under 16 and each boy under 14; but each soldier was expected to pay a contribution from his pay. Simkins writes that the overall position did not improve much until the coming into force of the Naval and Military War Pensions Act, in November 1915.

In July 1915 the National Registration Bill was enacted. This was designed to provide a complete record of the number and distribution of men in the country, so that the government could calculate the supply of manpower needed, both for military service and for industry. A National Register was duly taken on 15 August 1915 (the day my father was born), which showed that there were 5,012,146 men of military age who were not in the forces, of whom 2,179,231 were single and 2,832,219 were married. Of the single men, only 690,318 were in 'starred' occupations (such as coal mining, munitions, railway work and agriculture), which meant that (discounting married men) there were 1,489,093 single men who were theoretically available at once for military service.[23] However, although it was interesting, the Register had no effect on recruiting figures, which continued to be disappointing.

The Registration Bill was immediately followed by 'the Derby scheme'. This involved a personal canvass of every man between the ages of 18 and 41 whose name was on the register, which asked him to enlist voluntarily, on the basis that the youngest married men would not be summoned until all age groups of single men had been called up; but even so, there remained some doubt as to the position of the married men, if the single men failed to respond in sufficient numbers. The result was that the Prime Minister (under pressure to introduce full conscription) gave a *guarantee* to the same effect. This was translated into a governmental commitment by means of a statement issued by Lord Derby himself, on 11 November 1915 and the result was quite remarkable. The Derby Scheme was originally due to end on 30 November but, as that day approached, the recruiting offices were overwhelmed. The closing date was therefore extended, first to 4 December, then to 11 December.[24]

I think this almost certainly explains why Arthur Cooper decided to enlist on 10 December. He had effectively been told that, if he did this now on a voluntary basis, he would not be sent to the Front until all the unmarried men had been conscripted. My aunt's simple explanation that he was motivated by a strong sense of patriotic duty is still valid; but there was more to it than that. It is surely not without significance that, when he enlisted in the King's Liverpool Regiment, he was immediately relegated to reserve, and he was not called up for active service until 1918.

Arthur Cooper seems to have joined up at the nearest convenient recruiting office, Seaforth barracks, which was only around 7 miles from Albert Edward Road,

[23] Simkins, 148.

[24] Simkins, 154-5.

Liverpool 8, where he lived. (This is next door to Toxteth, the area affected by the infamous Liverpool riots of 1981; but , in the early 20th century, it provided housing for the lower middle classes and – in my Aunt's words – it was 'not at all rundown').

The process of enlistment was described by Edgar Wallace in his book about the Kitchener Armies, which was published in 1915:

The recruiting officer enters from his office, accompanied by an orderly who distributes a number of New Testaments to the waiting recruits, who take them shyly or with that evidence of embarrassment which comes to self-conscious people who are doing unaccustomed things.

'Take the book in your right hand. You swear – say after me, 'I swear''

'I swear' repeats the recruit

To serve His Majesty the King… His Heirs and successors.., and the generals and officers set over me by His Majesty… so help me God!

The book is kissed, and the raw civilian who came into the building on one side goes out at the other…[25]

There were eleven questions on the Attestation Form – incidentally, there is no sign that my grandfather participated in a 'group attestation', though these were common.

On attestation Private Cooper gave his address as 143 Albert Edward Road, Liverpool, his age as 29 years 5 months and his trade as Postal Sorting Clerk.

He gave his next of kin as his wife Margaret Thomas whom he married in Knutsford 1909. The names of his three children are recorded:

Amy Margaret born in Manchester 1910
Annie born in Manchester 1912
Marcus Ashley born in Liverpool 1915.[26]

The Attestation Form was headed 'Short Service'; and there is a joke about this in a Bruce Bairnsfather cartoon, cited by Fussell and others. This shows Old Bill, as usual in conversation, on the Western Front. His mate asks him

'Ow long are you up for, Bill?'

[25] Wallace, 12-13.

[26] My, father, who died in 1976.

'Seven Years'.

'Yer lucky – I'm duration'.

By the end of 1915, the high hopes of early victory and peace had proved to be a pipedream and the trenches had already begun to look as if they were permanent fixtures of the Flemish landscape. Arthur Cooper could not know how long the war would last; but, despite the misleading heading on the form, he too signed up for 'the duration', and in fact he served for 2 years 124 days, and was only sent to the Front about two to three weeks before he was killed.

Among other things, Private Cooper said he was willing to be enlisted for general service; but unwilling to be vaccinated. That is hardly surprising, given the family history (according to my aunt, two of his siblings, Ernest and Edgar, had died in infancy in the 1880s or 90s, as a result of vaccination). He was 5 feet 11 3/8 inches tall; but his chest when fully expanded was only 37 inches (and the range of expansion 3 inches). This was not the physique of a man used to hard physical labour. He had the chest of a sorting clerk, as (I am afraid) do I. Meanwhile, his Medical History form records his weight as 141 pounds – which is barely 10 stone – not much for a man of nearly six feet. At his age, I was already around two stones heavier, though I am about the same height.

Aunt Peg told me that Arthur enlisted even though he was in a 'secure position'. Sadly, this can't be quite right, because he joined up in December 1915 and conscription did not come in until 1916, and the concept of reserved occupation or secure position had no real meaning, in the absence of conscription. She was also wrong in thinking that her Dad should have been spared duty on the Western Front because he had not always been a well man and did not have 20-20 vision. When examined, all that was apparent was a scar below his navel, which probably confirms (as my aunt wrote) that he had been operated on for peritonitis; but, even so, I doubt that he was medically unfit for service.[27] Understandably she had no conception of the way in which the Army classified the soldiers it did accept. In 1914 assessments were carried out by medical officers, who used a system of lettering and numbering of some complexity, to decide a man's fitness for military service. These were as follows[28]

A	Able to march, see to shoot, hear well and stand active service

[27] In 1978 Aunt Peg wrote: *When Arthur was in his middle teens he had an attack of peritonitis, and an operation was imperative. His parents refused to send him to hospital and the operation was performed at home. I seem to recollect it cost £20… If it had been known at the time, I doubt if he would have passed for the Army, especially as he was also rather short-sighted, although he does not wear glasses in any photo except one.*

[28] Wikipedia: *British Army Medical Categories 1914*.

	conditions. *Subcategories:*
Al	Fit for dispatching overseas, as regards physical and mental health, and training
A2	As Al, except for training
A3	Returned Expeditionary Force men, ready except for physical condition
A4	Men under 19 who would be Al or A2 when aged 19
B	Free from serious organic diseases, able to stand service on lines of communication in France, or in garrisons in the tropics. *Subcategories:*
Bl	Able to march 5 miles, see to shoot with glasses, and hear well
B2	Able to walk 5 miles, see and hear sufficiently for ordinary purposes
B3	Only suitable for sedentary work
C	Free from serious organic diseases, able to stand service in garrisons at home. *Subcategories:*
Cl	Able to march 5 miles, see to shoot with glasses, and hear well
C2	Able to walk 5 miles, see and hear sufficiently for ordinary purposes
C3	Only suitable for sedentary work
D	Unfit but could be fit within 6 months. *Subcategories:*
Dl	Regular RA,RE, infantry in Command Depots
D2	Regular RA,RE, infantry in Regimental Depots
D3	Men in any depot or unit awaiting treatment

My grandfather was classified as 'B1 One Garrison'. As can be seen, this did not mean that he was considered fit for active service, though this was to change later. As we have seen, he served in several regiments. Looking at his Service Record now, it seems that he enjoyed some luck until the last year of the War, when it ran out, in spectacular fashion. Although he joined up in December 1915, he was immediately relegated to the reserve and was not officially accepted into the King's Liverpool Regiment until 20 June 1916 (that being the date on which he was officially 'mobilised'). Despite this he was not sent to the Front in 1916 (when the Battle of the Somme took place) or in 1917 (the year of Third Ypres, or 'Passchendaele'). Instead, he was sent to a Garrison battalion in the Welch Fusiliers for a few days only, and then, for a period of some six months, to the Border Regiment, where he was successively in a garrison battalion and in a provost battalion, both of which clearly

entailed home duties. Then in January 1917 he was transferred back to the 25th battalion King's Liverpool Regiment, Territorial Force.[29]

The number of regiments my grandfather was in is a bit of a puzzle. I would have expected him to remain in the King's Liverpool, where he started, since a recruit could generally choose for himself where he served and King's Regulations laid down that a soldier could not be forced to change his regiment. Moreover, pride in the regiment was central to the British soldier's loyalty to King and country. The historian of the 9th Battalion, King's Liverpool, wrote that 'the reputation of one's regiment is a matter of personal pride. It is a cement which holds it together at all times. The old spirit soon permeates the newcomers, the recruits become imbued with the spirit which led the veterans to victory, so it was with this battalion'. It is clear from Hindenburg's *Out of My Life* that the regiment was also the focus of loyalty in the German Army.

Liverpool was a vibrant city in 1915. During the eighteenth century the docks had grown enormously and the city had grown rich on the profits of the slave trade. In the 1850s Lord Macaulay described the city as one of the wonders of the modern world. McCartney tells us that the port handled one third of all Britain's exports and a quarter of her imports in 1907. Liners left from here to sail to all parts of the British Empire and the world, especially to the United States, while locomotives were shipped out to India (as my other grandfather, who was a long-distance lorry driver, well knew). MCartney also tells us that Liverpool was a city where the old aristocratic landowning families, including the Molyneaux and the Stanleys, still played an important part and the distinction between working class and middle class was very clear. She adds that there were many immigrants, from Wales, Scotland and Ireland, who preserved their culture, and often their religious traditions; and she emphasizes that there was a marked difference between Liverpool and Manchester, encapsulated in the expression 'Liverpool gentlemen, Manchester men'. This indicated that, while Manchester had an enormous manufacturing base, the wealth of Liverpool's middle class was based on shipping, commerce, insurance and other trades spawned by its port. At the same time, there was some manufacturing in Liverpool – the chairman of The United Alkali Company Ltd wrote from James Street Liverpool in May 1915, to protest that that Lord Kitchener had unfairly blamed the armaments industry for the alleged shortage of shells on the Western Front.[30]

It was at Formby that Siegfried Sassoon threw his Military Cross into the sea in 1917. In his *Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*, Sherston described the middle

[29] The Welch Fusiliers was Robert Graves's Regiment and those who are interested can read all about his experiences there in *Goodbye to All That* (first published 1929, but revised and republished in 1957). The 2/4th (Cumberland and Westmoreland) Battalion of the Border Regiment was formed in March 1915, and remained in the UK as a training and reserve unit).

[30] Becket, 25-7.

class at play there. There was an exclusive golf club near the Mersey Defence Force at 'Clitherland'.[31] Liverpool businessmen enjoy good food there, at a time when the U boats were sinking one vessel in four; but business at *The Adelphi Hotel* in Liverpool was booming.

At the same time, the middle class was dwarfed by Liverpool's working class, many of whom were dockers. The Liverpool General Transport Strike of 1911, involving dockers, railway workers and sailors, transformed trade unionism on Merseyside. It had begun when the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union had announced a nation-wide strike of merchant seamen but a strike committee - chaired by the syndicalist Tom Mann - was formed to represent all the workers involved. Many meetings were held next to St. George's Hall in Lime Street, including a rally on 13 August when the police charged a crowd of 85,000 people, who had gathered to hear Tom Mann speak. This became known locally as 'Bloody Sunday'. In the police charges and subsequent unrest, over 350 people were injured; and 3,500 British troops had to be stationed in the city. Two days later, soldiers of the 18th Hussars opened fire on a crowd on Vauxhall Road, injuring fifteen, two fatally. (An inquest brought in a verdict of 'justifiable homicide').

McCartney reproduces a map showing the social composition of Liverpool local governmental wards in 1914. Six of these are shown as middle class, 20 as working class, and ten as 'mixed'. According to McCartney the six pre-War territorial battalions of the King's Liverpool regiment reflected the stratified and heterogeneous nature of Liverpudlian society. The 10th Scottish and 8th Irish battalions attracted recruits on a nationalist basis, while the 6th Rifles Battalion attracted the middle class. An advert for the Rifles which appeared in the *Liverpool Daily Post* in September 1914 appealed for recruits from Aigburth, Sefton Park and West Derby.

The Kensington Ward, to which my grandfather moved in 1913, was a mixed area, which is fitting because Arthur was a postman who came from a line of postmen; and in terms of Liverpool's social structure these did not clearly belong to either class. It may also be relevant to note that my grandfather was not a Liverpudlian by origin. He and his wife and young family moved to Liverpool from Manchester; and there was (and is) every difference in the world between a Liverpudlian and a Mancunian – though McCartney writes that the Liverpool accent in 1914 was not so different from the Manchester, as it has since become.

It may be that Arthur Cooper was also different from many of his fellows in being indifferent to football. I say this because, as a schoolboy in Liverpool between 1953 and 1965, I can testify that loyalty to either Liverpool or Everton was very strong. Yet I was brought up by my father to be almost completely uninterested in this rivalry, and even in football in general; and I think the reason for this is to be found in the early years of the 20th century.

I was brought up to believe that you should not attend football matches,

[31] G, 168, 215.

because football grounds were dangerous places. People had been killed there in large numbers. There were too many people present for it to be safe. When a wall of people started to move, it was like water, nothing could stop it, and you were likely to get killed in the crush. As evidence for all this, my Dad used to cite the Ibrox disaster of 1902, which occurred 13 years before he was born, so he could only have heard of it from his mother, who probably received the information from her husband. In any case, the facts are that, on 5 April 1902, during a championship game between Scotland and England, the back of a newly-built stand at Ibrox in Glasgow had collapsed, due to heavy rainfall the previous night. Hundreds of supporters fell up to 40 feet to the ground below. 25 people died and 517 were injured. In fact, the disaster was due to bad weather, rather than to the movement of the crowd, or the defective design of the stand; but that was not how I remember the story, nor its terrible lesson.

McCartney identifies local patriotism as being of great importance in the King's Liverpool Regiment prior to and after 1914. She points out that men travelled from as far afield as Canada and Australia to join up in Liverpool; but for the above reasons, this spirit may have been lacking in Arthur Cooper's case. Though he may have had an allegiance to Lancashire, it is unlikely that he felt any particular attachment to Liverpool. Perhaps this explains why, although he enlisted in the King's Liverpool, he was not assigned immediately to any particular battalion, and was later transferred to other regiments.

On the other hand, it was the King's Liverpool he went back to in January 1917 – and specifically to the 25th battalion (territorial force), where he remained for over a year, before passing briefly through the 7th and 8th battalions. Does this indicate a birth of enthusiasm for Liverpool? It may do, but whereas a volunteer could initially choose the battalion he joined, it is likely that from 1916, a man had to go where he was needed. Another way of looking at the matter is that in my grandfather's case, Lord Derby's promise to the married men of Great Britain late in 1915 was honoured.[32]

In March 1918, at the very end of Arthur's life, the Notts. & Derby Regiment superseded the King's Liverpool in importance. The former had taken such a beating during the second phase of the *Kaiserschlacht* that its need for reinforcements or replacements overrode all else. Arthur Cooper was therefore taken out of his safe haven in Norfolk, swept up in the maelstrom and killed, all within the space of a couple of weeks; and it was the Notts. & Derby which assumed responsibility. He was given a new number, 102375, which stuck. They paid him, and they returned his personal effects and medals to his widow, and thereafter paid her a pension. So far as Tyne Cot Cemetery was concerned his number was 'up'; and that number was 102375.

[32] Simkins, 154-7.

Sheringham

We know a little about the period between June 1916 and February 1918, because this is when that photograph was taken, showing my grandfather with a group of others in their swimming costumes around a pool, probably in Sheringham. Aunt Peg told me he was a swimming instructor there, or at any rate in Norfolk. She also said he was a 'good swimmer', as was my father and as I was in my youth.

It has proved difficult to find out where the swimming pool was. During the First World War, there was an indoor pool in Barford Road, Sheringham, though the site is now (2013) occupied by a block of flats. There was also a pool at Weybourne Camp during the Second World War, though that is now buried under several feet of soil.[33] The assumption must be that Arthur swam at Sheringham pool, although he may also have swum in the sea.

Why train the men to swim? In 1915 Edgar Wallace (who wrote *The Four Just Men* and *King Kong*), published *Kitchener's Army and the Territorial Forces:The Full Story of a Great Achievement*. Although the index has entries for all kinds of training (learning to salute; drill; map-reading; signalling; 'Swedish exercises' (PT); how to use a bayonet; how to shoot; how to operate a machine gun; how to ride; how to dig a trench; how to build bridges),[34] nothing is said about swimming. Likewise, I have searched in vain in the War Office's manual *Infantry Training* (1914) for any relevant reference. It is, when you think about it, far more likely that Private Cooper spent his time practising shooting and the use of the bayonet on the end of a Lee-Enfield rifle, than swimming; but then, if you had explain to your seven year old daughter how you spent your time in the Army, what would you tell her?

The French army distinguished between 'fighting training' and 'recreational training' and it would seem that, in practice, the British Army wanted to ensure that the troops were fit. Swimming is undoubtedly good exercise; and it was clearly useful for a soldier who might be sent to France at any moment; but the main reason for doing this was probably that it helped to maintain morale. (Sassoon says that, on one occasion before the Battle of Arras in 1917, he ordered the men under his command to play hide and seek among the trees. They cheered up immediately).[35]

Arthur Cooper probably did not come home to Liverpool very often while he was in Norfolk; and, since there was no telephone installed in Albert Edward Road, he and his family must have kept in touch by letter or postcard. My aunt could remember the details of one such exchange. She had written to him as 'Dear Farther'. He had replied saying that this made him feel 'farther and farther away'. This may be an adult memory of a distant childish thing, but it is also a poignant reminder of a relationship destroyed by war.

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[33] Information supplied by Sheringham Tourist Information Centre and by Michael Savory, Managing Partner, The Muckleburgh Military Collection, Weybourne: see also www.muckleburgh.co.uk

[34] Simkins, 302.

[35] Dunn, 303; SS, 410.

Why was Private Cooper sent to Norfolk? One explanation for this may have been the numbers. Liverpool was very populous. As the army expanded in 1914 and 1915 each battalion was allowed to establish reserve battalions, and the King's Liverpool had seven; but Liverpool lay in the Western Command, where there were several large conurbations to draw on, whereas the population in the area covered by Eastern Command was predominantly rural and small, though London of course had a Command of its own. Perhaps too a man like Arthur Cooper – who was B category - was not especially needed in Liverpool or Lancashire, where there were numerous younger and more able-bodied recruits, some with stronger attachments to particular battalions. He could be of more use in a less densely-populated part of the country.

Another reason for the posting to Norfolk was probably the fear of invasion. Before the War, there were persistent rumours of German plans to launch an attack and, naturally, these affected the East of the country more than the West. Erskine Childers's *Riddle of the Sands* had been published in 1903 and was based on the idea of two young men who embark on a sailing holiday in the Frisian Islands, but discover a plot to send a German Armada against England. In 1906 William le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910* featured a similar invasion, with the Germans contriving to land an army on the East coast. Worries about invasion reached a new height when Guy du Maurier's *Englishman's Home* played to packed houses at Wyndham's Theatre in London in 1909. It is clear from Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man* that the fear of invasion was real; and not all the talk of it can be dismissed as idle rumour. Figures as eminent as Lord Kitchener viewed a German invasion as a real possibility. These fears increased when the German Navy bombarded Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft on 3 November 1914. On 16 December the same was done to West Hartlepool, Scarborough and Whitby. 127 people were killed and Whitby Abbey was damaged. On 14 January 1915 the first bomb to hit British soil was dropped by a Zeppelin airship and fell through the roof of a house in Sheringham.[36] There were 20 Zeppelin raids in 1915, when air-raid precautions were practically non-existent. They were minor affairs compared to the bombing conducted by the Luftwaffe during the Second World War (when my parents were Air-Raid Wardens in Liverpool); but the psychological effect was considerable. The poet D.H. Lawrence described a raid on London in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell: *Then we saw the Zeppelin above us, just ahead, amid a gleaming of clouds: high up, like a bright golden finger, quite small…Then there were flashes near the ground — and the shaking noise. It was like Milton — war in heaven*.

An invasion of Lancashire was never likely. If the Germans had attempted to invade, they would probably have chosen to land in East Anglia. The German port of Cuxhaven lies directly opposite; and the battles of the Dogger Bank (1915) and Jutland (1916) were both fought in the North Sea. Yet the Admiralty advised that these fears were unfounded. In November 1914 a cousin, working in the Admiralty,

[36] Beckett, 178; Simkin, 16-17.

wrote to Laura Upcher of Sheringham Hall to tell her 'I don't think the Germans will come but if they do it is nothing to make a fuss about.' Years later, in his book *The World Crisis*, Winston Churchill gave his opinion

Every higher officer who knew the facts was convinced that the operation of landing a German invading army of 70,000 men or upwards … was one which the Germans would not attempt and which, if they attempted, was doomed to certain disaster. It is not a question only of evading the Fleet, but of launching 70,000 men or upwards… to cross 250 miles of sea in the face of a decisively superior hostile navy; to disembark the army on an open beach, with all the chances of the weather and the uncertainty of attack at the latest within a few hours by submarines and destroyers.[37]

These re-assurances do not seem to have cut much ice in East Anglia. The North Norfolk coast in particular had long been regarded as a potential invasion area; and thousands of troops were stationed in and around Sheringham during both world wars. Despite Churchill's sanguine view, Sir Frank Fox wrote that 'direct attack by Germany was seriously feared… a bolder German naval policy, indeed, might have secured an invasion of England… plans were drawn up in England at one time on the supposition of a German descent on our coasts being successful in its first stages, and it was proposed to meet this by converting wide coastal section of England into a desert.' In Germany, Field Marshal Hindenburg later concluded that 'the very great sensitiveness of the English to the phantom of a German invasion would have justified greater activity, on the part of our fleet and indeed heavy sacrifices.'[38]

Plans were made to resist the invader. The town of Great Yarmouth issued instructions to every household in February 1915, telling the public to evacuate the area, in the event of invasion. Detailed instructions were issued, as to which roads to use. Special constables were appointed to oversee the evacuation. Farmers were told the best method for destroying their livestock, in pursuance of a scorched-earth policy. Pillboxes and other defensive works were constructed.

Rumours of invasion ran through Sheringham. In March 1916 the nurse Edith Upcher noted 'Many soldiers on Links and round Hospital' and 'All the soldiers had been out all night and not come in for morning ration… Le Gros came in with wide open eyes to announce that Germans had landed at Weybourne!' Of course, they hadn't; but the rumours continued, fed by the explosion of a floating mine which had come ashore – though, after this incident, the fear of invasion seems to have died away somewhat, to be revived during the multiple German offensives early in 1918.[39]

Arthur Cooper was probably sent to Norfolk to reinforce coastal defences.

[37] Churchill, vol II, 819-820.
[38] GHQ, 10.
[39] Meeres, 76, 86-91, 100.

(Troops from as far away as Ludlow were sent to East Anglia for this purpose.[40]) And he may have been stationed at Weybourne Camp, which is about 3 miles distant from Sheringham and was a major training centre. It has so far proved difficult to find out much about this place, though conditions in the training camp at Litherland near Liverpool are described both by Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves. The website relating to Weybourne describes remains from the Second World War but not the First. However, I have discovered this piece of doggerel, in the *Liverpool Echo*, dating from Friday 9 June 1916, two weeks after the Battle of Jutland, which clearly shows the Camp was in use at the relevant date:

A Soldier's Lament.

There's a little spot called Weybourne; it's a weary, dreary hole,
Where you never see a taxi, and you seldom meet a soul;
Where the rain comes down more often than any place I know.
And the trees wash o'er the housetops when the stormy breezes blow.

An unfortunate-battalion that they call the "Blanky-third."
Just after signing foreign from their units got "the bird".
Unit for foreign service, straight to Weybourne they were sent.
To "Form fours, right," and carry packs until their backs were bent.

They dug trenches all the summer and made dugouts by the score;
They fixed barbed wire entanglements until their hands were sore;
When darkness fell o'er silent tents they'd hear a whistle shrill:
The sergeant's blowing the alarm! Well, Gott strafe Kaiser Bill!"

November came 'Twas very cold and raining every day,
Until at last, wind and rain, the Camp was washed away.
We moved to winter quarters then: A loft fell to my share;
Along with twenty other chaps spent the winter there.

The dugouts we had laboured we found we had to use
To sleep for a seven day's guard 'twas 'guard doom' to refuse.
Sometimes the "seven days' guard" went, on - don't ask whatever for:
You start to think they'll keep you on the duration of the war.

We've been here now for seven months - it seems like seven years.
The outside world it knows us not, so hence our bitter tears.
I think they'll keep us here until I hardly dare to mention;

[40] *Shropshire Postcards from the Past, Ludlow and South-West Shropshire*, Roy Farlow and David Trumper (breedon books publishing 2005)

A general said the other day we'll get the old-age pension.

We all belong to Merseyside; lived there long ago.
In days of yore we've sat and watched the ebb tide-flow.
So when we've licked the Germans, and shot and shell doth cease,
Just think of us in Weybourne still, and murmur "Rest in peace."

R.F.N. CHARLES BLOTT.

The doggerel would seem to indicate that Arthur was not alone when he was sent to Norfolk; and that there were in fact a good number of Liverpudlians who shared the same experience.

I have been told that the troops who were stationed at Weybourne were generally billeted in private homes in Sheringham; and life in billets were probably preferable to that lived in army huts. Billeting was of course paid for. As Simkins notes, money helped to overcome prejudice against outsiders and the Government paid householders 3s 4 1/2p per day per man, which included 9d a night for lodging. The rate for officers was 3s per night, though they had to pay separately for their own food.[41] Nevertheless 'a great concentration of troops in any locality upset the routine of everyone in the locality… the elder women were kept busy by their billets and the younger women by their flirtations'.[42] Simkins gives numerous examples of cases where difficulties were encountered with 'frowsy' landladies, because of differences of class and behaviour. Drunkenness and fornication were common problems. One landlord said he would be pleased to have soldiers in his house 'provided they are clean men who will not spit upon the wallpaper.' The same difficulties were encountered in France: peasants were unwilling to put up hordes of French soldiers who descended on them from other parts of the country, even when it involved payment and even when large areas of the adjacent countryside were occupied by the enemy.[43]

I doubt that any landlady or landlord, however 'frowsy', would have had that kind of problem with Arthur Cooper. After all, he was not a teenager, but in his late 20s, and married with children; and, if Aunt Peg can be believed, he did not drink or smoke 'preferring to spend his money on other things.' In addition, he was of a studious nature. I still have a book which was given to him as a prize in 1910 by Cheetham Hill Congregational Church in Manchester.[44] Moreover, it was unlikely that class was a problem in his case, since I doubt if my grandparents thought of themselves as working-class.[45]

I cannot be sure how long Arthur was in Norfolk; but it seems that he spent

[41] Simkins, 246.
[42] Meeres, 9.
[43] Barbusse, chapter 5, *Sanctuary*.
[44] *The Doctor at Home & Nurses' Guide Book.*
[45] Simkins, 246

the second half of 1916 in the 43rd Provost Battalion of the Border Regiment, and I think it must have been at this time that he had that large photograph taken of him, which used to hang in Nana's hall at Hillingdon Road. For it is there that he wears a lance-corporal's stripe, apparently for the first time. This was something he must have been proud of: it represented recognition that he was 'a cut above', though he was not promoted until December 1916 and the promotion did not involve more money until February 1917. He also has a cap-badge. Although it is difficult to discern the detail, I think this most closely resembles the badge of the Border Regiment. It does not look like the cap badge of the King's Liverpool Regiment, which has a prominent horse on it.

A provost was a military policeman; and in 1914 there were 3 varieties in Britain: Regimental Police, Garrison Military Police and members of the Corps of Military Police (C.M.P). The first were simply soldiers chosen to perform police duties on a temporary basis; and I think this is the kind of policeman my grandfather must have been. As such, he was not entitled to wear the famous red cap. Of course the numbers of these men expanded greatly during the Great War – G. D. Sheffield estimates that around 25,000 men served in a provost role and that in 1914 the ratio of military policemen to ordinary soldiers was 1: 3306, and 1:292 in 1918. Clearly the Army needed substantial numbers of these reliable men[46]

There was a very clear distinction between the duties of those provosts who were part of the C.M.P. and those who were not. The C.M.P. manned the 'Straggler Posts', later renamed 'Collecting Posts' or 'Battle Stops', which lay behind the British lines on the Western Front, and whose purpose was to intercept those troops who had deserted, or lost their way, or were simply retreating, at times when the Germans were advancing. Their duties might include giving these men refreshment and encouragement, re-directing and re-forming them, but also (at the extreme) arresting and shooting them. In the field, they were sometimes responsible for imposing the notorious 'Field-Punishments'.

At home, the duties of a provost were of an entirely different kind, though even so it may have been a difficult job. The huge growth in numbers of the British Army created problems of its own, arising from the shortage of barrack accommodation. The historian of the Redcaps tells us that this meant that the equivalent of the combined populations of Leeds and Edinburgh had to be billeted on a civilian population with no real experience of it, and a traditional suspicion of soldiers. [47]

The policing of army camps and nearby areas rested initially and in the main with regimental and garrison M.P.s. These men had limited powers; but during the course of 1916 the organisation of military policing as a whole underwent a radical change, following the establishment of a new command structure on 16 June. The new Provost Marshal increased the number of officers under his command,

[46] Redcaps, 39, 77-8.

[47] Redcaps, 54-5.

improved their status and standardised general instructions. Given the date of Arthur's appointment as a provost – 27 June – there may have been some connection. At the same time, it is clear that military policing was always regarded as work of secondary importance, in terms of the war effort; and by the end of the war all A1 and most B1 men had been drafted out for more 'active' service.

Meanwhile, the majority of the work consisted of dealing with petty crime and indiscipline – drunkenness, theft, black-market activities, absenteeism, being improperly dressed, or behaving in an un-soldierly way. Standards were set very high: not long after the war began a Provost Marshal was reputed to have repeatedly told his men on pay day that 'We are at War with a great and Mighty Nation and we must always avoid women and wine.' It is doubtful if these standards could always be maintained. Even at the time, the story goes that the Provost Marshal's remarks were habitually answered with a grunt or a raspberry from the rear rank, which he never heard, since he was deaf.[48]

The most amusing case of indiscipline that I have come across is related by Robert Graves and concerns a man known only as 'Boy Jones' but it did occur in Liverpool in 1917, so I will include it. Boy Jones was charged with five offences. First of using obscene language – a bandmaster complained that he had been called 'a double effing c—t'. Second, of breaking out of the detention which had been awarded for the first offence. Third, of absenting himself from his regiment until apprehended in the Hindenburg line. Fourth, of resisting arrest; and, fifth and last, of being in possession of property stolen from a bantam soldier of the Cheshire Regiment at Liverpool Exchange Station. The punishment awarded may be considered relatively light: it consisted of ten days confinement in camp and a spanking by the bandmaster.[49]

Sheffield writes that 'no machinery existed for directing efforts away from crime into others directions should the occasion arise'. Specifically, he thinks that provosts were not really told what to do in the event of a German landing. Almost the only role allotted to them in that event was to collect officers and men on leave in the major cities. This changed in 1917 and 1918 and eventually, during the very week the Armistice was signed, the military police were given a proper operational plan; but by this time Arthur had gone 'to higher service' (as my headmaster in the early 1960s used to say).[50]

Why did Arthur re-join the King's Liverpool Regiment in 1 January 1917, when he was still in Norfolk at the time? Presumably, because that was where the 25th Battalion of that force was formed – indeed on that very day. This was most unusual - there were 49 battalions of the Regiment in all and all the others were formed in Liverpool. The explanation must be that Sheringham was a major training centre and there were many Liverpudlians in army units of one kind and another

[48] Recaps, 85.

[49] G, 70.

[50] *Redcaps*, 87-8.

there. Moreover, Arthur may now have reached a stage in his military career when it was thought appropriate for him to be put back with a Merseyside battalion. He was promoted a month after re-joining the King's Liverpool.

So, between December 1916 and February 1918 my grandfather was a Lance-Corporal, at first unpaid and then on a paid basis. This is the first level of responsibility for a private soldier; but there was a reason for this promotion. Kitchener was very much aware of the lack of instructors, officers and N.C.O.s when he was forming his New Army in 1914-15. In 1914 there were only 12,738 Regulars, 9,563 Territorials, 3,202 in the Reserve of Officers and 2,557 in the Special Reserve Units. He decided he needed at least another 30,000. In particular, 3 lance-corporals were needed to every 50 recruits. Some N.C.O.s could be found amongst the ranks of old soldiers, but these did not always prove satisfactory and it was eventually decided that candidates could be found amongst 'promising recruits', notwithstanding their lack of experience.

Corrigan explains the role of the lance-corporal very well when he describes the basic army unit of a section – 'eight privates, riflemen or guardsmen commanded by a corporal, with a lance-corporal to assist him'. To put this in context, four sections make a platoon, four platoons make a company, four companies make a battalion, and four infantry battalions make a brigade, while three brigades make a division. A division 'has its own artillery, communications unit, transport, cavalry squadron and field ambulance' and is in effect a small army; but by 1918 the Army had become so large that it was necessary to have Army Corps (consisting of several Divisions) and even separate Armies (with two or more Corps in each). General Plumer commanded the Second British Army at the time of my grandfather's death.[51]

What counted as a sign of experience? An 'unorthodox system' was adopted by Second Lieutenant Harold Hemming when helping to select N.C.O.s' from the recruits of the 12th West Yorkshire Regiment: 'I counted the men who had moustaches and found that I had just enough, so I made them all lance-corporals then and there.' This method worked for Hemming because his men were miners, and those at the coalface did not wear moustaches – so he had hit on a system which selected the so-called 'brain-workers'.[52] It would not work amongst postal workers such as my grandfather, where moustaches must have been the norm.

I think Arthur must have stood out in some other way. My aunt said that, although he did not have a secondary or 'grammar' education, he was 'excellent at his lessons', and that he could play the piano, as well as being an excellent swimmer. These qualities may have been chiefly in the eye of a dutiful daughter, but on the other hand he had passed some sort of examination to become a sorting clerk and telegraphist. It would not be surprising if this put him amongst the top 2% in 1916. Or perhaps it was just that he had caught someone's eye as a relatively capable, or

[51] Corrigan, 109-111.

[52] Simkins, 212, 226-7.

relatively senior, man. He was in his thirties now, not in the first flush of youth. Or perhaps they called for someone who could swim, and knew how to teach others to do the same. In *Her Privates We*, Private Bourne is unusual in his ability to speak French, but he is selected for work in the orderly room because he knows how to 'work' a typewriter (though he is reluctant to accept promotion, since he 'prefers the anonymity of the ranks'). He only stays in the orderly room a few days but is subsequently offered promotion again by a Captain Malet, who explains to a reluctant Bourne why the officers have got him marked down for it.

You haven't the build [to be a fighting soldier]. These [other] boys train on, most of them will fill out and make two of you. You are as fit you ever will be, and you're quite fit now, in the pink, I should say. But all these men are hardened to all kinds of manual labour, which you can't do. I bet you were never in proper training until you joined the army. You won't train on, you're much more likely to train off. If you crock up, you will only be a damned nuisance. You are out of place where you are. I believe you have a certain amount of influence over the men about you; I don't mean you try to influence them, but quite naturally they think you know a bit more than they do, and they are likely to be swayed by your opinion.

For all we know some anonymous officer may have had a similar conversation with Arthur Cooper; and Private Cooper might well have replied as Private Bourne did

I have absolutely no experience of men, not even the kind of experience that a public-school boy gets from being one of a large community. .. It would be better if I got a little experience of men and soldiering before trying for a commission.

Graves has a story which gives us the flavour of the British Army during these years. A Colonel berates his junior officers for the lack of discipline he has observed. In particular he is incensed by an incident where a private soldier addresses a lance-corporal (whom he knows well) by the name of 'Jack'. And, by God, the lance-corporal makes no protest! The Colonel has the lance-corporal reduced to the ranks and he awards a Field punishment to the private.[53]

Active service

It is difficult to believe that Arthur Cooper would ever have been sent to France if it had not been for the re-organisation of the Army which took place during the winter of 1917-18. He had originally been classified as 'B1 Garrison' in 1915, which meant that he was only fit to serve at home; and there is no record of this classification ever having been altered. His Statement of Services tells me that he was mobilised, and

[53] G, 150.

indeed posted (though only to 'Reserve') on 20 June 1916; and Army Form B 103 specifically refers to his active service as beginning on 20 June 1916. Yet it was only on 5 February 1918, at Overstrand in Norfolk,[54] that he was posted to the 7th Reserve of the King's Liverpool Regiment, from which he was sent to France. Conceivably he was re-classified medically at this point, but that may already have happened in June 1916. Either way, there is no record of it; and on the other hand there is reason to think that by February 1918 – even before the Germans launched the *Kaiserschlacht* - the Army was prepared to send both A and B men to the Front, because of the desperate shortage of men.

The shortage is well described by David Stevenson in his excellent book *With Their Backs to the Wall*. He explains that, between January and November 1917, the B.E.F. had suffered 790,000 casualties and that during the winter which followed, it shrank from 62 to 58 infantry divisions. Field-Marshal Haig was intensely concerned and asked for 650,000 more men; but the War Cabinet was unwilling to oblige. This was not just because Lloyd George disapproved of the wasteful strategy and tactics deployed in 1917 (in particular during the long battle known as Third Ypres or Passchendaele), but also because many felt that the Allies should wait for 1919 (and the arrival of large numbers of American forces) before launching any further offensive. The Cabinet also took account of the need to retain sufficient men at home for vital industries. Accordingly, it was only prepared to reinforce the B.E.F. with 100,000 men – a fraction of those requested.

It seems that the military authorities now took a 'relaxed attitude' towards medical classification. Terraine tells us that between January 1 and March 21 1918 the following numbers were sent to France from the United Kingdom

British Category A	129,357	
British Category B	5,299	
Total		134,636

Between March 21st and August 31st the following numbers were sent

British Category A	418, 99	
British Category B	49,925	
Total		461,915

In other words, the Army was now prepared to use Category B men now, although it is remarkable that the vast majority of men sent to France and Flanders at this time were still Category A.

[54] A.C.'s Medical History form refers to his being at Sidestrand. Overstrand – where Winston Churchill had a cottage – and Sidestrand are both very small villages on the Norfolk coast, not far from Cromer.

It was at this time that the Cabinet re-structured Haig's 56 non-Dominion divisions from 12 to 9 battalions each, and his meant that 115 battalions were disbanded altogether and 38 amalgamated. In the view of many military men, this was highly disruptive, because the battalion was the key fighting unit.[55] The effect of the army re-organisation, so far as King's Liverpool Regiment was concerned, was that the 5th, 8th, 9th, and 10th first-line battalions were integrated with the second-line, while hundreds of their men were distributed to other battalions. The 20th disbanded altogether as did the 25th, which had been my grandfather's batallion.[56] Frank Richards – who had been a regular soldier for some years before the War broke out - tells how once this happened, 'the drafts from home were a sorry looking lot of men, and during the next six months (that is, between January and July 1918) they got worse.' Specifically, he thought that 'the doctors that had passed some of them A1 cannot have had tender consciences'. Other old soldiers opined that the new arrivals would not be of much value: 'they will be men with such long service at home only that they have no notion of serving out here'.[57]

[55] Stevenson, 49-50.

[56] List of battalions of the King's Regiment (Liverpool) - *en.wikipedia.org*.

[57] Dunn, 467.

3 *KAISERCHLACHT*, 1918

The Cooper Family

Arthur Cooper's parents, Mark and Frances Cooper were on their way 'up' in 1914. Arthur was born in 1886 at Poplar Cottage Central Avenue, Levenshulme, in South-West Manchester. Later his parents moved to Scholes Street, Cheetham Hill, in North Manchester; and then to 24 Oakhill Street, Cheetham. Arthur married Margaret Thomas in Knutsford – or at least in Bucklow registration district - in 1909 and the couple went to live at Narbuth Street and then at 9 Anne Street – each of these being in Cheetham Hill. Arthur was a member of the Congregation Church there the following year; and the 1911 Census shows the couple living with my Aunt Peg, then aged 7 months, at the second address. By then, Arthur's father had become an Assistant Inspector of Postmen and had two children working in 'the Manchester Warehouse', making up 'the Manchester goods' (cottons): they were living in a 7 room house at 1 King's Avenue Crumpsall (in Manchester).

I have looked for all these places, using *Google Maps*, and I can find neither Poplar Cottage, nor Narbuth Street – though there is a modern Narbuth Drive. Likewise, there is nowadays an Oakhill Way (not far from Narbuth Drive) but no Oakhill Street. Nor can I find Anne Street or Scholes Street. I think the reason for these changes is probably that the Coopers were relatively poor and lived in 'artisans' dwellings' which have since been pulled down to make room for more modern housing. For example, the Census of 1911 confirms that the house at 9 Anne Street, Cheetham Hill, had only four rooms, which indicates a 'two up' and 'two down' arrangement. The exception is 1 King's Avenue, Crumpsall. This is still standing and this indicates that it was a better type of house than the others, and that Arthur's parents were 'moving up' in the world.

Arthur was very much a Manchester man; and his wife, originally from Knutsford, had become a Mancunian too, probably because of Arthur's work. According to the 1911 Census he was a 'Town Postman', and he followed in the family footsteps: his grandfather had been a 'letter carrier' in Tring in 1851 and his father Mark was described as a 'stamper' in 1901, though he was an Assistant Inspector of Postmen by 1911. (I have a photograph of Mark looking very grand, in what I take to be his Assistant Inspector's uniform, leaning on his stick).

The opportunities for advancement in Manchester were clearly greater than elsewhere. It was a major city; but then so was Liverpool, and when Arthur passed an exam within the Post Office in 1913, he transferred there, with his young family. Neither he nor his wife, nor his children ever went back to Manchester to live there permanently, though my mother and father moved back there for a few years during the Second World War, before finally returning to Liverpool in 1950.

My grandparents were doing well before the outbreak of the Great War; and it is possible that they had ideas 'above their station', because there was a claim to noble, or at any rate gentle, descent, on both sides of the family. The Thomas's claim was if anything even more extravagant than the one made on the Cooper side.

Nana's mother had been born Margaret Thomas, and her mother – my great-grandmother, Eliza Jane Thomas, had been born Eliza Jane Massey. The story in the told in the family was that in the 1870s or 80s she used to 'bring home her earnings from working in the fields', to her father Francis Massey in Knutsford 'to help pay for the lawsuit'. So what was this lawsuit about?

The Masseys had long been connected with Cheshire; and it was a numerous family. Our Nana always said that her Masseys came from Dunham Massey, while Cousin Fred said that in Cheshire 'there were as many asses as Masseys' in the county. Eliza Jane Thomas used to say that 'by rights she should have been able to ride in her own carriage round Knutsford'. In its fully developed form, the myth was that some young Massey squire had fathered a child on some young girl of peasant stock, giving rise to our poverty-stricken (but honest) side of the Massey family; but Francis Massey knew the truth of the matter and he sent Eliza Jane to collect 'hush-money' from the big house (was it Dunham Massey Hall, or Tatton Park?) But that tale is incompatible with the idea, also current, that 'if we had our rights, we would be lords of Dunham Massey/Tatton Park', because illegitimate children had no rights of inheritance at the time. (Though perhaps I am guilty of trying to inject an element of logic here, where it really does not belong).

However, there remains, one piece of intriguing evidence. During her heroic but unsung researches, conducted during the early 1960s - when no-one else was interested - my Aunt Peg came into possession of a document. This was a petition filed by Charles Massey, said to be my great-great-grandfather's uncle, perhaps with the House of Lords; and it asks in the most moving but hopeless terms, for justice to be done. The petition is dated at London, 19 December 1816. It claims ownership of some property or other on the basis that it belongs to the Masseys by right, though they have long paid a rent of £2/5s/- for it. Reference is made to a John Massey, who originally made this claim in 1781, when he put a plate on the pew door at Hollins Green Chapel in the township of Rixton in the parish of Warrington. It is alleged that the Masseys were at some date deprived of their estate by the Tempest family. Since then the Tempests have supposedly paid the sum in question to the Crown, but in the name of the Masseys.

The Petition has clearly been drafted by a litigant in person, and does not make much sense; but it is at least clear that Charles Massey felt that there had been

some skulduggery on the part of the evil Tempests; and there is a tone of outraged innocence about his complaint which appeals to me, even after 200 years

Since your petitioner started a lawsuit against Stephen Tempest, some persons have taken down the monument out of their chapel in Warrington church in order that their family may not be traced and also taken their names out of the Register.

So my lords the question that your petitioner humbly prays to put before your lordships is ? have not Government always considered that Masseys was the family that enjoyed the property and my lords does it not ? that Masseys are still the holders of the property... Your petitioner still lives in hope… you will allow your petitioner to be entitled to the premises and the others the unlawful intruders keeping them by tyranny …

I have to say that, when presented with the evidence that there might be something in the ancestral claim to the Massey inheritance, my father took the line that the kindly and wise John Jarndyce had taken towards the far more famous fictional proceedings in Jarndyce v Jarndyce – *Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come [to the court of Chancery].* Litigation was likely to end in bankruptcy, madness and worse. Charles Dickens had had good reasons for writing *Bleak House*; and my father was undoubtedly right. I retain a certain curiosity to know more, having spent almost 40 years in the law; but I know full well that law can indeed be a 'bottomless pit'.

Aunt 'Peg', who was so interested in all this, was regarded by my parents as an 'eccentric'. So far as I was concerned, Peg's eccentricity manifested itself when she took to signing herself *Tante Marguerite* and threatened to write a book entitled *Histoire des Familles Cooper et Thomas*. The eccentricity was established to my mother's satisfaction when she started to study Russian at night-school, sometime in the early 1960s, when the Cold War was at its coldest. Indeed, what might have been seen by others as an admirable thirst for knowledge, and a desire to keep up to date, was relayed by my mother to her friends, as a clear sign of insanity. My father's attitude was more kindly. I think he felt sorry for Peg, because he did not think she led a happy life. Nevertheless even he thought her a little strange; and he certainly did not share her passion for family history. Mind you, to be interested in that in the 1960s was a little like being a runner before the running 'boom' of the 1980s.

As for the Coopers, the claim to noble descent on that side was equally tenuous. The story was that the elder male children in the Cooper family were traditionally called Ashley, as my elder brother and my father were; but this was simply untrue. My grandfather was an Arthur, his father was a Mark, and his father (I believe) was called John. However, when it comes to long-lost rights, the facts are no bar to enthusiasm for the quest; and the supposed use of 'Ashley' as Christian name for Cooper boys was thought to indicate that we were descended from the

Ashley Coopers who had once been Earls of Shaftesbury. In particular the 7th Earl, Victorian philanthropist and factory reformer, was held in high esteem.

There was no more truth in this load of old bollocks than there was in the story about the Thomases, indeed probably a good deal less. My great-great-great grandfather John Cooper, who lived at the same time as the blue-blooded factory reformer (in the 1840s) was a haberdasher in Tring, and his wife's family were closely engaged in the straw-plaiting trade. No blue blood there; but then, of course, it was said that our descent from the Earls of Shaftesbury might have been 'on the wrong side of the blanket' – a coy phrase much in use before illegitimacy became respectable.

My Aunt Peg's evidence for our descent from the Earls of Shaftesbury was a miniature, handed down in the family, and which I still have in a drawer somewhere (why is it always me?) This shows a Victorian gentleman, dressed in somewhat foppish style, with a nose which might be said to be somewhat Cooperish, and a lock of hair preserved in the back of the case. This miniature is a nice object – it was valued by Boodle and Dunthorne of Liverpool, in the 1960s and found to be of the right period, though I no longer have the valuation; but there is no evidence that it ever belonged to the Shaftesburys. My aunt said that she once visited the ancestral home of the Shaftesburys – I wonder if they saw her coming - and they had a wall there, with a number of miniatures, and there was one missing. I have never known what to make of this one. As far as I can see, the Shaftesburys lived at St Giles's House, Wimborne in Dorest, which is not generally open to the public, though for all I know, it may have been in the 1960s.

At any rate, in the early 1900s, we see the Coopers, gently rising in the world, considering itself a little genteel perhaps, and even suffering from mild delusions of grandeur; but then the War breaks out. What effect does it have? My grandmother said in later years that 'the world went mad' in 1914; and it was certainly catastrophic for her.

A certain amount can be deduced, I think, from my father's date of birth. I imagine that my grandparents hoped, like everyone else, that the War would be over by Christmas 1914; and I cannot be certain what they concluded, when it wasn't. At any rate, my father was born on August 1915. He was the last and third child, whereas Arthur was one of seven children. Would he and Nana have had more children, if Arthur had not been killed in 1918? It is impossible to say. As it was, one can imagine that from the time he joined up, or at least from the time he went away to Norfolk, my Aunt Peg would have been helping Nana to look after the younger children; but she makes no mention of it in the two letters I have.

My great-grandparents Mark and Annie had seen two children die in infancy, from the effects of vaccination. There was also a daughter, Annie, who had died very young. Then they lost Arthur in the German war, and May in 1919, to Spanish influenza; but they still had Mark junior, George and Clarice, all of whom survived the war by many years, though George had been a soldier like Arthur. Moreover,

the grandparents Mark and Annie both lived until the 1930s and were aviailable to help out with Arthur's three young children.

12th April 1918

In the early 1990s Major Creamer had told me that my grandfather had been killed 'in the defence of Mount Kemmel.' I suspected at the time that this was probably being kind, and I have since read that euphemistic language was very common during the Great War itself. The officers who filed reports of the fighting always tried to make the best of things, even when 'things' were going very badly indeed. Fussell has some good examples of this: 'sharp' or 'brisk fighting' meant that around 50% casualties had been suffered; 'frantic retreat' and 'dire military necessity' meant defeat. When a large group of men lost their nerve and raised their hands as if to surrender to the Germans, the officer in charge resorted to the passive mood when describing what he did next – 'of a party of 40 men who held up their hands 38 were shot down', meaning that he shot his own men. Reading David Stevenson's account of the *Kaiserchlacht* many years later confirmed my suspicions. My grandfather was killed on or about 12 April 1918; but the German attack on Mount Kemmel did not even begin until the 25th; and the hill was captured on the same day. My grandfather can only have played a very marginal part in its defence, if indeed any.

The *Kaiserschlacht* between March and July was not a single offensive, it was five. The Germans called the first, on the Somme, *Michael*; and this lasted between 21 March and 5 April; and they called the second, in Flanders, *Georgette*. This operation lasted between 9 and 29 April. The British called this the Battle of the Lys, but they might as well have called it the Fourth Battle of Ypres, since it was directed against their positions around that much battered town. The objective was to punch out the Ypres salient, capture the railway junctions at Bailleul and Hazebrouke, and if possible to restore the war of movement. As it was, the Germans did succeed in taking Armentières, Bailleul and Mount Kemmel, but not Ypres, nor Hazebrouke, nor indeed the small village of La Clytte, where my grandfather's battalion was last seen intact

It is usually said that the Germans achieved complete surprise when they launched the *Kaiserschlacht*; but, according to Sir Frank Fox, who had an eye for a headline, the offensive was 'trumpeted like a Fat Woman at a Fair, and supplemented by an almost equally strident advertisement of a gigantic defensive. … the German High Command wished the world to know that it was preparing a mighty series of defensive positions back to the Rhine…. They had not only the most marvellous Fat Woman, but also a miraculous Skeleton Man…[58]

Many of the German troops involved in *Michael* were also involved in *Georgette*, and were consequently battle-weary. They must also have been

[58] GHQ, 215-6.

discouraged, because they had been promised victory during *Michael*, and victory had not been secured. (*Georgette* had originally been named *George* and the adoption of the diminutive indicated that the scale of the attack had been reduced; but it was still a major offensive). The German 6th and 4th Armies had 29 divisions (around 300,000 men), and 492 aircraft. They deployed over 2,000 guns against about 500 British, on a front of around 25 miles. By the evening of the first day of the attack, 9 April, they had established a pocket ten miles wide and five and a half deep to the south of Ypres, and gained a bridgehead across the River Lys. By the evening of 10 April, they had taken 11,000 prisoners and 146 guns. By the evening of 12 April they were within 6 miles of Hazebrouck.

It comes as a surprise to learn that a Portuguese contingent held a critical part of the line near Ypres; and its presence on the Western Front requires a little explanation, because Portugal had initially remained neutral in 1914. However, tensions between Germany and Portugal arose due to German U-Boat campaign against the United Kingdom — at the time the most important market for Portuguese products. There were also clashes between Portuguese and German troops in the south of Angola in 1914 and 1915. In February 1916 Portugal agreed to a British request to intern some German ships in their ports and Germany now declared war. The Portuguese therefore sent troops to the Western front in July 1916, at the time of the launching of the Somme offensive, though no troops actually arrived until February 1917. Thereafter, they were kept on duty almost continuously. At the time of *Georgette*, they were overdue for replacement.

The conventional view is that the Portuguese were overwhelmed when the Germans attacked. Frank Richards wrote that in 1918 *there was a yarn going around that Old Jerrie would come over whenever he liked, pinch [the Portuguese] rations and smack their backsides before leaving, telling them that they were not worth taking as prisoners*. And again, once the Germans had attacked, he reported that *the Portuguese ran [and] the best runners that ever lived would never have caught them.* Ferguson has a table showing that 37% of the Portuguese were taken prisoner (compared with 9% of the Germans, and only 3.3% of the British.[59] However, it is only fair to point out that Sir Frank Fox complimented the Portuguese for their part in the fighting:

The Portuguese contingent remained with the British Army to the end, and it did very well, as might have been expected; for as a race the Portuguese have a proud record of heroism and knightly adventure.… The British Empire … owes much to such great sea captains as Vasco da Gama, Torres, Magellan, Quiros and Menezes.[60]

Fox was not alone, for he cites conversations with British soldiers who also thought that the Portuguese were 'good sports.'

[59] F, POW, 369.
[60] GHQ, 251.

Whatever one concludes about the Portuguese, the British were so hard pressed during operation *Georgette* that on 11 April 1918 Douglas Haig issued his 'Backs to the Wall' order (see above). This was controversial at the time, and has continued to be so since. The situation was indeed desperate: the French could not retreat much further without forfeiting Paris and therefore the entire war; the British could not retreat much further without being swept into the sea; and every man did need to stand his ground. However, it was said that the reaction of some British troops to Haig's order was to ask 'where's the [effing] wall?' because, of course, there was none: what they had at their backs was (ultimately) the sea.[61] At least one corporal noted that *we never received [the order]. We to whom it was addressed, the infantry of the front line, were too scattered, too busy trying to survive, to be called into any formation to listen to orders of the day.*[62] On the other hand the Order had a significant impact on some of those who heard about it: Vera Brittain, who was working as a nurse near the battle-front, revised her low opinion of Haig when she heard of it and wrote that 'there was a braver spirit in the hospital that afternoon'.

When he heard of the advances made by the German Army on 12 April, Field-Marshal Henry Wilson remarked 'this is the devil'. The Director of British Military Intelligence thought that, without reinforcements, Britain faced defeat. Churchill thought that 12 April was 'probably, after the Marne, the climax of the war.'[63] As it turned out, though, 12 April was also a critical day for the Germans. They were already falling short of their objectives, and this was having an effect on their morale. *Georgette* was not the last of the offensives but it was terribly costly for the attackers as well as the defenders. During the course of the operation, the Germans suffered some 86,000 casualties, compared with 82,000 British and 30,000 French. The repeated failure to break through was gradually destroying the morale of the German Army.

If his is the overall picture, can we pinpoint Arthur Cooper's place in it? At the beginning of 1918 my grandfather is still described as being in a reserve battalion in the King's Liverpool Regiment. He might have begun to hope that he would be able to see out the war in Britain and return safely to his wife and three children. But 'reserve' implies that the soldier can be called forward at any time. The British Army is getting ready for an attack of some kind, whether mounted by Haig, or Foch or Ludendorff. In fact it is Ludendorff who attacks and launches the *Kaiserschlacht* on 21 March, which for some weeks carries all before it.

As we have seen, Arthur Cooper's military service record has the following brief entries

Reverted to Private on posting to 7th Reserve Battalion	*04.02.18*
Posted to Base Depot	*27.03.18*

[61] Dunn, 468

[62] Fussell, citing Terraine, *Impacts of War 1914 & 1918* (1970), p 174.

[63] Stevenson, 72.

Posted to 8th Battalion *27.03.18*
Transferred to Notts. and Derby Regiment and posted to 7th Battalion, Sherwood Foresters *29.03.18*

My grandfather reverts from Lance-Corporal to Private on 5 February 1918. On 27 February he travels from Norfolk to Oswestry, and he embarks for France at Folkestone.[64] On 27 March he arrives at Boulogne and indeed at Base Depot, which is at Étaples (known to the troops as 'Eatables' or 'Eat-Apples'). It had a more sinister reputation as the home of the largest 'Destructor' in the world, an infernal machine, supposedly used to reduce all kinds of refuse – including body parts - to ashes.[65] This was a minor British equivalent of the dreaded Corpse Factory, which the Germans were believed to maintain at an unknown destination in France, for the production of fat. (Bruce Bairnsfather drew a cartoon showing a German scientist pouring the contents of a funeral urn into a shell-case and muttering *Alas! My poor brother*).[66] The base has also become famous as the scene of a mutiny in September 1917, which was fictionalised by William Allison and John Fairley in *The Monocled Mutineer* (1978), also the subject of a BBC TV series in 1986. This portrayed the mutiny as a justified reaction to harsh conditions; but Captain J.C. Dunn's version of events was very different

Some W.A.A.C.'s [female auxiliaries] showed a partiality for Maoris… Our fellows, taking no account of the fascination the abnormal and the exotic male has for many females, resented it. Authority intervened. The Maoris retaliated with provoking humour; they trundled a brigadier in a handcart, and asked for a civil speech before releasing him. A Red-cap shot a Jock by mistake. It was then that trouble arose, and other real or supposed grievances were aired.[67]

On arrival at Étaples my grandfather was posted to 8th King's Liverpool Regiment but the next day 28 March he was transferred to the Notts. & Derby Regiment (and specifically to the 7th Battalion, B company). The Sherwood Foresters were part of the Regular, as opposed to the Territorial, Army. Why was Arthur transferred there, when he had no territorial connection with either of the two counties in question? In view of what we now know about the *Kaiserschlacht*, the question is easily answered. McCartney tells us that, with 40 battalions, the King's Liverpool Regiment was one of the largest in the country (the Buckinghamshire Light Infantry regiment only had 16), so it was a great reservoir of men. When a regiment of the line suffered significant casualties in France or Flanders, it was common to replace the losses by drafting in men from the same regiment; but if

[64] TNA, WO, 363 (burnt records).
[65] Fussell.
[66] Dunn, 435.
[67] Dunn, 389.

necessary, men from others were used.

The 7th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters, known as the Robin Hood Rifles, has suffered terribly during the *Kaiserschlacht* and *Georgette* in particular has decimated it. Men are in short supply everywhere and drafts are pulled in from men who have hitherto seen no action. The Notts. & Derby receives drafts of men from various Northern regiments, of whom Arthur Cooper is one.[68]

Did Private Cooper have any inkling of what he was about to face when he was transferred to the Rifles? He may have done. The History of the Battalion records

Feb 17th [1918] we relieved the 2/5th Sherwood Foresters in the line; we held the right sub-section of the Brigade front, just NW of Bullecourt. The main line of defence here was part of the Hindenburg line.

The Hindenburg 'line' was only a line in the imagination of the British Army. In fact it was a vast complex of trenches and fortifications, protected by barbed wire and redoubts, which the Germans had been preparing since 1916.

On 2nd March the Battalion was relieved by the 22nd Battalion the Northumberland Fusiliers and returned to Mory L'Abbaye Camp. Rumours of a coming German offensive were now very strong…

On 10th March we relieved the 2/6th South Staffs in the sunken road between Ecoust and Noreuil.

On the night of the 16th/17th March we relieved the 2/5th Sherwood Foresters in the front line… Our front line here extended from L'Hirondell Valley on the right, across the railways cutting, round the apex and on to York trench… a distance of about 1500 yards.

On 21st March at 5 a.m. the enemy opened a very heavy bombardment… HQ were in a sunken road about 800 yards NE of Noreuil… Germans attacked about 8.30a.m. and by 10 a.m. they had broken through both on our right and on the left… many famous Robin Hoods met their fate this day, the casualty list being 26 officers and 629 other ranks… thus for the second time in their history the Robin Hoods were practically wiped out.

[68] When Arthur was near Mount Kemmel the 55th Liverpool Division, known as 'the fighting 55th' was at Estaires, only a few miles distant. Local newspapers in Liverpool gave due prominence to its activities. This was said to be the only part of the Front that withheld the force of the German offensive in the spring of 1918; and the courageous stand of the 55th is commemorated by a memorial in the small village of Givenchy (which was completely destroyed). In July 1919 Haig wrote to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool that 'in the gallantry of their action in the field, Liverpool yields to none of the cities of our Empire.' Givenchy was adopted by Liverpool in 1920 and there is a memorial hall there.

Despite the generally optimistic tone of the narrative, and the morale-boosting congratulations received later by the Battalion from its commanders, it is clear from this account that the Battalion was decimated and had to be taken out of the line.

March 22nd… Mory fell.

March 23rd… remnant of the Brigade began a long and dreary march to Senlis, a large village North of Albert… march to Berencourt… Fieffes… by train to La Boissiere and by motor lorries to Hermin.

March 28th, Hermin… fed and billeted.

On 10 April 1918 Arthur was sent to an Infantry School at Terdeghem and attached to the 33rd division. Terdeghem was a small village - only a few kilometres from Poperinghe, Ypres and indeed Mount Kemmel - where there was a 2nd army grenade and light trench mortar school, possibly situated in an old monastery. It looks from the Casualty Form as if it was intended that Arthur should receive training there for 10 days, until 20 April 1918.

In theory the British believed in the virtues of training the troops. Captain Dunn reproduces a weekend Training Programme for 14 to 16 December 1917, which included numerous bayonet fighting 'games' and various drills (close order. extended order, saluting) each lasting 45 minutes, on the Friday and Saturday, followed by conferences (and Church) on the Sunday. He also records a lecture, given on New Year's Eve 1917, when the Corps Commander lectured the officers present, his theme being 'Teach the teachers how to teach before they teach the Tommies'. The lecture was followed by a practical demonstration of 'platoon work', which began with the General 'taking a flying start in a race with his officers across a field.' However, lectures of this sort came a little late in the day. Sir Frank Fox thought that during 1916-1918 'circumstances had not allowed British forces adequate opportunities for re-training'; and Dunn's contributor refers in an exasperated fashion to an order given on 31 March 1918 (ten days after the launch of the first of the Kaiser's final offensives) that the men should practise rapid loading: *Such is G.H.Q.'s woeful discover of our Army's training* – which meant of course no training at all. He goes on to say expressly that 'our Army is not trained to real fighting.... too much trust is put in mechanical means to the neglect of manoeuvre of men.[69]

Arthur Cooper would have received some basic training in 1916 and 1917, but it was only at the eleventh hour that he was sent for the kind of training that he would have needed for combat in the trenches, or during an offensive. By which time, it was too late: the 'Backs to the Wall Order' was issued and this hardly allowed for the kind of delay which a proper course would have entailed. As it was,

[69] Dunn, 422, 431, 460, 464; GHQ, 298.

he seems to have had only two days at Terdeghem before he was reported missing, which must mean that he was called out of the Infantry School before he had completed the course, or had even really begun it.

Ever since 1918, Private Cooper's death had been recorded as *on or about 12 April 1918*, but itwas not until 3 May 1918 that an officer marked the form to record that he was *Missing* with the word *Field* in the adjacent column; and added *'Killed in Action' or 'Died of Wounds' on or shortly after 12-4-18* underneath. Note the deliberate use of quotation marks. Note too that these words are subscribed *Authority D.A.G 3rd Echelon 25-6-1918* and there is a marginal note *Part II Orders 0.1810 No 38 30-6-18'*. Frank Richards wrote that it was sometimes impossible to tell whether a man was killed, wounded or missing. The authorities were doubtless under a considerable degree of pressure and worked quite literally by the book. There was no time for a post-mortem or inquest.

What of those Robin Hoods who survived? Unfortunately, there was no happy ending for them either. The battalion historian does not hide the depths of his despair

[Battle orders] April 13th…through Kemmel village and along the wide cobbled road towards Neuve Église they marched… at Linden Hoek… the Robin Hoods were to advance as far as Neuve Église in battle formation.

Neuve Église
13th April 9 a.m. Orders were received to move at once towards Neuve Église to clear up the situation there. The sniping section proceeded the Battalion acting as a 'point' as far as Lindenhoek. There an officer patrol consisting of the sniping section moved forward at T 9 c 7 7 the Battalion H.Q. of 4th Y & L and found that the enemy had been driven out of Neuve Église but the situation on the right was not clear. The patrol then moved into the village and found that the situation was normal and that the enemy were being held.

'Being held' was a notorious euphemism, which meant 'has not yet broken through'. The writer duly records that at 3 pm Neuve Église fell to the Germans. Further, so far from 'the situation' being normal, things were going from bad to worse. We read in a note in a Diary entry headed 'Wulverghem' that on 14th April, that the Battalion relieved the 112th R.I.R. and took up front line positions; but in the History that it withdrew to Kemmel on the 16th; and that on the 18th French troops arrived, relieving the Robin Hoods on the 19th. Were they now going forward, or backwards? The historian allows no doubt as to the end result

All was over… the Robin Hoods, so recently re-formed had lost a third of their strength in one week; England was dry of men and every battalion in France was crippled – the melting pot had to be refilled.

On May 6th the Batallion received its final orders. The officers and men who were

left were drafted to new units. Though the War did not come to an end for another six months, Robin Hood had effectively been caught and hanged by the Kaiser, as if he were a common thief.

In the Papers

What did the public know of the German Spring offensives back home in Liverpool? Stories of press censorship, possibly deriving from the Second World War rather than the First, inclined me to the view that they were probably told very little; but then the risk of a German invasion was a good deal higher in 1940 than it had been in 1918, when the Allies in the West had managed to resist Imperial Germany's onslaught for four long years, and aerial warfare was largely confined to the Western Front. Accordingly, we find that the censorship seems to have been light; and the *Kaiserschlacht* was openly spoken of in British newspapers, in particular in the *Liverpool Daily Post*.

On 1 March 1918, the *Post* printed details of General Foch's optimistic view of the impending German offensive. He is reported as saying:

> The Germans will not break through our lines. Their previous attempts failed. The advantages are now all on our side. We are better organised. Our reserves can be handled more effectively, and were never more powerful. We have an abundance of guns, munitions and aeroplanes, and our superiority in artillery is incontestable. Finally, our morale is better than ever.

The following day, the paper's London Correspondent wrote that he had learned from authoritative sources that there were 'increasing indications that the Germans were preparing for the long-talked-of offensive', though he did not known where it would be launched. He also voiced the fear that, this time, the Germans would deploy tanks, while expressing confidence that

> In this instrument warfare we have had a long start, and have the advantage derived from experience. Both the personnel the tanks and the troops operating them require great deal training, and there is no reason to suppose that the Germans have reached a position of equality with either the production of tanks or in the skill with which they are used.

It is interesting to note here that the writer's scepticism about Germany's ability to mount a 'Blitzkrieg' with tanks was entirely justified. In fact, they never displayed the mastery of tank warfare in the Great War which they so often had in the Second World War. Indeed, they were slow to start building tanks at all, because for long periods between 1914 and 1918, their troops were on the defensive (at least

on the Western Front); and, although they captured 63 Allied tanks at Cambrai in 1917 (and were able to manufacture their own model as a result), they never mass-produce them. As a result, they had only about two dozen tanks in 1918.[70]

By the Spring of 1918 the *Post* was well aware that, Germans had knocked the Russians out of the War and had transferred sufficient divisions from the Eastern to the Western Front, to gain a temporary numerical superiority. On Saturday 16 March 1918 the *Post* was clear as to the danger this posed to the British Army:

> Close to 190 German divisions (about 2,250,000 or 2,500,000 men) are on the front in France and Belgium, and fresh troops from Russia and from the interior of Germany can still be transported. Over a third of the identified enemy are in reserve ready to be hurled against any point of our front General Ludendorff may select. The enemy's preparations are evident. New aerodromes have sprung up, new roads laid, and new hutments for troops have been built on a large scale. Naturally, those outward and visible signs of the enemy's intentions afford no clue as where the blow will fall.

We now know that the first stage of the *Kaiserschlacht*, which was known as *Michael* and was focussed on the Somme, was launched on 21 March. At the time, it was not immediately obvious what was happening; but on Wednesday 27 March the *Liverpool Daily Post* did manage to strike the conventional optimistic attitude:

> MASSED INFANTRY BOMBED. GERMAN ADVANCE CHECKED. UNSURPASSED TARGETS FOR OUR AIRMEN. HARD FIGHT SOUTH OF SOMME. Last night British aviation report was as follows. Our aeroplanes were employed almost entirely in bombing the enemy's troops and transport, massed in the areas behind the battle front, and in attacking them with machine-gun fire from low height… The Germans have been attacking heavily south of the Somme this morning, and took Roye at 10.30 a.m. The line there appears to run from Maricourt on the Somme through Rosières, west of Roye and west of Noyon. Fresh German division have been identified in this area, including two Guard and two Brandenburg divisions. On this part of the battlefield British, French and American troops are fighting shoulder to shoulder, and French reinforcements are rapidly coming up. The enemy has been checked west of Roye and Noyon.

With hindsight we know that the second phase of the *Kaiserschlacht*, known as *Georgette*, was launched on the River Lys on 9 April, and this was picked up by the *Post* two days later. The newspaper carried several relevant articles, containing remarkably detailed, if depressing, information from German and British sources:

[70] Stevenson, 36, 220-2.

BERLIN REPORT ON CAPTURES: MEN, 600; GUNS, 100. German Main Headquarters announced yesterday:— Between Armentières and La Bassée Canal, after strong preparation by our artillery and mine throwers, we attacked English and Portuguese positions, took the first enemy lines, and captured about 6,000 prisoners and about 100 guns.

EFFECT OF GERMAN ATTACK. AN AWKWARD SALIENT. It is understood on high authority that the general situation on the main battle front for the time being is that the enemy finds himself north of the Somme faced the stone wall of the Third Army, against which it is repeatedly battering, without any material result. South of the Somme he finds his progress blocked by the arrival of French reinforcements. Therefore, he has changed the scene, and on Tuesday transferred operations to front we know well, old ground between Armentières and Béthune.

The same issue of the newspaper even carried a report from the British Commander in Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, timed at 7.43 pm on April 10th:

Following upon the bombardment already reported, the enemy this morning launched fresh attack in strength against our positions between the river at Armentières and the Ypres-Comines Canal.

Heavy fighting has been taking place in this sector throughout the day, as well as on the whole front of yesterdays attack north of La Bassée Canal.

North of Armentières the weight the enemy's assault has pressed our troops back to the line of the Wytschate-Messines Ridge and Ploegsteert. Bodies of German infantry who had forced their way into Messines were driven out this morning by a counterattack by our troops.

South of Armentières the enemy succeeded, after prolonged struggle, in establishing himself on the left bank of the Lys River.

Only two days later, on 12 April, the very day my grandfather was reported missing, General Haig issued his Backs to the Wall Order (see above). At the same time, the *Liverpool Daily Post* also painted a bleak picture of what was happening on the Front that day:

HEAVY SHELLING AROUND YPRES. During yesterday the great Flanders battle continued with unabated violence, steadily extending up the line. German aircraft supported the enemy infantry attacks in considerable numbers, notwithstanding the fact that visibility was very poor and that both our own airmen and infantry engaged them frequently… During the course of the afternoon artillery and trench mortar activity increased to quite a heavy degree around Ypres and so far north as Passchendaele… Between one and two o'clock this morning our line was believed to run eastward of Ploegsteert

> Village and through Ploegsteert Wood, then past St. Yves, almost due northward past Oosttaverne, joining our old line near Hollobeke…. Northward of Hill 60 the situation is reported unchanged… Continued enemy inactivity along the whole of our front south of Arras makes it appear as though he were awaiting the result of his Flanders offensive before developing any further plans. Beyond some heavy bursts of shelling there is nothing to report between the Scarpe and the Somme, except that enemy aircraft are busy in watching our movements so far as our own airmen will permit them. The weather still continues dull and heavy, but is keeping dry.—Press Association War Special.

The following report from 'Reuter's Expert Commentator' in Paris indicates that, despite the devastation and death caused by operation *Georgette*, the Allies still felt that the German offensive in Flanders was a diversion; and that the main assault would soon be launched on the Somme:

> GERMAN SEARCH FOR WEAK POINT. The German Headquarters still continues to lengthen out its field of action, but the attack on the front forty kilometres between La Bassée and Ypres seems too remote to be able to constitute an integral element in the principal operation, which still remains in progress in the region of the Somme. For the moment we must regard it merely as a diversion on large scale, intended to retain in the north those British divisions which might otherwise sent down the south, to keep them out of the principal battle zone. Such diversion was no means unlocked for, and doubtless British reserves will be able to re-establish the situation, which would only become grave if the advance of the Germans were notably increased.

4 POST-WAR

Liverpool

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool first proposed a memorial for the city shortly after the end of the Great War, but Liverpool had such a difficult time economically in the early 1920s that it was several years before the Council decided to set up a committee and what we know today as The Cenotaph was only unveiled in 1930. Before then, Armistice Day services were held in front of a temporary wooden structure, transported each year on a handcart. Lionel Budden's design for a cenotaph was chosen in 1926 in a competition judged by Professor Charles Reilly of the Liverpool School of Architecture, for its 'dignity, simplicity and reserve'. The horizontal of the monument both complements and contrasts with the enormous vertical bulk of St George's Hall in the background. The bronze reliefs on the memorial were sculpted by G. H. T. Smith, with the panel facing the Hall depicting an army on the move, whilst the panel on the Lime Street side shows Armistice Day celebrations.

The war ended in November 1918; but Liverpool was anything but peaceful in 1919. There was a race riot in June and a Police strike, involving a further riot, in August the same year. The race riot is very disturbing, from a modern liberal point of view. It is said that some of the old soldiers resented the fact that, when they returned, they did not find a land 'fit for heroes', but a place where there was widespread unemployment and where, as some of them saw it, 'coloured' immigrants had been interbreeding with their (white) women. A Liverpool newspaper claimed that the 'negro' population of Liverpool had grown by leaps and bounds during the war, though the figure was only thought to be 4 or 5,000. *The Times* gave out the same figure, but the *Daily Express* put their number at a mere 2,000. According to some sources 'there was fierce competition between blacks and working-class whites for jobs' and, true or not, it seems that in 1919 many black Liverpudlians had their employment at local oil mills and sugar refineries terminated, because whites refused to work alongside them.

The riot broke out on Thursday 5th June; but there are wildly differing accounts, most of which seem to put the blame on the blacks, though they seem to have come off worst. One account has it that a large crowd of young white men and

girls confronted a large crowd of blacks. Among the whites were a number of young soldiers in khaki, as well as many ex-soldiers. Revolver shots rang out and one soldier was wounded in the thigh. Rioting broke out again on Sunday 8th June. An account of subsequent court proceedings said that a Coloured man had been running along the street waving an iron bar and shouting "Down with the white race." The same account continued:

White men appear determined to clear out the blacks, who have been advised to remain indoors. This counsel many of them disregard, and late on Sunday a large body of police had to be requisitioned to prevent serious consequences. Whenever a negro was seen he was chased and, if caught, severely beaten...

There is one particularly horrific story, to the effect that a 24 year old Bermudian seaman called Charles Wotten was murdered when he was set on, beaten, weighed down with an anchor chain, thrown into the Queen's Dock and left to drown.[71]

As for the police strike in August 1919, the background is that the National Union of Police and Prison Officers (N.U.P.P.O.) was formed in 1910 and in 1918 the Metropolitan Police had gone on strike over recognition of that Union; but, after the Prime Minister Lloyd George intervened, the strike was called off after less than a day and the issue of recognition was postponed for the remainder of the war. On 1st March 1919 a Committee under the Chairmanship of Lord Desborough was convened to look at pay and conditions, which varied a good deal from place to place. Desborough supported an increase in pay, a root and branch upheaval of conditions, and the introduction of a representative body for the Police Service; but this was to be a federation, rather than a full trade union. Many in N.U.P.P.O. did not like this idea and there was renewed pressure for a further strike, on a national basis.

As it turned out, strike action was centred on Merseyside; and Liverpool, Birkenhead, Bootle and Wallasey all saw Officers failing to report for duty. The complaints did not just relate to pay, but included hours, lack of opportunity for advancement and discipline. As to the last, Police Constables were required to parade for duty a quarter of an hour before their start time and then be inspected, when each Constable had to prove that he was ready for action. On the hour the Sergeant would march his section out to their respective beats, which were fixed – with no discretion as to the order in which the Policemen would patrol the streets. Then the men would meet at a designated Conference Point – at the same time every hour. And so on. Yet on the other hand, clerks were promoted who had never been on the beat.

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71 www.heretical.com/British/riot1919.html/liverpoolcitypolice.co.uk/police-strike-1919/4552230277; *History Today*, October 2013, Stephen Bourne p 56-7, citing Costello, Ray, *Black Liverpool* (Picton Press, 2001).

The strike began early on Friday 1st August 1919, when Bridewells and Police Stations across Liverpool saw groups of striking policemen gathering, in an attempt to gain support from those who had rejected the Union's call to stay away from work, whilst other strikers spread throughout the city. The Watch Committee issued an ultimatum that those men who had failed to parade for duty by 8.00 p.m. would be dismissed. About 50 Officers heeded the warning and returned to duty but the majority ignored it.

The strike presented the 'unruly elements' in Liverpool with a rare opportunity. On the Friday night there was widespread looting in shops in Scotland Road, Byrom Street and Great Homer Street.[72] Police Officers were called in from Hatton Garden and Rose Hill but this only meant that the disorder spread to other parts of the city. Clothes and shoe shops were targeted, along with jewellers and pawnbrokers. The events of Friday night were repeated on the Saturday night and again on the Sunday night. Nonetheless, the rioting was met with a swift and forceful response. The city fathers called on the business community to provide men to act as special constables, while police officers were also drafted in from other parts of the country. The Armed Forces were also called upon: Army units were encamped in St. Johns Gardens, while *H.M.S. Valiant* steamed down from Scapa Flow and anchored in the Mersey. In Everton the Riot Act was (literally) read, from the safety of an armoured car. An hour later the Army fired a volley over the heads of rioters. Police Officers were driven to the scene of disturbances and, upon arrival, charged the rioters with batons, driving them into alleyways where they were met with other policemen. The tactic was a success, at the cost of many broken heads.

By Monday 4 August, things had almost returned to normal. 350 people now appeared in court, charged with looting and rioting. According to the Head Constable's report, 955 strikers were dismissed and told to return their uniforms and accoutrements to St. George's Hall. However, not everyone complied; the strike cost the city over £125,000 in payments under the Riot Damages Act, in addition to what had to be paid to central government for the attendance of the Army and Navy.[73]

Commemoration

Modern historians have carefully re-examined the traditional notion that a whole generation of young British men was killed in the First World War. Searle points out

[72] My father had a shop – consisting of a Pharmacy and Sub-Post Office – in Great Homer Street in the 1950s and 1960s, which must have been there in 1919. It was eventually pulled down to make way for the second Mersey Tunnel in the 1970s.

[73] S & E, 304; Sellwood,A.V - *Police Strike 1919* (W.H.Allen, 1978); Bean, R. *Police Unrest, Unionisation and the 1919 Strike in Liverpool*- Journal of Contemporary History, vol 15 –1980; *Report of the Committee on the Police Service in England, Wales and Scotland, part 11, Minutes of Evidence*, B.P.P. cmd. 874, 1920 (Desborough Committee); Thomas, E,- *Liverpool Police Strike 1919* (unpublished thesis, Liverpool 1986).

that whereas the British Isles suffered a loss of 6.3% of its male population between 15 and 49, Germany lost 12.5%, Rumania 13.2%, France 13.3% and Serbia 22.7%;[74] but it scarcely needs saying that figures like this do not take us very far. It would not have been of much comfort to my grandmother to be told that there were more German, or French, or Russian widows than British. In the same way, I doubt that it would have been a consolation to be told that the sacrifice her husband had been worthwhile, because we had won the war.

By 1916 the mechanism for informing people of the deaths of relatives was well established. Despite the urban myth about the receipt of the dreaded telegram, it was usually done by means of an official letter, expressing 'deepest regret…', followed by another written by an officer, containing more platitudes. However, the chance of *anything* like this ever having been written in Arthur Cooper's case were slim, in view of the short length of time he was in the Sherwood Foresters and the fact that he was not even an N.C.O. at the time.[75] There is certainly no letter surviving.

Early in the War there had been a great deal of pressure put on the government to bring the bodies of soldiers killed in the conflict home; but so many men had lost their lives that it was decided as early as 1915 that repatriation was impractical, not only because of the numbers involved but because, for almost half those who were killed, there was no body anyway, or at least nothing recognisable. However, identity discs were used and in September 1916 it was decided to give soldiers two such discs, one to be taken as proof of death, the other to be left with the body for later recognition, which made the process somewhat easier. In my grandfather's case, they must have found some part of him, because his identity disc came back to my grandmother, along with other personal effects.[76]

An instruction in Form 118A was sent by the War Office in London twelve days after the Armistice, requiring the Officer in charge of Infantry Records at 6 District Lichfield to despatch any articles of personal property to my grandmother in Liverpool.[77] And on 6 December the following were duly delivered to her at 143 Albert Edward Road:

'Disc. Photos. Pocket Book. Corres. Religious Book. Cards.'

A receipt was signed by my grandmother for these on the same day, and sent back and received in Lichfield on the 7th. (The receipt or a copy was then attached to a copy of the accompanying letter held in Lichfield). I now have the disc referred to; but the remaining items were clearly kept by my Nana. She couldn't have cared less about the disc. She put it in a drawer.

[74] Searle, chapter 19.
[75] S&E, 89, 93
[76] E&S, 107.
[77] TNA, WO 363.

Three years later, on 30 December 1921, the two medals now in my possession - the British War and Victory Medals - were both hand delivered to Nana's house at 143 Albert Edward Road in Liverpool: the Burnt Documents contain a receipt, signed by my grandmother on that day for them. One medal is inscribed with the words 'The Great War for Civilisation'. On another day that month, probably prior to the 30th but I cannot be sure, a large medallion commemorating Arthur's death arrived in the post. This was inscribed with the words 'He Died for Freedom and Honour'.[78]

I have no reason to doubt that my grandmother shared these noble sentiments; but I also know that she put all three items in the drawer, along with the identity disc, rather than mounting them or displaying them; and indeed that she left the medallion in its official envelope. Moreover, family tradition has it that she never attended the services on Remembrance Sunday. Perhaps she simply felt, as many must have done, that her sorrow was 'too deep for words'. Perhaps she was repelled by the hypocrisy of some of the regular attenders. Frank Richards was. He thought that the award of war medals was somewhat indiscriminate and that

There are some on parade today wearing war-medals on their breasts as if to say that they have been in action – but the only action they were ever in was with some of the charming damsels in the Red Lamps behind the Front and down at the Bases where they served.[79]

Yet my grandmother was certainly religious. She attended Church several times a week, and made sure that her children did the same as they were growing up; and the official line taken by the Christian Churches (Anglican, Catholic and Nonconformist) was that British soldiers died 'For God and the King', and in a noble cause. It clearly stuck in Siegfried Sassoon's craw to be told by a Bishop that 'great was the sacrifice but it was supremely glorious'; but by 1918 Sassoon was clearly an atheist.[80] I can't believe that my grandmother was (she had grown up in a world where Newton and Darwin were strangers to the classroom); and she may well have shared the same view of the War as Douglas Haig, who was Presbyterian, and whose views percolated down to his men through the ministrations of countless ministers and elders, that God was on Britain's side. In addition I am sure that, to judge by my father's views, she must have been unerringly patriotic. Rupert Brooke was probably more representative of her views than Wilfred Owen; and she died the year before *Oh! What A Lovely War* was first staged. I doubt that she would have thought much of that production, or with Owen's idea that *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* was a 'lie', or with Sassoon's view that the War was no more than 'a dirty trick' played on him and his generation; and yet there was this complete indifference to the medals, the medallion, and to Remembrance Sunday.

Not all the poetry written during the Great War was the anti-war poetry

[78] I have the envelope the medallion arrived in, but the day of the month on the postmark is obscure.
[79] I owe this reference to Fussell.
[80] SS 631-3.

which is now so often associated with it. Much that was written at the time was straightforwardly patriotic. Amongst my books is a slim volume of verse by Rupert Brooke, given to my father as a Form Prize in 1928. This contains the poem 'Peace' written in 1914:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,

The same volume contains the more famous poem 'The Soldier':

If I should die, think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England.

We shall never know the reason for my grandmother's refusal to attend services of remembrance; but I suppose it is possible to accept the teachings of the Church and at the same time feel that the answer they provide is incomplete, and even – perhaps at certain times in the night – that it is no answer at all. At any rate, Nana was one of those who preferred to do her grieving in private.

Yet, as I have learned during the course of these researches, Arthur Cooper *is* commemorated in several different places, not only in Liverpool but also in Belgium, Manchester and Derbyshire. In addition, he is commemorated in Liverpool, both by the Cenotaph and by the Post Office War Memorial, which incorporates a remarkable statue of Britannia mourning her dead, originally unveiled by the M.P. for the Scotland district of Liverpool T.P. O'Connor on 15 June 1924.[81]

Tyne Cot Cemetery and Memorial, near Passchendaele, to the east of Ypres in Belgium, is the largest British military burial ground there is. The land on which it sits was assigned to the U.K. in perpetuity by King Albert I of Belgium, in recognition of the sacrifices made by the British Empire in the defence and liberation of his country. The name is said to come from the resemblance which the Northumberland Fusiliers saw between a German concrete pill box (which still stand in the middle of the cemetery) and traditional workers' cottages on Tyneside - Tyne Cots. The area was captured by the 3rd Australian Division and the New Zealand Division on 4 October 1917 and the construction of a cemetery for British and Canadian war dead was begun only two days later. (It was recaptured

[81] O'Connor was the only Irish Nationalist MP ever to be elected by a mainland British constituency – which tells you something about the size of the Irish community in Liverpool, especially when you learn that he was first elected in 1885 and returned unopposed in the general elections of 1918, 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1929.

by German forces on 13 April 1918, but liberated by Belgian forces on 28 September the same year).

The stone wall at one end of the cemetery at Tyne Cot contains the Memorial to the Missing. Upon completion of the Menin Gate memorial in Ypres, builders discovered it was not large enough to contain all the names for which a home had to be found; and, using an arbitrary cut-off date of 15 August 1917, the names of the U.K. missing after this date were inscribed on the Tyne Cot memorial instead. The memorial contains the names of 33,783 soldiers of the UK forces, plus a further 1,176 New Zealanders. It was designed by Sir Herbert Baker, with sculptures by Joseph Armitage and F.W.V. Blundstone, who also sculpted part of the Newfoundland National War Memorial; and it is here that Arthur Cooper is commemorated. His name is towards the bottom of Panel 100; and he is the first of five Coopers whose names appear there.

It is now 40 years since I first started to take an interest in Arthur, and almost 20 since I first visited Tyne Cot. When I did most of the research described above, it was done by letter and telephone call; but nowadays it is possible to do much of the research work online. I reproduce below the print out of a search conducted in 2013 on the website of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission - www.cwgc.org.

Name	Rank	Service Number	Date of death	Age	Regiment	Country	Reference	Cemetery
COOPER, ARTHUR	Private	102375	12/04/1918	32	Sherwood Foresters (Notts and Derby Regiment)	United Kingdom	Panel 99 to 102 and 162 to 162A.	TYNE COT MEMORIAL

My Aunt Peg informed me in 1978 that Arthur Cooper was also commemorated on a family grave at Agecroft Cemetery, which is a large municipal cemetery in Salford, founded in 1909; but it was not until 2013 that I wrote for information and was told Luke Smith, an administrative support officer, that he had found a grave in what he called the 'Dissenters' section - plot 15 grave number 483. (There is in fact more than one 'Nonconformist' section). He said that in the grave were

May Jackson – 15.04.1919
Frances A Cooper – 05.09.193
Mark Cooper – 07.06.1934
Mark E [sic] Cooper – 15.08.1936

Clarice Maden – 10.01.1964[82]

This is a list of those members of Arthur's family who were buried in the grave in question - his father Mark and his mother Frances (always referred to as Annie), his older brother Mark, and his younger sisters May and Clarice. Not mentioned there are Arthur himself, his youngest brother George (who was to die in 1966) and his twin brothers and sister, who died in infancy, some time in the 1890s.

I visited Agecroft while in Manchester on business on 12 July 2013. It is a very large cemetery but I found the grave without difficulty, because I had the number.[83] There was indeed a grave, and it was well kept, with a large tombstone, though it inclined forward slightly. The full inscription is

In
Loving Memory of
MARK
BELOVED HUSBAND OF
FRANCES ANNIE COOPER.
DIED JUNE 4TH 1934, AGED 74 YEARS
AT REST
***ALSO* FRANCES ANNIE.**
***BELOVED WIFE OF* MARK COOPER.**
DIED SEPT 1ST 1932, AGED 75 YEARS.
GOD GAVE. GOD AS TAKEN. [sic]
MAY.
BELOVED DAUGHTER OF
MARK & FRANCES ANNIE COOPER.
DIED APRIL 11TH 1919, AGED 27 YEARS.
SWEET REST AT LAST.
ALSO ARTHUR COOPER, SECOND SON
KILLED IN FRANCE APRIL 12TH 1918.
AGED 32 YEARS.
LOVED BY ALL WHO KNEW HIM.
ALSO MARK CLEMENT COOPER.
ELDEST SON OF THE ABOVE.
DIED AUGUST 11TH 1936 AGED 52 YEARS.
PEACE PERFECT PEACE

There are various things I notice about this. The inscriptions were very clear and,

[82] Note that these are the dates of burial, not death.

[83] See also http://www.salford.gov.uk/d/Plan_of_Agecroft_Cemetery.pdf

apart from making a curious spelling mistake ('God as taken'), the stonemason has taken great care. Several different 'fonts' have been used, and several sizes of letters and numbers: it looks to me as if the stone mason earned his fee. As to content, this reveals that the stone must have been erected in the mid-1930s, possibly by Clarice, who was buried here 30 years later, though she has no inscription (there is no room!) I doubt there were many visitors to this spot between 1964 (when Clarice died) and 2013, although there may have been visits paid by other members of the family, whom I have never been in touch with – for example the children of Clarice and George (who both had daughters); and my aunts were clearly aware of the existence of the grave in the 1970s. But Peg wrote in 1978 that 'all in Manchester have now gone'; and on 18 July 2013 the cemetery administration confirmed that my great grandfather Mark was the only grave owner and no-one else has ever taken over ownership of the grave. (I pause to add that, without grave ownership nothing can be done to the headstone in the way of resetting, additional inscriptions and further burials). All this points, I think, to a sad but perhaps inevitable history of neglect during the last 70 years.

Of course the main thing which interests me was that Arthur's name is inscribed here, though he was not buried here. The statement that Arthur was killed 'in France' is strictly inaccurate, since he was killed in Belgium; but doubtless the family was not told where he was sent when he was posted abroad. Alternatively, 'France' may have been used as shorthand for 'France and Flanders', which was a common way of referring to the Western Front.

I very much like the sentiment contained in the words 'Loved by all who knew him', since I think it is more than a platitude. It contrasts with the generality (not to say banality) of the other, more religious commemorative words to be found here, and to my mind it is a fitting tribute to Arthur's easy-going character, as related to me by my aunt.

Does the fact that the tribute to Arthur is not religious in content tell us anything? The family grave is in the Nonconformist section of the cemetery; but Arthur's identity disc stated that he was 'C of E' (though, as we know, he may strictly speaking have been a Congregationalist). This was a conventional way of describing someone who had no particular religion and Aunt Peg wrote that in her view Arthur was 'not a religious man in the conventional sense', though 'he had a natural sense of right and wrong given to few of us to possess.' So the conclusion is yes, probably.

Arthur Cooper is also commemorated at the Memorial Tower on the top of the hill in Crich, Derbyshire, not far from Matlock. The tower there (just up the slope from the National Tramway Museum) commands an impressive view on a fine day; but I visited on a wet and windy day in September 2013. This was originally an ancient structure but in 1921, the Sherwood Foresters Old Comrades Association decided that it should become a memorial to the memory of the 11,409 Sherwood Foresters who died during the Great War. The tower was duly refurbished and dedicated in 1923, the ceremony being carried

out by the Colonel of their Regiment, General Sir Horace L Smith-Dorrien, who had commanded the British II Corps at the Battle of Mons in August 1914, and the Battle of Le Cateau which followed. (In the spring of 1915 Sir John French relieved him of his command for requesting permission to retreat from the Ypres Salient to a more defensible position).

There is a contemporary account of the ceremony

By 3.30 pm the crowd surrounding the foot of the tower had assumed gigantic proportions and still the pilgrims to this elevated shrine came up in a steady stream. The weather was so good that it could not have been improved, a cool breeze swept over the top of the cliff from the infinite space above the valley of the Derwent and the only drawback was that a low visibility considerably interfered with the enjoyment of the extensive view. Many of the male members of the crowd wore war medals and not a few had the appearance of men still suffering from the effects of the European holocaust. These were the most pathetic of all the visitors, poor, broken men who had braved the difficulties of the long and steep climb and possibly suffered much pain in the process that they might be present at the honouring of their lost comrades.

One of the inscriptions at the Memorial Tower in Crich commemorates not only the Sherwood Foresters who gave their lives, but also to the 140,000 men who served during the Great War, and there are also plaques commemorating those who were killed in the Second World War, and to certain prominent officers, including Smith-Dorrien.

The Memorial Tower has been restored and added to several times since the 1920s; and in 2009 the British Legion - which meets at The Cliff Inn at the foot of the hill - collected funds and arranged for a memorial to be erected at Tyne Cot Cemetery, which is engraved as follows

IN MEMORY OF
OVER 11,000 ALL RANKS OF
THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS
(NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND DERBYSHIRE REGIMENT)
WHO LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES
ON THE WESTERN FRONT
BETWEEN 1914 AND 1918

The Widow and Her Son

How was my grandmother placed financially, after the War? I was always told that

my father's family were not poor but, on the other hand, they were certainly not well off. They were frugal, they did not believe in wasting food and they did not buy things before they could afford them. Hire-purchase was a post-Second World War phenomenon. By the end of the Great War the separation allowance paid to a woman, including increments for children, was 23s a week.[84] The widow of a soldier killed in the performance of Military duty might receive a pension at the following rate per week

Warrant Officer, Class I	21s	3d
Warrant Officer, Class II, or Non-Commissioned Officer, Class I . . .	18	9
Non-Commissioned Officer, Class II	17	6
Non-Commissioned Officer, Class III	16	3
Non-Commissioned Officer, Class IV		15
Private, etc. (Class V)	13	9

By the time of his death Arthur Cooper had reverted to the status of private. A widow might be granted a further allowance at the following weekly rates for each child under the age of 16 maintained by her.

	s.	d.
For a first child	5	0
For a second child	4	2
For a third child	3	4

In fact, I now know from 'Widows – Form 3', which the Ministry of Pensions used to communicate with the relevant officer of the Notts. & Derby Regiment in Lichfield on 9 December 1918, that my grandmother was awarded 29 shillings and 7 pence a week for herself and her three children, from 6 January 1919. I cannot quite reconcile the figure with the tables set out above; but I assume that she must have benefited from some annual increase by the time the pension took effect (or else there was a slight uplift due to the time he had spent as a lance-corporal).[85]

At first sight it seems utterly tragic that my grandmother was left to look after three small children when her husband was killed; and no doubt it was. But families were on the whole larger then; and more support was commonly given by grandparents and others than is the case nowadays. Moreover, more people attended Church then, and the Church provided a community as well as religion.

According to the Census of 1901, the Cooper family consisted of Arthur's mother Frances Annie Cooper, who lived until 1932; his father Mark Cooper (b 1859)

[84] Searle, 767.

[85] Great War Forum - http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=147564

who lived until 1934; Arthur's older brother Mark, who died in 1936, the sister Clarice, who died in 1964 and the younger brother George, who died in 1966. Admittedly, the rest of the family had stayed in Manchester when Arthur and Margaret moved to Liverpool in 1913, where she continued to live for the rest of her life; but it is reasonable to suppose that links with Manchester were maintained. There was a good service by railway; and I have one family photograph which shows several generations gathered together, when my father was still a young schoolboy. This shows Arthur's father, with his sister Anne on his knee; a friend; my father; Clarice with a baby and her husband 'Uncle' Hartley Maden. Where it was taken, I know not.

My grandmother came from a family of four children. In the 1901 Census she is recorded as having two sisters and a brother living with her, all considerably younger than herself (they were 7, 3 and 2, so the eldest of them was nine years younger), while her mother was only 40, though her father was already 59. It is perfectly possible that some of these family members continued to be a support to her after 1918. For that matter Nana herself is already recorded as being a 'seamstress' in 1901, though she was only 16. It is possible that she may have been able to obtain some work to do at home in the 1920s, though I have no hard information about this and it may well be that she had her hands full with three small children to look after.

In addition, my grandmother received support from her own children, as they grew up. Anne Cooper never married and she stayed at home with 'Nana' – she was always there when I visited them in Hillingdon Road as a child in the 1950s. At a suitable age, though, we were told that she had been 'jilted' by her fiancé during the Second World War. His name was Arthur Thomas. As a result of this, my mother said that his face had been 'turned to the wall'. I never quite knew whether to think this had been done literally (as one could with a photograph), or only figuratively. At any rate, Aunt Anne stayed at home for the rest of her life and was treated like a little girl while Nana lived. It seemed to me that her idea of a 'good time' was a glass of sherry at Christmas. She continued to live at the house at Hillingdon Road after Nana died, until her own death. At some point, I believe that my Aunt Peg, now a widow, moved in with her.

Peg must have known something of the grief felt whole family, when Arthur Cooper was killed. Barbusse has a scene where one of his characters says that grief for a dead husband is only transitory and that sooner or later, all widows find another man; but Nana never re-married nor ever met another man, so far as I known. And I recall my father's anger when one of his shop-girls made fun of a MissYoung, who also worked there, but was reckoned to be an old maid. He pointed out that it was quite possible that a woman of her age had once had a 'sweetheart', who had been killed in the 1914-18 War; and young men of marriageable age had been thin on the ground in the 1920s.

I think it is not too far-fetched to suggest that my grandfather's death when his son was only two and a half had a profound influence on my father's character.

My father was brought up his grieving mother, and two elder sisters. It is my guess that, being the only 'man' in the house affected him deeply. He grew into a relatively small man (5 feet 7 inches), but one who was determined to show that he was as good as the next, and better than most. He was 'the man of the house' from an early age.

My father was independent, self-reliant and very sure that he was right about most things. He was highly intelligent, but struggled to get an education. He left school 16, once he had obtained his School Certificate (which we came to know as 'O' level). People from his background did not go to University; but somehow he was apprenticed to a pharmacist, and by dint of hard work, he qualified and became an M.P.S. – Member of the Pharmaceutical Society.

He was expert at many things. He knew the thirteen-times table and had some knowledge of several languages – Latin, French and German. He could sing *La Cucaracha* in Spanish and dance the *Pasodoble* (or a solo version if you preferred); he was very good at crosswords and puzzles involving numbers; and of course he knew the contents of the *Pharmacopeia*. He read the *Manchester Guardian* as well as the *Liverpool Echo*. Even then, he did not regard the *Daily Mail* as a respectable newspaper. He played the violin. His general knowledge was very wide; but he had never learned the chief thing which a University education teaches us – which is how little we know. He had a habit of denigrating anyone who had reached the top, with the exception of Nobel Prize Winners in the hard sciences, and surgeons (whom he greatly admired).

I think it was Mark Twain's father who was always 'agin the government;' and my father shared that attitude. He was the only father that I knew who thought that Winston Churchill was 'a bloody fool'. This was not just because Churchill refused to listen to his advisers during the Second World War, but because he had been responsible for the disaster at Gallipoli during the First. I see now that this particular criticism was somewhat inconsistent, because my father also thought that the generals responsible for the Western Front were bloody fools.

It is very difficult for me now to say what attitude he took towards the Great War. He did not remember his father; but he had that book of poems by Rupert Brooke, which I have already mentioned. Brooke was by no means anti-war; but I hardly think that my father's possession of these poems had any political significance.

In the last decade of his life, my father heard about Joan Littlewood's *Oh What A Lovely War*. He told me that when he first heard about the show, or the film, he disapproved of it (though he had not seen it) because he thought it made fun of the war, which was not a subject for humour; but then he told me that he had second thoughts. He now thought that the show was 'all right' because it was making fun of the generals, not the men. This was revealing. I think my father subscribed very much to the view that the infantry were 'lions led by donkeys'.

The phrase was used as the title of a book published in 1927 by P.A. Thompson and then by the late Alan Clark M.P., whose diaries became bestsellers in

the 1990s; but in fact Clark's book *The Donkeys* (1961) is not about the First World War in general, nor does it propound a general theory that Douglas Haig and his kind were asinine. It is concerned only with the Battle of Loos in 1915: the author expressly disavows any criticism of what came later. Nevertheless, Clark's book is now associated with a view that had been expressed by Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967), in his poem '*The General*'

'Good Morning, Good Morning!' the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead.
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
'He's a cheery old card,' grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.
But he did for them both by his plan of attack.

'Lions led by donkeys' is a phrase which has caught on; but it is a very lazy view to take. Several million men passed through the ranks of the British Army during the First World War, and no doubt they included a fair number of lions, as well as many less courageous beasts. In view of the fact that around 750,000 of them were killed, and that they were following orders, it would have been impractical as well as invidious to criticise them. The officers were relatively few, and the generals even fewer; and, in an increasingly democratic and less deferential age, the generals became fair game, as did officers in general. Yet the truth is that the Generals would not have been of much use in the Front line, and the junior officers (other than the relatively few staff officers) suffered as much as the men. They led the troops into battle and their expectation of life was miserably short (six weeks, in the case of Old Etonians). As for the generals, they probably did their best, in circumstances of unprecedented horror and slaughter, which very few could have predicted or prepared for in August 1914. They do not deserve the calumny they have received.

There is even a respectable view that it was the Germans who were lions led by donkeys. Sir Frank Fox reproduces a conversation with a British officer in 1918, whose views he clearly regarded as typical of officers at G.H.Q., and who referred to the 'military glory of Prussia' but thought that the German High Command had 'committed some tremendous blunders', in failing to calculate the forces they had to meet precisely, in committing atrocities in Belgium, and in failing to concentrate sufficient troops for the Schlieffen plan and on the Marne in 1914. 'During the first three months [of the war], the disciplined and trained devotion of the German troops worked wonders in the battle line. But indecision at Headquarters prevented the concentration of their efforts…'

Stephen Cooper, 12 April 2018

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Illustrations

My great-grandfather Mark Cooper (1860-1934)

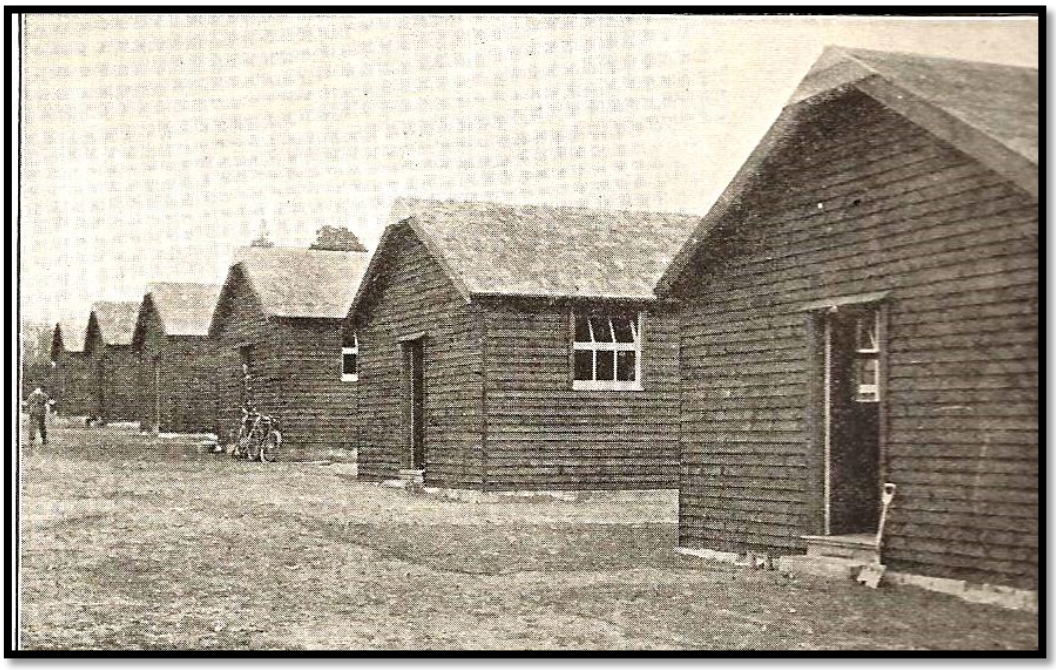
Arthur Cooper with daughter ‘Peggy’, circa 1914

143 Albert Edward Road, Liverpool 8

Ypres

Medical exam c.1914

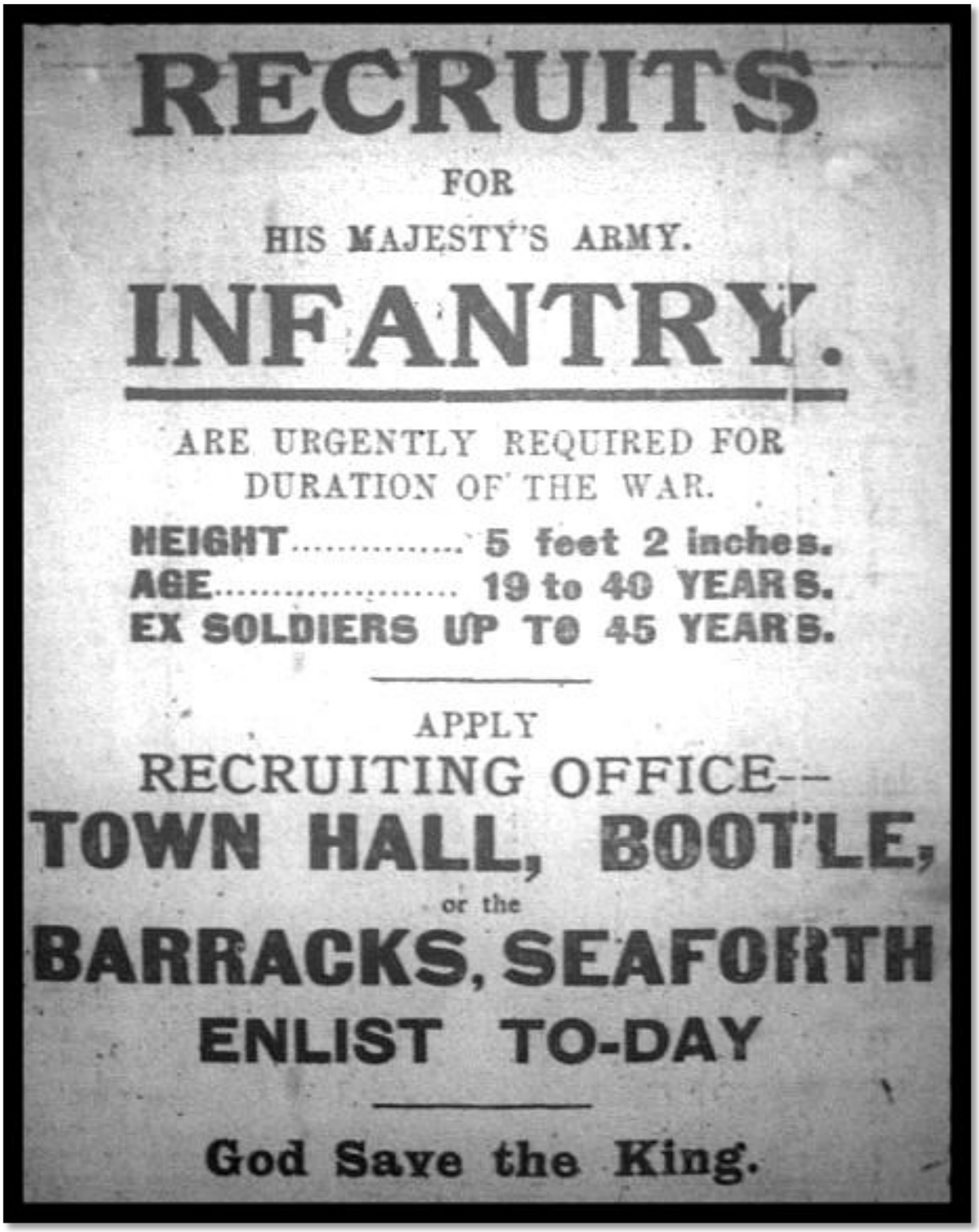
Kitchener Army recruits experiencing the joy of war



Kitchener Army Huts

Recruits to the King's Liverpool Regiment, circa 1915

P.T., Kitchener Army Recruits

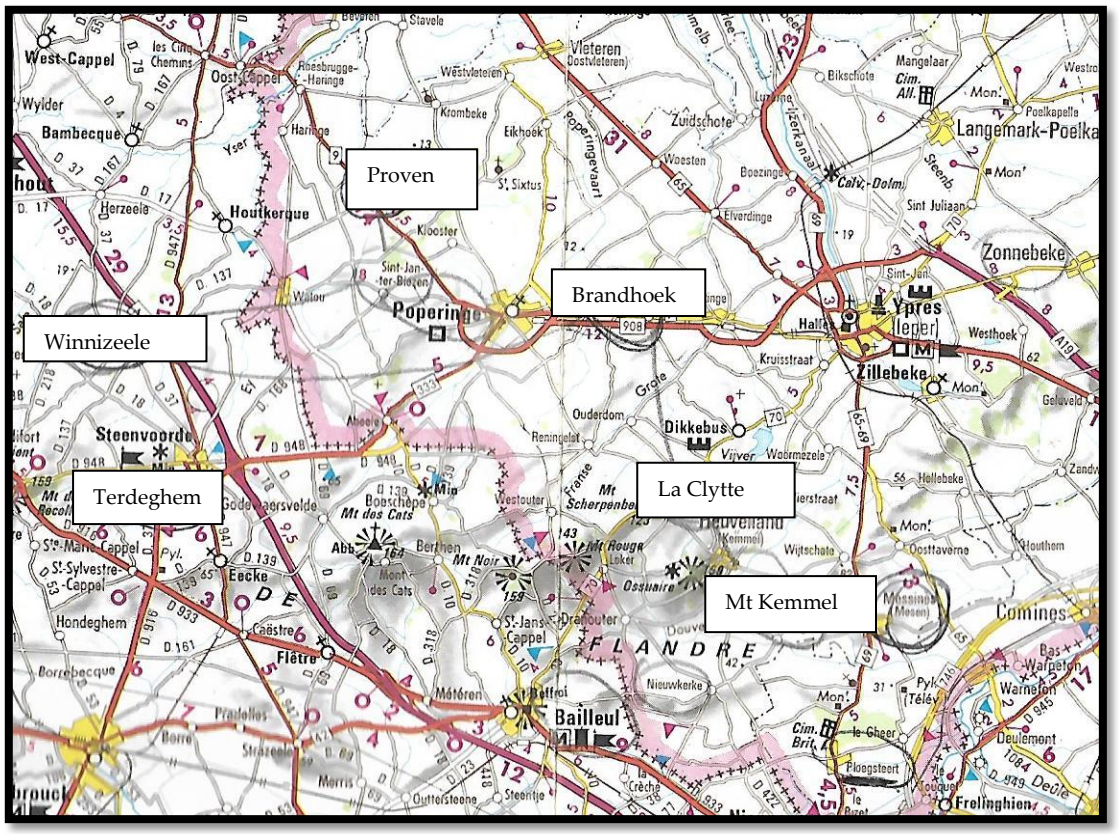


Recruitment poster, Liverpool

Arthur Cooper in 1916 or 1917

Arthur Cooper and Army colleagues in Norfolk

Photograph from ‘Toc H’, Poperinghe



Map of area around Ypres

The road to Mount Kemmel, 1997

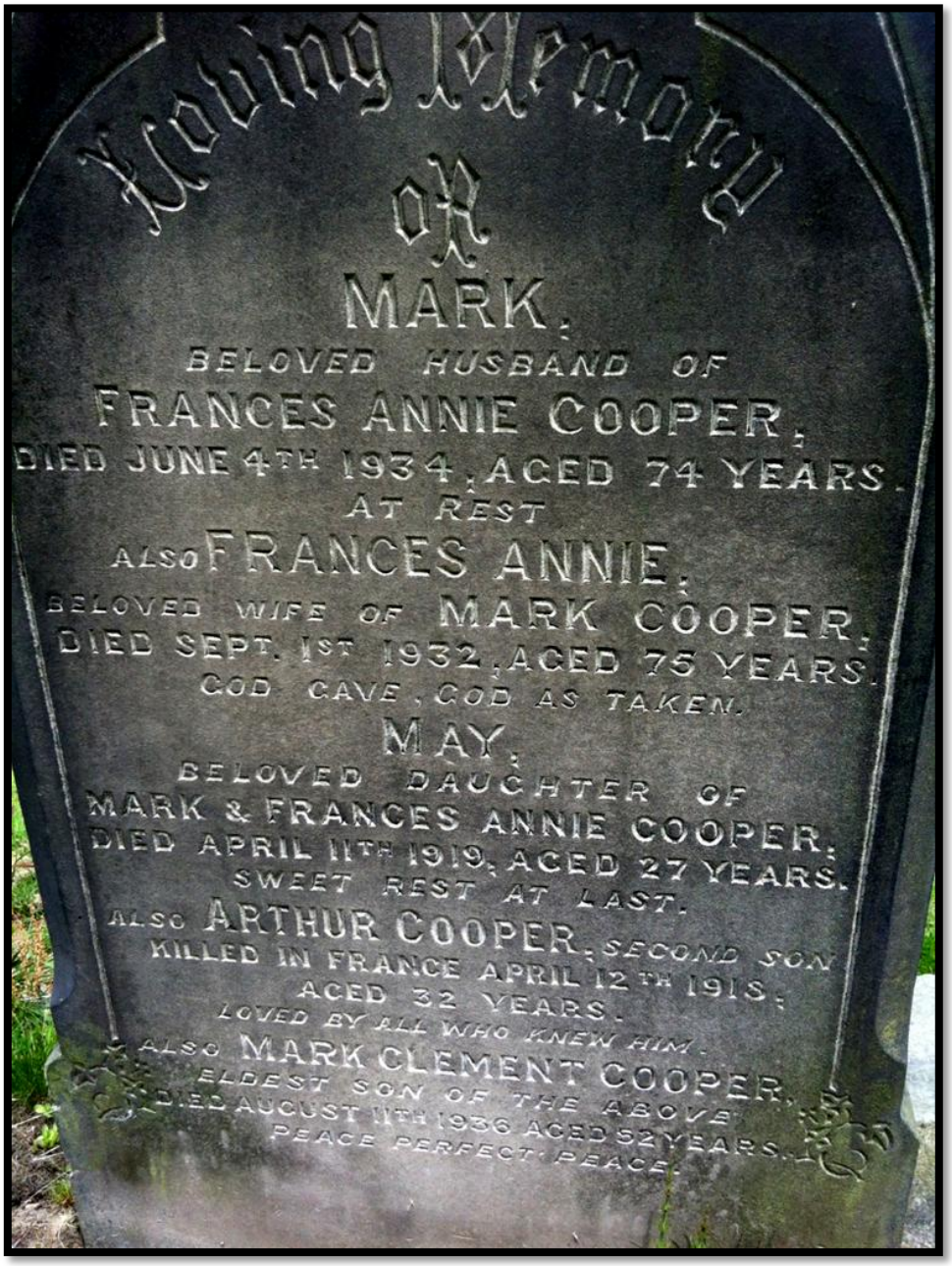
Margaret Cooper and her three children, 1918

Tyne Cot (1)

Tyne Cot (2)


CASTERTON W.
CAWTHORN W.
CHAMBERLAIN T.
CHAPPELL A.
CHARLESWORTH H.
CHIVERS G.
CLARE E. J.
CLARK B.
CLARK C. W.
CLARK W
CLARKE W.
CLAY T.
CLAYTON J W
CLEARY W. S.
CLEAVER D.
COOK C. F.
COOK C. R. S.
COOKE G. F.
COOPER A. 102375
COOPER A. 200892
COOPER E. 73076
COOPER E. 201915
COOPER H.
COPE H.
FOSTER G.
FOWLER S.
FOXON J.
FRANCIS A.
FURNISS G. W.
GARNER S.
GARROD H.
GAUNT W. L.
GLADDIN W.
GLASS G.
GODFREY J.
GREEN H. A.
GREEN J.
GRICE J.

Tyne Cot (3)



Cooper family grave, Agecroft Cemetery, Salford