



Remembrance Day

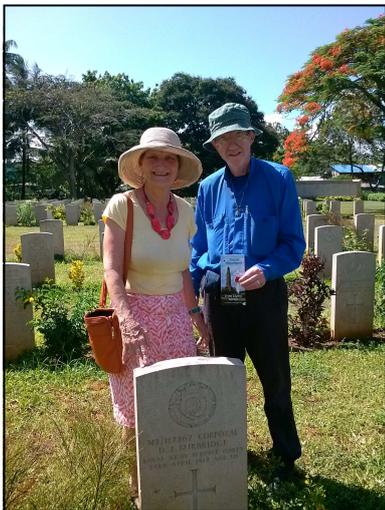


The people of Thame turned out in their thousands for the Remembrance Sunday service, on 9th November 2014 and the Thame Remembers stall was almost overwhelmed with enquiries and interest in the project. We made many positive contacts for future delivery of crosses, especially from the Howland, Line, and Chowns families. The installation of 190 Thame Remembers crosses, each bearing the name of a casualty and laid out in the shape of the cross covering an area nearly 5 x 2 metres, was very poignant and brought home the significance and scale of our challenge. The crosses are now safely put away for next year.



Photographs Courtesy of Nick White

Crosses to Tanzania



We reported last issue about the cross delivery in Dodoma, Tanzania. Hugh Prentice and his wife Dorothy have continued their travels and have now delivered a cross to the cemetery in Dar es Salam, Tanzania. The grave is that of Cpl David John Burbridge RAOC who was killed in fighting there. He was the father of Joy Campoli who many of you will remember around the town, as she only died in 2010.

Crosses Recently Delivered

13 November 2014
Sgt Maj Stockwell 1918
St Sever, Rouen, France
Mr Charles Boundy

14 November 2014
Cpl D A Burbridge 1917
Dar es Salam, Tanzania
Rev Hugh Prentice

Visit to St Sever Cemetery

Thursday 13 November – Normandy

St Sever cemetery and its extension lie near the middle of the section of southern, left bank Rouen, within one of the great sweeps of the River Seine. To the west the commercial and docklands centre spreads untidily back from the river; to the north spasmodic redevelopment continues towards the city centre, where the bright lights of the Christmas funfair on the left bank look across the bridges to the brooding spires of the cathedral. We are here to find the grave of one of Thame's war dead as part of its recognition of those who gave their lives in the First World War. Entering the cemetery we see traditional French family shrines and graves and then iron crosses for the French soldiers before the massed ranks of the Commonwealth war dead come fully into view.

Sergeant Major Herbert Arthur Stockwell is commemorated by a headstone



in section P, close to the walls of the new multi-sport ground and with a view back to the football stadium on the other flank. From the summary of his life I take it that he joined up at the start of the war, so had already survived nearly four years of camaraderie and hell, progressing to Sgt-Major and being awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery. He died on 1 April 1918, one of close to 100 we counted in that section to die on that day, and in turn one of the nearly 12,000 war dead buried in that cemetery. This was the time of the successive German

offensives designed to break the stalemate, some months before the Allied push which finally brought victory. Though he died from wounds to the head Sgt-Major Stockwell at least found peace in the relative safety of Rouen. His headstone is one of a pair, as with nearly all others, to suggest perhaps that we are not alone even in afterlife. They stand in rows, more ordered in death than ever in life, lit by a low sun, unruffled by the cool breeze. Roses grow in the soil; young acers with burnished late autumn colours stand like sentinels and the fronds of tall grasses rise between some lines like plumes on helmets. Although it is mid-November the mowing machines are still at work; theirs and the soft hum of traffic from surrounding roads are the only sounds.

Hazel places the flowers by the headstone. I tuck the *Thame Remembers* cross into the ground and speak to Bertie for a while. We record the scene and sign the nearby visitors' book in the tiny space left available. We notice the diversity of those who died – from all parts of the country and Commonwealth. Even in the French section the names show how their colonies supported them. I note that in Bertie's case (was he still called that in the trenches I wonder?) his age at death is not mentioned on the headstone. That is one way to live on.

Charles and Hazel Boundy



Thame
museum

This newsletter is printed and published by Thame Museum Trust and distributed free to all.

This paper is intended as a digest of news items about the Thame Remembers project to keep the people of Thame up to date with what is happening.

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Lt A F McDonald

In the last lewsletter we reported the delivery of a cross to the grave of Lt A F McDonald in Malta. We have since come across a remarkable report held in the Imperial War Museum, which is accompanied by the original camisole worn by his wife, Irene Robidou, at their wedding. We reproduce the report below in its entirety, and the camisole can be seen at

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30086941>

(camisole, as worn by Irene Robidou, as part of her wedding trousseau)



Research News from the Imperial War Museum

We met at the Shipbuilding Conference, Grosvenor Place, in October 1939 when I joined the staff as a junior secretary. Alexander Fahey McDonald (Mac), a very grown up 19, 6'3", sandy haired, athletic, was an assistant to the Deputy Chairman. His father had



been an accountant from Aberdeen who went to work in Trinidad, married Mabel Fahey (of Irish descent) there, and had two sons. Mac, the elder, was sent to school in England, and tragically his father died suddenly a year or two later. Mac spent his school holidays with Scottish relatives or friends of his parents. When he finished school, it was decided he should train here. His brother remained in Trinidad

for his schooling. We went dancing, walked in the parks and over Parliament Hill Fields and Hampstead Heath, attended the odd cinema and concert, although Mac adored jazz as well; I discovered The Melodymaker and somebody named Jack Teagarden! We tried playing tennis but he was so good he knocked my racquet out of my hand. But we had fun in the open air swimming pool. He insisted I read all Somerset Maugham.

After Dunkirk the Deputy Chairman offered to lend Mac his fare back to Trinidad, which he politely refused. He had sat his exams (which he passed) and was accepted to train as an Observer in the Fleet Air Arm. I thought I should join up but he said it was imperative I was home when he got leave. We were walking across Hyde Park when he began to describe where he would like to take me on our honeymoon in Trinidad, but that honeymoon would have to wait until the war was over. I said I couldn't go on my honeymoon without a proposal. He said "I'm not asking ya, I'm tellin ya." I said I wasn't going to be the only girl on honeymoon without a proposal. So he said "Will you marry me" and I said "Yes please." We were still 19. We were apprehensive about asking my parents if we could be officially engaged. Mac was a proud man and said he wasn't going to ask his mother's permission to get married, so we would have to wait until we were 21.

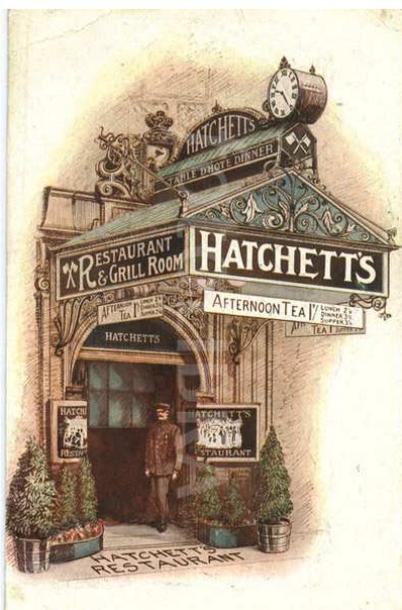
The blitz started and there were near misses. Mac was called to Portsmouth and they took their turns fire watching on the roof at night, but they got on with their studies, and I loved waiting to meet the train when he got weekend leave. Mac was in Course

45, and believe it or not the flight training was to be in Trinidad. It was so very wonderful; he would see his family after so many years, and be away from the stress of bombing. In our early days he asked me my birthday and when I said "2nd August" he said "Are you sure?" which he often did. This time I said "If you ask me am I sure again, it is all off." It was because I was 17 days older--his birthday was the 19th! So it was while Mac was in Trinidad, and we had our 21st birthdays in August 1941, I was planning our wedding. My mother had always taken me to Bourne & Hollingsworth for my party dresses, and while I was at Camden School for Girls (junior school of the Frances Mary Buss Foundation then) B&M took over the supply of school uniform, so to our favourite shop went my mother and I to buy my bridal gown. Family and friends chipped in to help with clothing coupons and ingredients for the cake. My two school friends, Dorothy and Ellen were to be bridesmaids, and a super dressmaker produced the dresses and little tricorne head pieces. Course 45 had a slow and tedious journey back but arrived safely in January 1942. Mac had grown a marvellous little beard but shaved it off while I was at the office — I had wanted everyone to see it! As a result of being with his brother, he announced that after the war he must come to England and stay with us to be trained.



Woburn Square in 1960's before Christchurch was demolished

We were able to get organised within a few days, and the wedding was at Christ Church, Woburn Square, where I attended, on 17th January 1942. After the reception at the Berners Hotel, we went to a tea dance at Hatchett's in Piccadilly where Stephane Grappelli



was playing, and caught the train to Torquay the next day for our English honeymoon! After our week, we went to Mac's relatives in Bournemouth, where he was able to play golf with his uncle. I had already been taught where to stand and be silent during play. Mac had been junior champion in Trinidad. Within a day or two my parents rang to say Mac had to go to Portsmouth for tropical gear, and while he was there his travel pass came for the night journey to Glasgow.



Stephane Grappelli

He took passage on HMS Cleopatra. German dive bombers attacked in the Med and a near miss fatally injured Mac on 11th February, and he died in Malta on 12th February 1942.

He is buried in the war cemetery at Imtarfa. After the war was won, an office colleague Joyce borrowed my headdress for her wedding to her regular soldier who had decided to become a doctor while he was a prisoner of war. Another colleague Molly asked to borrow the gown and headdress for her wedding to Dennis who was unfit for military service.

Thame Remembers is a project of Thame, Oxfordshire to commemorate the centenary of World War One by researching those from Thame who fell in all conflicts worldwide, and remembering them by placing a Thame Cross on their grave or memorial wherever in the world that may be. If you feel that you can help please contact Dave on 01844 21 5178.