

ISSUE 17 - December 2025

LAST POST

Newsletter of the Leicester City, County & Rutland At Risk War Memorials Project





The Leicester City, County & Rutland At Risk Memorials Project welcomes any information which can help or promote their work. If you have any details of any War Memorial you feel is at risk, or can help in any way, please contact us on:



Or contact the project's directors:

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**The Chancel,
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LE1 4PH**

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Welcome

A warm welcome to our winter issue no. 17. As our distribution has grown, so has the positive reaction of our readers enabling us to offer a wider selection of interesting subjects. In this issue are three fascinating articles prompted by the authors reading LAST POST.

On **P8** Brian Sreaton gives us a fascinating account of the search in 1951 by four Germans under the auspices of the VDK, (the German equivalent to our CWGC) for German soldiers buried in the desert following the heavy fighting in WW2.

On **P10** Paul Harrison, sparked by the memorial cleaning demonstration at our May Open Day, recounts a story of memorial restoration in Hong Kong.

On **P12** an article by Alec West about the highly ambitious creation of the striking memorial to the 10th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, which was based around Burrough on the Hill prior to their involvement at Arnhem. Their casualty rate makes sombre reading.



Denis Kenyon
Project co-founder

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COVER IMAGE:

Interior view of St. George's Memorial Church, Ypres

NEWS

Upcoming Open Days in 2026

In 2026 we have an exciting schedule of events taking place throughout the year. The dates for your diaries are listed below, we hope to see you there:

Open Days	
24 th January	11:00am - 4:00pm
14 th March	11:00am - 4:00pm
23 rd May	11:00am - 4:00pm
25 th July	11:00am - 4:00pm
14 th November	11:00am - 3:30pm

Heritage Open Days	
12 th September	10:00am - 6:00pm
13 th September	11:00am - 3:30pm

Friends of the Botanic Gardens Saturday 29th June

We have established an excellent relationship with The Friends, an important factor, given the BG will be our future home. We had a stand in the grand hall of Beaumont House and were run off our feet, holding 54 meaningful conversations and signing on another 13 subscribers to LAST POST.

No sooner had we drawn breath, than the following **Sunday 5th July**, we were in **LAHS History Day in Rutland Museum, Oakham**.

It was not as hectic, but we made some very useful contacts who will be able to help us



in the future. **Another 7 signed up for the newsletter.**

Open Day Saturday July 26th

This was keenly looked forward to, as in keeping with our aim to have an additional interest on Open Days, Robin Jenkins, always a big draw, gave two talks about the attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt. It was planned to take place under our gazebo in the churchyard. However, after weeks of non-stop sunshine, this was the day the weather broke. Nothing daunted, Robin gave his talks inside, and at each there were in excess of 25 people. It worked well with pop-up banners perched along the sink and kitchen unit!

On 31st August we were back in Beaumont House in the Botanic Gardens for a University History HUB event. Again, we



were very busy with 34 useful conversations, seven more for LAST POST. We were honoured and delighted when the Vice Chancellor came over to greet us.

Western Front Association Meeting		
15 th December	David Humberston	Sidney's War
19 th January	Grant Cullen	The Quintishill Disaster 22nd May, 1915
16 th February	Greg Drodz	Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover
16 th March	Nigel Atter	The Indian Corps on the Western Front
20 th April	Jim Beach	Wyndham Lewis's War Art (1918-1919)

Council Chamber, Braunstone Town Council, Braunstone Civic Centre, Kingsway, Braunstone Town, LEICESTER, LE3 2PP

Heritage Open Days

We had a successful time showcasing during the **Heritage Open Days Saturday 13th September was busy with 41 visitors**, many of whom had come to hear David Humberston's very well presented talk about the creation and operation of St George's Memorial Church in Ypres, of which

David and Valerie are trustees. Under the gazebo, excellent visuals help aloft by Valerie, served as a good substitute to power-point. Sunday was a rain-sodden wash out with two visitors, but we were honoured as one of whom was the High Sheriff, Stephen Bryan JP.



Dyers & Scourers' War Memorial and Roll of Honour oil painting

Despite our best endeavours, not a word has been heard about this. We can't believe that it has been destroyed. Please keep hunting. It is such a fine piece of Leicester's industrial and social heritage.



History Day, Adult Education Centre

This years **History Day at the Adult Education Centre on Saturday 11th October** was very much busier than the last

one. Useful contacts to spread the word and 9 more for LAST POST.

Gateway College

On Friday 17th October two members of staff and 11 students visited All Saints Church. Robin laid a wreath on our behalf at their Remembrance Service.



Update on move to the Botanic Gardens

Good progress is being made with detailed discussions of exact location.

Crowd Funding for revamp of displays

We have seen the first proposals from our chosen design company but until we have a definite idea as to our future home, these are being paused.

Hall Primary School, Glenfield

On Tuesday 14th October Denis spoke to two classes about the importance of Remembrance.

Too dearly loved in life to be forgotten in death

A reflection on the first Christmas of the war in 1914

Sheila Banyard reflects on the human experience of the Great War's first Christmas in 1914, drawing on the poignant letters soldiers sent home to local newspapers to find the rich source of their voices and enduring testimony to their service and sacrifice.

As the Great War has slipped from living memory the war memorials still visible in towns, villages and institutions, as well as those cared for by the At Risk Project, have taken on extra significance as a tangible testimony to the past. Whether specifically honouring those who lost their lives or recording all who served from a community, the fact that they publicly commemorate the service and sacrifice of each individual by name is deeply moving.

But especially when personal records are not readily available, what is it possible to glean about the disposition of these men in 1914 when the war was new and passions ran high, with the hope that it might "all be over by Christmas". One rich source for hearing their voices is in letters to local newspapers. These papers reported the fortunes of regiments, ships and units with connections to their area, but they also told the stories of individuals, not least those far from home enduring perilous circumstances, and of the increasing numbers of the fallen, wounded and bereaved. No surprise then that as the first Christmas of the war drew near all these people became a special focus for thought and concern.

The Leicester Daily Post and the Leicester Daily Mercury were early in opening funds to raise money to provide Christmas gifts to men of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland serving at the front or with the Grand Fleet. On 8th October 1914 they proposed to their readers the start of a "Shilling Fund", with all donations devoted to the cause. Whilst large donations would be gratefully received, it was hoped these modest shillings might be

within the reach of many ordinary people. It was estimated that at least 15,000 presents would be needed at a cost of perhaps 4 or 5 shillings each. Relatives of men who had been mobilised were asked to forward details so that a gift could be sent and the papers' proprietors opened the fund with a donation of one thousand shillings. There was a hopeful

contingency that "...in the event of the War finishing before Christmas we shall still forward the presents as arranged to wherever the men may be quartered."¹

It soon became clear that the task was even more enormous than originally envisaged, especially as it was now hoped to include those serving with the colours at home and military patients in local hospitals, as well as families of men who had fallen. In early December the Post was telling its readers that numbers of gifts requested had already topped 17,000.²

As parcels went out, letters of appreciation came in. Recipients hailed the contents with delight and enthusiasm: chocolate, writing paper, mufflers, gloves, bootlaces and tobacco were all especially welcomed. Each package included a card with seasonal greetings signed by the Mayors of Leicester and Loughborough. Many local firms made or donated goods, mufflers were knitted by women and schoolchildren, and fundraising events contributed more shillings. The scale of the dispatching operation was



Above: "Over By Christmas" print by Tony Sarg from the series "Humours of London", originally published in 1913.

such that by the first week of December when Lieutenant J W E Mosse, 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment, reported the safe arrival of 40 boxes for distribution, he added "Everyone at the Supply Depot came up and asked if the Leicesters were setting up as Harrods."³

A reflection on the first Christmas of the war in 1914

Able Seaman Walter Albert Toone, writing from HMS Tiger, must have echoed the feelings of many recipients for when he opened the parcel:

*"... a lump seemed to rise to my throat. The thought that was uppermost in my mind was that, although I was away on the high seas, out of sight, the people at home were thinking about me."*⁴

W Smith, Shoeing Smith, Royal Field Artillery, a veteran of the Boer War, was even more touched:

*"I have been out at the front since the commencement, and I can assure you we have seen some ups and downs... I am a man with no relations, and cannot remember seeing anyone in the wide world belonging to me yet, so you may know how I feel to think you have been so kind."*⁵

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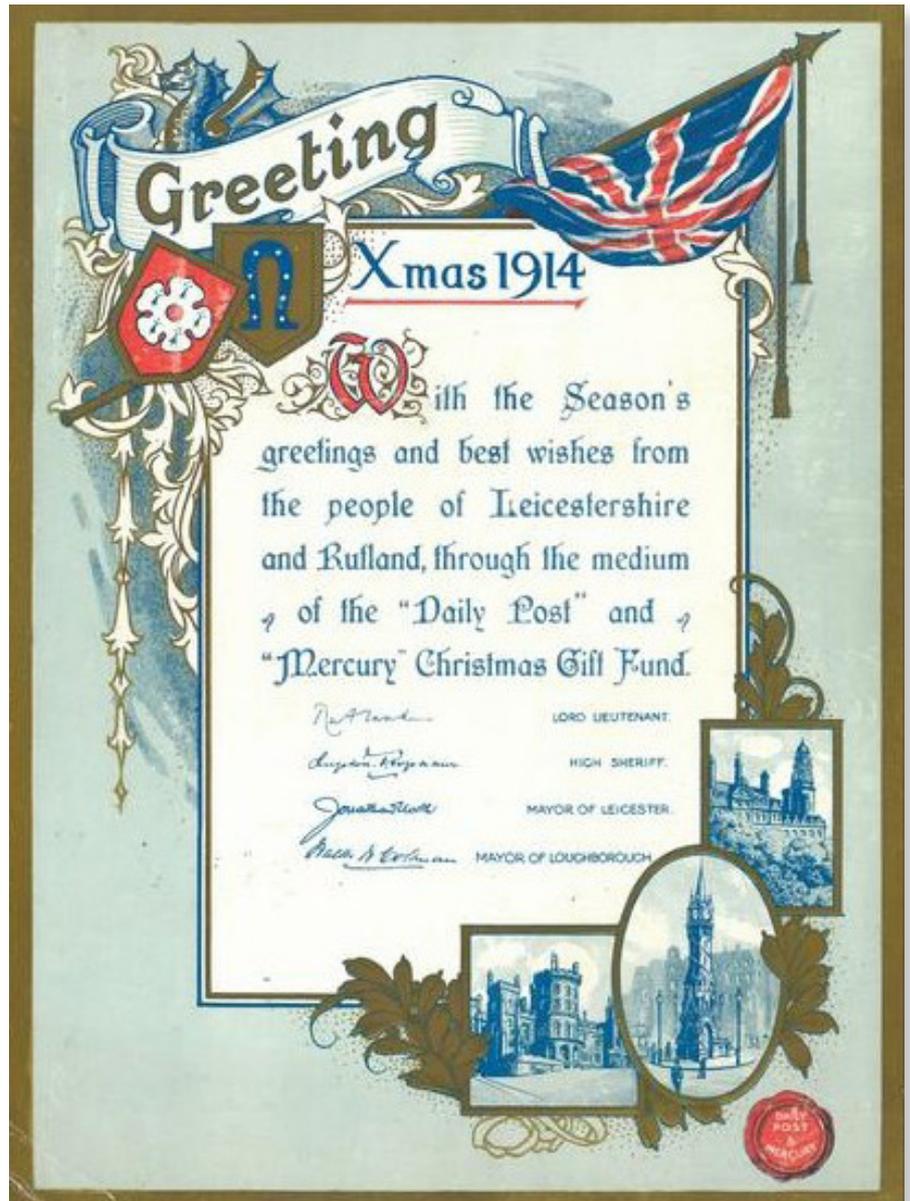
Bombardier W Woodward, Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, thought the parcel's contents had been skilfully selected and it was his intention:

*"... to forward the [greetings] card to my father to keep, so that I may look back and think how kind my townspeople were to their young people whilst doing their utmost for the Empire in its hour of trial."*⁶

The wish to send the card home to families for safekeeping was a recurring theme and many must have adorned mantelpieces that Christmas.

Despite the limitations of censorship, some letters offered a glimpse of the soldier's mood.

Private G Fitch, 1 Battalion Leicestershire



Above: Christmas greeting card from the people of Leicestershire and Rutland sent to soldiers during the First World War in 1914 and distributed through the "Daily Post" and "Mercury" Christmas Gift Fund.

Regiment, wrote:

*"I am deprived as to enter into details as to the war, but I can say that our battalion has been somewhat in the rough, though we have fared somewhat lucky, not too many losses, and so far general good health exists amongst us. Our hopes are high; there are many rumours. We are at the beginning of the end. Anticipation is high as to opening the New Year with peace. God speed the day."*⁷

Private E C Hammond, Royal Army Medical Corps, serving with 23rd Field Ambulance, reported :

"that the good old Leicesters are with us, and they are braving it grandly, and with the cold

*weather coming on it will go very hard with them in the trenches dodging 'Jack Johnsons'. They are awful things ... Still, at the same time, we are giving the Germans all that they are asking for, and the troops are confident of victory before many more days are past. During that time the Leicester boys out here do appeal to those who have not yet enlisted to do so at once, and let us get this war over."*⁸

The oft-mentioned 'Jack Johnson' was a fearsome 150mm German artillery shell with a powerful 'punch', nicknamed after the famous Black American heavyweight boxing champion of the day.

A reflection on the first Christmas of the war in 1914

Corporal George Gogerty, 31st Battery, Royal Field Artillery, described the bitterly cold weather, with fur coats being issued to drivers and men in the trenches, and fire buckets for burning charcoal:

"The war is beginning to drag a bit now," he commented wryly. He also recounted with glee how he and his fellows had marched to a town where a local brewery had provided large vats in which they could have a welcome hot bath and get clean clothes.⁹

Private J Wells, 6th Division Cyclist Corps, described a quiet time when his unit was able to play football. The first match was with the 19th Hussars, which was lost 6-3:

*"I think it would have been a win for us if we had had any practice, but as we have not got a ball we cannot get any practice no other way than kicking jam tins about, so if there is any kind reader who has a spare ball we would be very thankful."*¹⁰

Private J Wells, 6th Division Cyclist Corps, described a quiet time when his unit was able to play football. The first match was with the 19th Hussars, which was lost 6-3:

*"I am perfectly happy here. The French and Belgian people treat us with great respect, especially the Belgians, and when we pass through a good many of their places they will give us hot coffee and cigarettes, but the fags nearly poison us, so you can guess how an English one goes down ..."*¹¹

Many writers mentioned the plight of the refugees and the terrible sight of their ruined homes and villages.

Soldiers understandably wrestled with the temperature.

R Jarman, 17th Lancers, had met several of his "Townies" since landing in France, and all were pleased with their parcels, but:

*"It is intensely cold here, especially for us coming from India, and most of us are suffering more or less from ague. We are expecting to go in the trenches every day, and we are grumbling because we keep getting stopped. We want to get at those "Death's Head" Hussars, for having the same motto as us. We are very anxious to wipe them out before any other regiment gets a chance."*¹²

Private J Paine, Yorkshire Light Infantry, had been in the thick of it from the start. Noting the cruel weather:

"...the trenches put you in mind of the pictures when the watermain burst that Sunday, and also the snipers are very busy at



Above: *"Hands Off, Boys!" - Christmas Morning in the Trenches*, 1915 by an unknown artist.

present."

He was grateful for good boots but, like countless others, he struggled with:

*"... having to stand up to your knees in mud and water, and lay in it perhaps for days at a time, and then your things dry on you."*¹³

Driver J Nutt, Army Service Corps, 7th Co Field Ambulance, was stoic:

*"I have just left Belgium for France for a few days' rest with our Brigade. As you know, we have had a very rough time, as I am with the Life Guards, and had six weeks hard fighting. Our Brigade has lost over 2,000 in this last engagement round Ypres and Zeebrugge. I hope to be in my own town and among my own people very shortly. I have had the honour of catching four German spies."*¹⁴

With the formal closure of the Fund on Christmas Eve, the Post reported that over 40,000 shillings had been subscribed and more than 17,800 gifts had been distributed. Even so, contributions continued to come in, gifts to be sent out and thanks to be received from hospitals and bereaved families at home, as well as men overseas. Such was the success of the enterprise that Christmas parcels would be sent out again in 1915, by which time it was clear that the war would be a long haul.

The letters printed were inevitably just a sample of those received, selected for their interest to readers and perhaps for the newspapers' agenda. The men writing were those who had the resources, energy and

inclination, so that this glimpse into the lives of combatants was necessarily limited. These seasoned soldiers and sailors naturally drew on their past experience, not least perhaps in sometimes adopting cheery tones for people at home, but weariness and anxiety can be heard alongside the gratitude, pride and grit. Many would never return to the people and places they mention with such warmth, and none would return unscathed: **Private Hammond**, for example, survived the war but was sick and disabled thereafter, and **Private Wells**, now Lance Corporal, endured years of conflict only to die of influenza in Italy on 11th November 1918, aged 24, where he is buried in Staglieno Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. The personal inscription on his headstone might well stand as a commemoration of all those who, now long departed, were also embroiled in the Great War, but whose names and voices can still echo today: 'Too dearly loved in life to be forgotten in death'.

¹ *Leicester Daily Post*, 8 Oct 1914, p4.

² *Leicester Daily Post*, Weds 9 Dec 1914, p6.

³ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 4 Dec 1914, p6.

⁴ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 24 Nov 1914, p7.

⁵ *Leicester Daily Post*, 26 Dec 1914, p6.

⁶ *Leicester Daily Post*, 28 Nov 1914, p6.

⁷ *Leicester Daily Post*, Weds 9 Dec 1914, p6.

⁸ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 24 Nov 1914, p7.

⁹ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 2 Dec 1914, p7.

¹⁰ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 3 Dec 1914, p7.

¹¹ *Leicester Daily Post*, 11 Dec 1914, p6.

¹² *Leicester Daily Post*, 31 Dec 1914, p6.

¹³ *Leicester Daily Post*, 28 Dec 1914, p6.

¹⁴ *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 1 Dec 1914, p7.

Searching for the War Dead in North Africa

The article on the German approach to memorialising its war dead in the previous issue jogged one reader's memory regarding a chance purchase at a vintage Volkswagen show in Germany. The book, written in French, was titled: Images du Souvenir - roughly 'Memorable Images'. The author was one Pierre D'leteren, a Belgian proprietor of a Volkswagen dealership in Brussels. - Brian Sreaton

Briefly, the book records an epic journey that he and three colleagues made in 1950/51 from Belgium to the then Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) in a prototype Volkswagen Beetle and a very early Volkswagen Kombi (a Minibus). The Beetle had been modified mainly by raising the front and rear axles to give it increased ground clearance, which it would need to complete the journey across the Sahara and through the jungles of central Africa. It was to be called the 'Colonial Beetle' but never went into production. A second similarly modified Beetle was given to Gabrielle D'leteren, Pierre's mother, who was a rally driver and used the car to compete in the Cape Town Rally at the same time as her son's African trek.

Both Beetles and the Kombi returned safely to Belgium and were displayed at Volkswagen dealerships in Belgium and Germany, and also at the Frankfurt Motor Show, before visiting the Volkswagen factory at Wolfsburg where

they were welcomed by Heinz Nordhoff, the chairman of the Volkswagen Company, and overhauled. The trail then went cold until I discovered an article in a German car magazine from August 1952 which, under the title 'Unverwüstlich' (Indestructible), related the further adventures of the three vehicles this time under the auspices of the organisation that Denis mentioned in his article, the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (VDK) or German War Graves Commission.

I contacted the VDK who were very helpful and provided me with a copies of articles from 1951 and 1953 published in their in-house magazine 'Kriegsgräberfürsorge' in which the further story of the three Volkswagens is told. The 1951 article records that the VDK were pleased to receive 'two Volkswagens and a Kombi which have already proved themselves with an international test drive right across Africa'. The vehicles were either given or loaned to the VDK by the Volkswagen



Above: Pierre D'leteren (holding the sign) and his three colleagues celebrate with champagne upon crossing the Equator in Gabon just prior to reaching the Belgian Congo

company, with whom they had strong links.

The VDK had an important use in mind for these vehicles. Bearing in mind that they had already made a double crossing of the Sahara it was decided that they would be used to take four representatives of the VDK to the deserts of North Africa, and especially Libya, in order to search for the bodies of German and other servicemen who died in the intensive wartime combat in that area. So, on November 1st 1951, four vehicles set out from the VDK's headquarters in Kassel, the fourth being an Opel Blitz truck to carry all the necessary equipment such as tents, spades, spare parts and 'search devices' which could detect mines and unexploded ordnance, as well as the presence of graves. All the vehicles were fitted with radio communication. The convoy headed from Kassel to Naples where they were ferried to Tripoli where, as the VDK article says, they 'began their peaceful advance into the desert...to search for the 8,000 German graves in Libya'.

The expedition was made possible by the co-operation of the Libyan and British governments and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who are credited with being 'instrumental in providing the impetus and opportunity to begin this work'. The German group worked closely with British troops stationed in Libya from day one, and were invited to live in the British Officers'



Above: The two Volkswagens navigate a rocky section of the Sahara Desert on their return journey from the then Belgian Congo in December 1950.

Searching for the War Dead in North Africa

clubs. They were also provided with a Fieseler Storch aeroplane by the Egyptian Air force to support their work.

The four men chosen by the VDK for this expedition were all fluent in English and Italian and each had his own speciality, one being a former officer under field marshal Erwin Rommel, and therefore well versed in the locations of the battles and combat areas. They recruited local manpower to assist in their searches including many who could, it is said, 'detect even the slightest change in the ground' which, as well as detecting graves, also apparently 'allowed them to walk safely through minefields'. It was estimated that several million French, Italian and German mines were still lying in the desert.

Of course, by now it was more than six years since the end of the war, and eight years after hostilities ceased in North Africa, so there was a certain amount of urgency as grave sites could easily be obliterated by the shifting desert sands. But by the time the expedition returned to Germany in early December 1953 they had succeeded in recovering 6,922 bodies in Libya and Egypt, many of which they had also been able to identify. The breakdown given by the VDK shows that of the bodies found, 6,417 were German, 225 French or Italian, and 280 were British, who had not been found during a similar search by the British in 1947. The German total of 6,417 was not quite the 8,000 that the VDK had hoped for but nevertheless was a great achievement bearing in mind the difficulties of the terrain that they were searching, and the time that had passed since the numerous fierce battles in that arena.

The German bodies found in Libya were brought to St John's church in Tobruk, where they were kept in individual coffins until a German war cemetery was completed to the south of the town in 1955. The cemetery resembles a castle with high walls and four towers up to 14m high, on a 40m square site, close to the Mediterranean. It is described in more detail on the VDK's website - <https://kriegsgraeberstaetten.volksbund.de/en/friedhof/tobruk>.

The VDK reported that the three Volkswagens and the Opel Blitz had 'proven themselves outstandingly well in the harsh conditions' covering 'over 200,000km across desert landscapes'. However, like many of the soldiers from both sides who were involved in the wartime battles, the final resting places of the three Volkswagens are unknown. Volkswagen have a huge collection of their various models at their Wolfsburg museum, but sadly there seems to have been no place



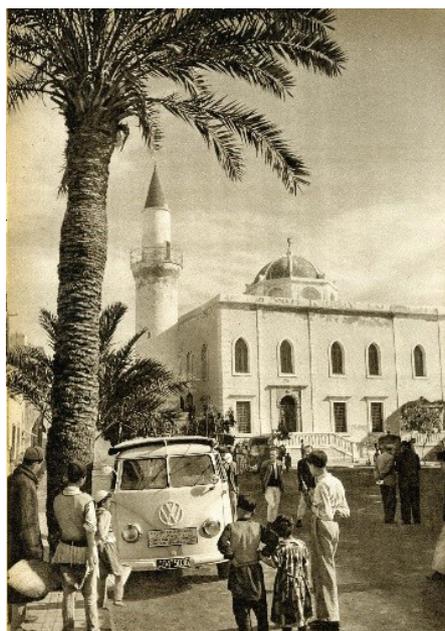
Top: The German War Graves Commission expedition to North Africa about to set off from their headquarters in Kassel on 1st November 1951.



Above: Prior to their departure numerous boxes containing files on various burial sites in Libya had to be sealed by a customs officer.



Above: On the way across North Africa to Libya the driver of one of the VW Beetles meets two Bedouin. Equipment attached to the car includes a very useful shovel as well as radio communication equipment.



Left: The VW Kombi and its plaque cause some interest in a picturesque town, probably Tobruk. Above: The original German caption to this photograph translates as follows. 'The British in Cyreneika [eastern Libya] were particularly helpful: an English communications unit provided the expedition with a short wave radio, which they constantly monitored. This would have allowed the Germans to radio for help from the desert at any time. The unmarked graves of unknown soldiers represent a point where two nations can come together in a spirit of mutual understanding'. Presumably the probe which the German soldier is holding is one of the 'search devices' mentioned previously.

for these three intrepid and unique vehicles, nor to record their part in retrieving so many of the war dead.

Memorial to the French Destroyer Fronde Wrecked in 1906

Paul Harrison, an archaeological conservator, tells us here about some memorial adventures, while working in Hong Kong. Having carried out various roles in Leicester museums and in Hong Kong, Paul returned there to work at the History Museum in 1996, one year before the handover to China.

Shortly after I arrived, a mainland “artist” as a protest against British rule, poured several tins of red paint over the statue of Queen Victoria in Victoria Park in Causeway Bay (Tung Lo Wan in Cantonese).

As the metal conservator, having acquired an MSc in ancient metallurgy, the technical aspects of the restoration fell to me. The whole conservation section dropped their other projects and behind a tarpaulin and through storms and late into the night, we used solvents to remove the paint. The surface of the statue was a little bubbly and rough, so the paint tended to hide in all the crevices and holes. The face was caved in so we made two holes, one in the top of the head and one in the back of the head and took a sample of metal from behind an ear for analysis. In my metallurgy studies I am an iron specialist

- Queen Victoria is copper alloy. I reckoned the alloy could be shaped. The sculpture was hollow cast, so using the top hole to place the pushing device by eye, and the neck hole we placed a rod connected to a hydraulic jack and a frame to hold it, the rod then pushed the face back into place.

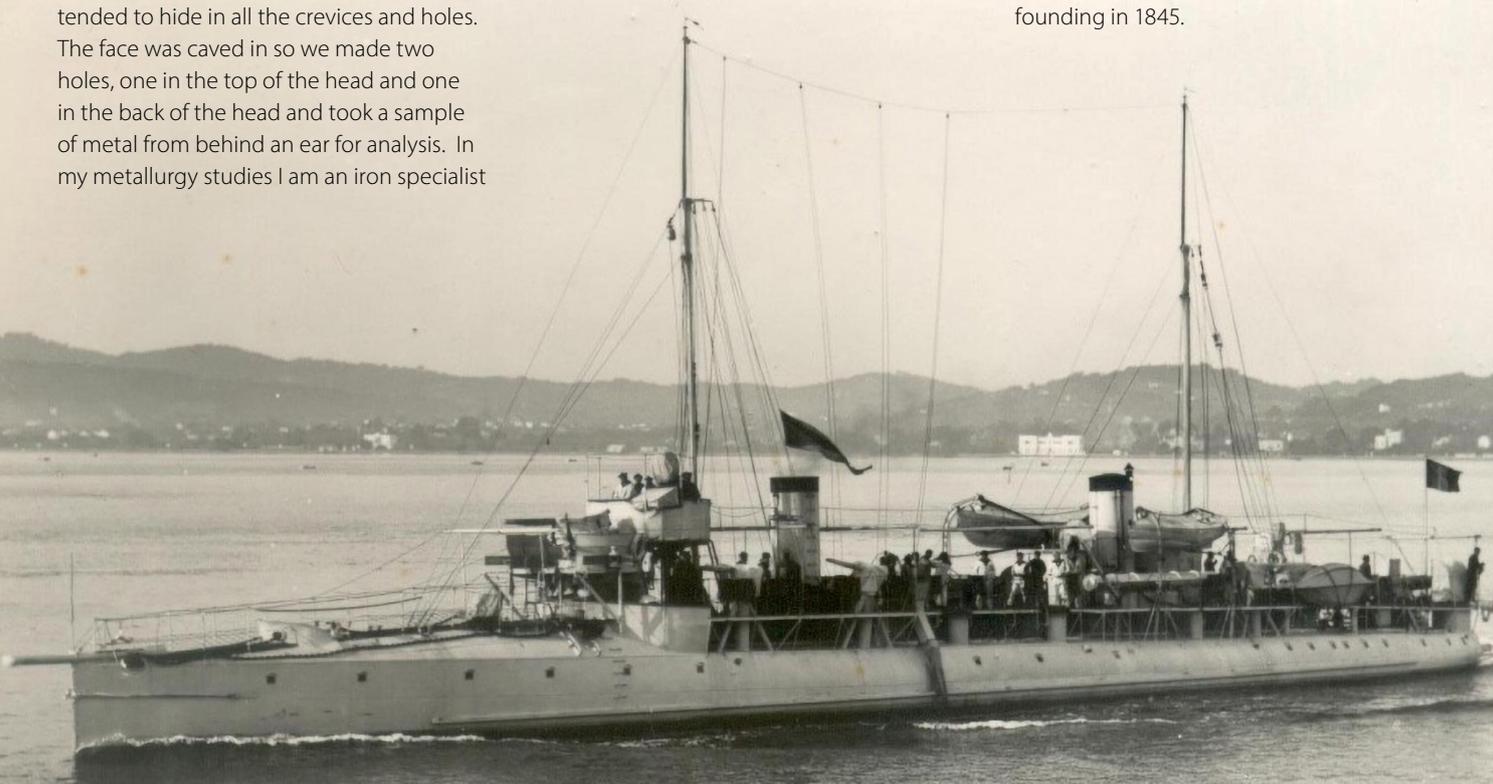
She then looked OK, but battered as if she had been sparring with Mike Tyson! So, resin was used to give the Queen plastic surgery. This was then painted a bronze colour. Next year is thirty years since we did it and you can make out some red paint is coming through our paint.



Above: **Statue of Queen Victoria, Park Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.**

The “artist” got a month in gaol.

Paul also led guided walks, and one destination was the tightly packed, terraced Hong Kong Cemetery, opposite the famous Happy Valley Racecourse, and previously known as the Colonial Cemetery. It contains many fine tombs installed there since its founding in 1845.



Above: **Postcard of the French Destroyer The Fronde**

Memorial to the French Destroyer Fronde Wrecked in 1906



Above: **The Hong Kong Cemetery, Wong Nai Chung Road, Happy Valley, HK.**



Above: **Postcard of a painting depicting the typhoon that wrecked the Fronde Destroyer.**



Below: **Inscription dedicated to those who lost their lives in 1906 aboard the Fronde.**

One monument with which Paul was concerned, and which had been moved there because of road widening, was to sailors from the Fronde. She was a French destroyer wrecked in 1906, trying to rescue boat people caught in a horrendous typhoon.

The Fronde Monument had lost some cement; this had enabled two banyan trees to get embedded and grow high up. They drop aerial roots and can survive in really spartan conditions and were thriving in their sparse home. But if allowed to continue, they would knock the top off the monument. Not only would this be a tragedy for the Fronde,

but depending on the way the stones fell, they might hit a person or other nearby memorials.

Paul writes:- So, I wrote to the French Consulate and explained the situation. They were interested and gave me a deadline for when a French warship was passing through soon, as well as agreeing to pay for myself and a friend who was between jobs, to do it. We had scaffolding to get to all the areas of the monument, the trees were removed, bad cement was removed and refilled and the inscriptions were repainted with alkylid paint, first a grey primer and then a black

top coat, the primer is thicker so stops the paint going into the stone, though this stone is fairly impermeable granite, it makes the treatment more reversible - a key word my profession likes to hear. Members of the French Navy came to the unveiling ceremony. The French wanted a plaque saying they paid for it originally too, but HK Govt did not want a new addition. Although I am very grateful to the French for the work and I honour the brave matelots. It is a good Rosbif vs the French incident that the Brits, kind of forgot to ask that the French donation be remembered!



Above: **The Fronde Obelisk standing in the Hong Kong Cemetery, Wong Nai Chung Road, Happy Valley, HK.**

The Creation and Fulfilment of the 10th Battalion

Alec West tells us about the highly ambitious creation of the memorial to the 10th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, which was based out of Burrough on the Hill prior to their involvement at Arnhem. - Alec West

In 1944, the quiet Leicestershire villages of Somerby, Burrough on the Hill, Thorpe Satchville, Twyford and Owston became the home and sometime training ground for the 10th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, as they prepared for Operation Market Garden - the ambitious Allied plan to seize the bridges over the Rhine - leading into Germany through Arnhem in the Netherlands.

The Battalion, from its formation in the arid lands of North Africa and the Middle East and after its first action in Italy arrived in High Leicestershire on a cold snowy night in December 1943.

For nine months, the men lived among the villagers, forming close bonds of friendship and respect. They trained across the surrounding hills and fields, attended services at All Saints Church, and became part of village life. Romances and even some

marriages took place with local and Land Army girls.

On 18 September 1944, 582 men of the 10th Battalion gathered outside All Saints church in the headquarters' village of Somerby, before being taken by 34 lorries to RAF Spanhoe, where they boarded 34 C47 Dakota aircraft bound for Arnhem - parachuting onto drop-zones some 60 miles behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied Holland.

Two weeks later, only 36 men returned to the village. Ninety-nine had been killed or mortally wounded and 405 were taken prisoners of war - many of whom were wounded.

The loss was devastating. In Somerby, a welcome-home banquet for a return of perhaps hundreds of men, prepared by local women and Land Army girls lay untouched. For decades, the villagers mourned and

remembered the men who had left them - keeping their story alive through annual services, parades, and quiet acts of remembrance. A memorial service and parade have been held, unbroken, for almost eighty years.

It was during a meeting in 2011 in Oosterbeek - close to Arnhem and the site of the battalion's demise - between the next of kin of men of the battalion, Alec Wilson, Jeanie Holland, and Grahame Warner, that an idea was born. What began as a spark of inspiration seemed at the time almost too ambitious. Although Somerby church held a commemorative tablet and a stained-glass window, and a plaque adorned the village hall, there was nowhere that recorded in stone the names of the men of The Tenth. And thus, the vision began.



Above: *'The Best of Times During the Worst of Times'* - the 10th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment Memorial Sculpture and Garden at Burrough on the Hill, Leicestershire.

A Vision Born of Memory

The Birth of Friends of the Tenth

In 2018, that long-held wish began to take shape with the founding of Friends of the Tenth - a registered charity created to ensure the 10th Battalion's history and sacrifice would be remembered with the dignity and permanence it deserved. We were honoured when the Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire, Jennifer, Lady Gretton, agreed to be the charity's President and Major General Ranald Munro, a former officer of 10Para (V), a patron together with Dr Robert Voskuil from Oosterbeek.

From its inception, the Friends were united by a clear mission: *'To create a lasting memorial in Leicestershire - a home of remembrance that would honour the men of the 10th and their bond with High Leicestershire.'*

Finding a Home for Remembrance

The original plan was to erect a memorial in the village of Somerby, but it soon became clear that the small village green was not an ideal location. Then, from out of the blue, came an extraordinarily generous offer from an unexpected source.

In early 1944, the grand house of Burrough Court was destroyed by fire - a blaze accidentally started by mischievous members of the 10th Battalion. Their intention had merely been to 'blow the doors off' the wine cellar to access the fine collection of wines and spirits amassed before the war by the estate's wealthy owner. But their plan went awry, and within hours, the house was reduced to ashes.

Ironically, it was the current owners of the Burrough Court Estate, Dawn and Fred Wilson, who offered Friends of The Tenth a beautiful site on their land. Nestled amid rolling countryside and overlooked by the ancient Iron Age fort on Burrough Hill, the location carries a quiet symbolism. It offers open skies, gentle contours, and a profound sense of peace - a perfect setting for remembrance.

The site lies equidistant between the villages of Somerby, Burrough on the Hill, Thorpe Satchville, and Twyford, high on a lonely hill it poignantly overlooks the very fields once used as an exercise drop zone ('DZ') before Operation Market Garden.

Generously gifted for this purpose, the land is ideal - accessible yet secluded, rural yet deeply rooted in the same landscape the battalion knew during its final months in England.

Raising the money

When fundraising began in 2018, the initial budget for the sculpture was set at £75,000. It soon became clear, however, that preparing and landscaping the site - together with providing a car park - would require additional funds. No money was sought from grants or other official sources.

In an astonishingly short space of a year, more than £125,000 was raised. Contributions poured in from a wonderfully diverse range of supporters. Several corporate donors were extraordinarily generous, but equally heart-warming were the efforts of 10 Para (V) veterans with their 'tin-rattling,' along with donations from the families of battalion veterans and many other kind individuals.

Singularly significant was the remarkable sum raised from the sale of the stunning painting donated to FoTT by artist Derek Chambers FRSA - *'The Last Stand of The Tenth'*.

Right: *'The Last Stand of The Tenth'*, painting by Derek Chambers FRSA.

Below: **Architects Perspective Drawing of Borough Court House, Borough-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire. An Arts & Crafts style house designed by Walter H. Brierley in 1906 for Herbert Allfrey.**



A Vision Born of Memory

Designing the Memorial Garden

Every element of the 10th Battalion Memorial Garden was conceived with care and reverence. Its layout blends natural beauty with poignant symbolism, allowing visitors to reflect, remember, and reconnect.

At its centre stands the striking tryptic memorial sculpture, *'The Best of Times During the Worst of Times'*, created by renowned sculptor Graeme Mitcheson MRSS.

Combining and illustrating companionship amid adversity, the sculpture captures the humanity and courage that defined the 10th Battalion - *'It is not a monument to war, but to the bond between men - forged in hope, tested in battle, and remembered in peace.'*

One side depicts the happy nine months spent in High Leicestershire - The other more sombrely carries the names of the Fallen of the battalion together with a scene from the killing fields of Holland and the following quotation:

**This Commemorative Stone is dedicated to the memory of
The 10th Battalion The Parachute Regiment.**

During 1943-44, the battalion was housed in the nearby villages of Somerby, Burrough on the Hill and Thorpe Satchville.

Of the 582 who departed for the Battle of Arnhem on the 18th September 1944, two weeks later only 36 returned.

They fought on, they fought on...

"With an enemy growing ever stronger, pressing them on all sides but one - and that a wide, swiftly flowing river - they fought on.

Without sleep, presently without food or water, at the end almost without ammunition, they fought on.

When no hope of victory remained, when all prospect of survival had vanished, when death alone could give them ease, they fought on.

...they performed a feat of arms which will be remembered and recounted as long as the virtues of courage and resolution have power to move the hearts of men.

Now these things befell at Arnhem."



Above: 10th Battalion Memorial Garden.

Facing the sculpture are several key features: an Unveiling Interpretation Stone, two carved stone memorials, and two carved stone benches, each shaped in homage to the profile of a Dakota C47 aircraft.

One memorial honours the post-war 10th Battalion (V) Parachute Regiment, which proudly carried forward the traditions of the original unit.

- The other commemorates the USAAF 315th Troop Carrier Group, whose Dakota aircraft bore the men of The Tenth to Arnhem.

The benches each bear inscriptions of deep significance:

- One carries the words of war correspondent Alan Wood: *"If in years to come you meet a man who says, 'I fought at Arnhem'. Raise your hat and buy him a drink".*
- The other bears a tribute from Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery: *'What manner of men are these who wear the maroon-red beret? They are, in fact, men apart - every man an Emperor'.*

The memorial itself was built from Yorkshire sandstone and is surrounded by granite setts reclaimed from Somerby's original Main Street - stones that once echoed with the footsteps of the battalion's men. The site rests within landscaped grounds designed to foster reflection and tranquillity.

Later, the garden was consecrated, affirming its sacred character and ensuring it would forever stand as a place of remembrance and peace. Its sanctity was deepened when Victor Gregg, the Last Man Standing, requested to be interred within its bounds. His simple, anonymous stone bears the epitaph: *'An Arnhem Paratrooper'*.

An English oak obelisk also stands within the garden, designed to hold stainless steel plaques commemorating the 'Friends' of Friends of The Tenth - the principal supporters and activists who have since passed away, but whose contributions remain an enduring part of the memorial's story.

Right: **Victor Gregg's anonymous stone and the Oak Obelisk commemorating 'Friends' of Friends of the Tenth.**



Above: Graeme Mitcheson sculpts the memorial.



Above left: **Unveiling Interpretation Stone.** Above right: **Memorial to USAAF 315th Troop Carrier Group.** Above centre: **Memorial to 10th Battalion Parachute Regiment**



Above: **Stone carved memorial benches.**



A Vision Born of Memory

Building and Dedication

The creation of the garden was a collective act of remembrance. Volunteers, local craftsmen, members of Friends of The Tenth, and families of the fallen all contributed. Every spade of earth turned and every stone laid was a tribute to those who never came home.

When the 10th Battalion Memorial Garden was formally dedicated in 2019, it marked the fulfilment of a promise made more than seven decades earlier. The ceremony was attended by veterans, serving soldiers of the Parachute Regiment, descendants of Veterans and the Fallen, local residents, dignitaries, and representatives from the Netherlands. One of the (then) three surviving members of the battalion, Freddie 'Dixie' Deane, unveiled the sculpture to gasps of appreciation from the five hundred or so guests.

It was a day of solemn pride - a day when the story of the 10th Battalion was once again united with the soil of Leicestershire.

The Garden Today

Since its dedication, the memorial garden has grown in both beauty and meaning. It has become the focal point of remembrance for the 10th Battalion - a place of national and international recognition.

- Each September, the annual Arnhem Service and Reunion is held there, drawing visitors from across the World, Britain and the Netherlands.

- Every November, the Remembrance Day Service unites generations in tribute.

In recent years, the garden has evolved further:

- A memorial pathway was laid, inscribed with the names of all who were members of the battalion at the time of the battle of Arnhem. Each engraved stone tells a story - a life cut short, a man and perhaps a family changed forever.

- The site has welcomed school groups, veterans' associations, and international visitors, ensuring remembrance extends beyond ceremony into education and shared history.

- The 10th Battalion Trail was designed and completed - a 15-mile, way-marked trek through the beautiful, bucolic Leicestershire countryside linking the sites where the battalion was billeted. Parachute Regiment maroon cast-metal heritage plaques mark significant buildings, and a guidebook, The Tenth Battalion Trail, has sold more than 700 copies.

Visitors from across the world - Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and of course Arnhem, Oosterbeek, and other Dutch



Top Left: **Freddie 'Dixie' Deane unveils the sculpture.** Top Right: **10th Battalion Memorial Pathway.** Bottom Left: **Memorial Plaque.** Bottom Right: **School Groups paying tribute at the memorial to the 10th Battalion.**

towns - have made pilgrimages to the site, reaffirming the enduring friendship forged in 1944 between Britain and the Netherlands.

Continuing The Legacy

The creation of the memorial garden was not an end, but a beginning.

It laid the foundation for broader work by Friends of The Tenth to preserve and share the battalion's history. Through initiatives such as the Tenth Battalion Trail and the publication of Grahame Warner's acclaimed book *Arnhem: Eight Days to Oblivion*, the story continues to reach new audiences.

Educational projects with local schools ensure that young people understand and value the sacrifice of those who once trained and worshipped in their villages. Children from Somerby and Ab Kettleby Schools now play an active role in remembrance — laying flowers at services and proudly wearing Friends of The Tenth T-shirts.

The memorial garden thus stands not as a static monument, but as the living heart of an ongoing legacy — a place where history, faith, and education come together.

Fulfilment of a Promise

The 10th Battalion Memorial Garden at Burrough on the Hill is more than stone and sculpture - it is the embodiment of a promise.

A promise that the men who left Somerby in 1944, and the community that sent

them forth, would never be forgotten.

In its stillness, visitors can feel the presence of the past: the echo of boots on the village street, the quiet prayers in All Saints Church, the unspoken courage of those who went to Arnhem and did not return.

The garden stands as a testament to courage, comradeship, and community - to 'the best of times during the worst of times'.

And in its fulfilment, it ensures that the story of the 10th Battalion lives on - remembered, revered, and renewed with every passing generation.

We Will Remember Them

For further information about **Friends of The Tenth and The 10th Parachute Battalion Memorial Garden**, please visit:

<https://friendsofthetenth.co.uk>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/friendsofthetenth/>

A CHARITY REGISTERED IN ENGLAND & WALES number 1176669



By Jody Johnson (aged 11)
Lancashire, England

Who are these men
Who march so proud
Who quietly weep
Eyes closed, heads bowed?
These are the men
Who once were boys
Who missed out on youth
And all its joys.

Who are these men
With aged faces
Who silently count
The empty spaces?
These are the men
Who gave their all
Who fought for their country
For freedom for all.

Who are these men
With sorrowful look
Who still can remember
The lives that were took?
These are the men
Who saw young men die
The price of peace
Is always high.

Who are these men
In the midst of pain
Whispered comfort to those
They would not see again?
These are men
Whose hands help tomorrow
Who brought back our future
With blood, tears and sorrow.

Who are these men
Who promise to keep
Alive in their hearts
The ones God holds asleep
These are the men
To whom I promise again
Veterans, my friends,
I WILL REMEMBER THEM.

