

## Chapter 9: Personal Experiences

In order to understand grandad's experiences of the war and those of his family it is necessary to first understand a little of the process of recruiting men to the military in the first world war. I had thought that all adult men had been in the military apart from those who were conscientious objectors. This was not the case. What I had not realised was that there was a [whole system of Tribunals](#) set up to consider those who, for various reasons, sought exemptions to military service.<sup>1</sup>

[Military Service Tribunals](#) were established by councils to hear applications for exemption from conscription during World War 1. Although they were not strictly recruiting bodies, they played an important part in the process of conscription. They were initially established as part of the scheme developed by Lord Derby in 1915 but were continued on a statutory basis following the passing of the Military Service Act.

There were 2,086 local Military Service Tribunals, staffed by local dignitaries, with 83 County Appeal Tribunals to hear appeals by applicants not happy with the local Tribunal decision. A Central Tribunal in London served as the final court of appeal. Although they are best known for the way they dealt with conscientious objectors, most of the Tribunals' work dealt with domestic and business matters. Only around two percent of cases related to conscientious objection.

According to the [Military Service Act of 1916](#), grounds that Tribunals could consider were:

- (a) on the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that he should, instead of being employed in military service, be engaged in other work in which he is habitually engaged or in which he wishes to be engaged or, if he is being educated or trained, for any work, that he should continue to be so educated or trained; or
- (b) on the ground that serious hardship would ensue, if the man were called up for Army Service, owing to his exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic position; or on the grounds of ill-health or infirmity; or on the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service.

In addition, Government Departments could grant exemptions to men who were employed or engaged or qualified for employment or engagement in any work which is certified by the Department to be work of national importance.

A very large number of men applied. By the end of June 1916, 748,587 men had applied to Tribunals. Over the same period, around 770,000 men joined the army. Most men were given some kind of exemption, usually temporary (between a few weeks and six months) or conditional on their situation at work or home remaining serious enough to warrant their retention at home. As of May 1917, 780,000 men were exempt with 110,000 pending. In addition, at this point there were also 1.8 million men with exemptions granted by the government, for example, those working in war industries. Combined, these exemptions covered more men than were serving overseas with the British Army.

Two different systems of medical grading appear to have been in use at the time. It is not clear if one was an older system<sup>2</sup> or if one grading was used for an initial medical with another used by the Tribunal itself.

One used a system of numbers from I to IV. Under this system, grade III meant that the person had marked physical disabilities and was considered fit only for clerical work. Grade IV meant that the man was totally and permanently unfit for military service.

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<sup>1</sup> Quite a lot of detail about [how the tribunals operated](#) is contained in a book about Joseph Blackburn. This book is called Joseph, 1917. It is by David Hewitt and I have the kindle version.

<sup>2</sup> There was a [change in how the medical assessments were carried out](#), in November 1917. Before that time, medicals were conducted by the military but, after that, they passed to civilian control.

The [other system](#) used a combination of letters and numbers as shown below:

<b>A</b>	<b>Able to march, see to shoot, hear well and stand active service conditions.</b> <i>Subcategories:</i>
A1	Fit for dispatching overseas, as regards physical and mental health, and training
A2	As A1, except for training
A3	Returned Expeditionary Force men, ready except for physical condition
A4	Men under 19 who would be A1 or A2 when aged 19
<b>B</b>	<b>Free from serious organic diseases, able to stand service on lines of communication in France, or in garrisons in the tropics.</b> <i>Subcategories:</i>
B1	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
<b>C</b>	<b>Free from serious organic diseases, able to stand service in garrisons at home.</b> <i>Subcategories:</i>
C1	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
<b>D</b>	<b>Unfit but could be fit within 6 months.</b> <i>Subcategories:</i>
D1	Regular RA,RE, infantry in Command Depots
D2	Regular RA,RE, infantry in Regimental Depots
D3	Men in any depot or unit awaiting treatment

There were [concerns](#) about the fairness and objectivity of the system. These concerns included that some men were given an unduly positive medical grade while others, who were accepted into the military on one basis (e.g. grade III), could have that grading changed (e.g. to grade I) so that they ended up directly in the firing line.<sup>3</sup>

There are many entries in grandad's diary concerning his relatively poor health. In February 1915, he noted being examined by a doctor and he started exercising as a result. He recorded using various remedies including Zam-Buk<sup>4</sup> for his knees, some "*embrocation stuff*", Doans backache pills<sup>5</sup>, bone marrow, a porous plaster, a medical coil, a magneto machine, St Jacob's oil<sup>6</sup>, iron jelloids, Hall's wine<sup>7</sup>, Regelax<sup>8</sup> and some Dr Cassels tablets<sup>9</sup>. He was a small, slight youth. In June 1914, he was weighed and measured, he was 5ft 2½ins and 7st 1¼lbs (45kg). Among mum's papers was a height and weight card for grandad from September 1913 which gave his height then as 5' 1¼" and his weight at 6st 11lbs (43kg). He also recorded problems with his teeth and, in January 1917, had at least ten teeth out. He had dentures made in March 1917 and had them repaired and modified in January, June and July 1918.



Grandad's height and weight 1913

<sup>3</sup> This happened to Frank Seville's brother Horace. He was initially considered unsuitable for foreign service because of problems with vision but he was later posted to Salonika on the basis that the vision problem was corrected with glasses.

<sup>4</sup> A [herbal balm and antiseptic ointment](#) still available today.

<sup>5</sup> Based on [magnesium salicylate](#) and still available today.

<sup>6</sup> Described as a [liniment](#) for muscular pains and aches

<sup>7</sup> [Alcoholic wine](#) that also contained cocaine.

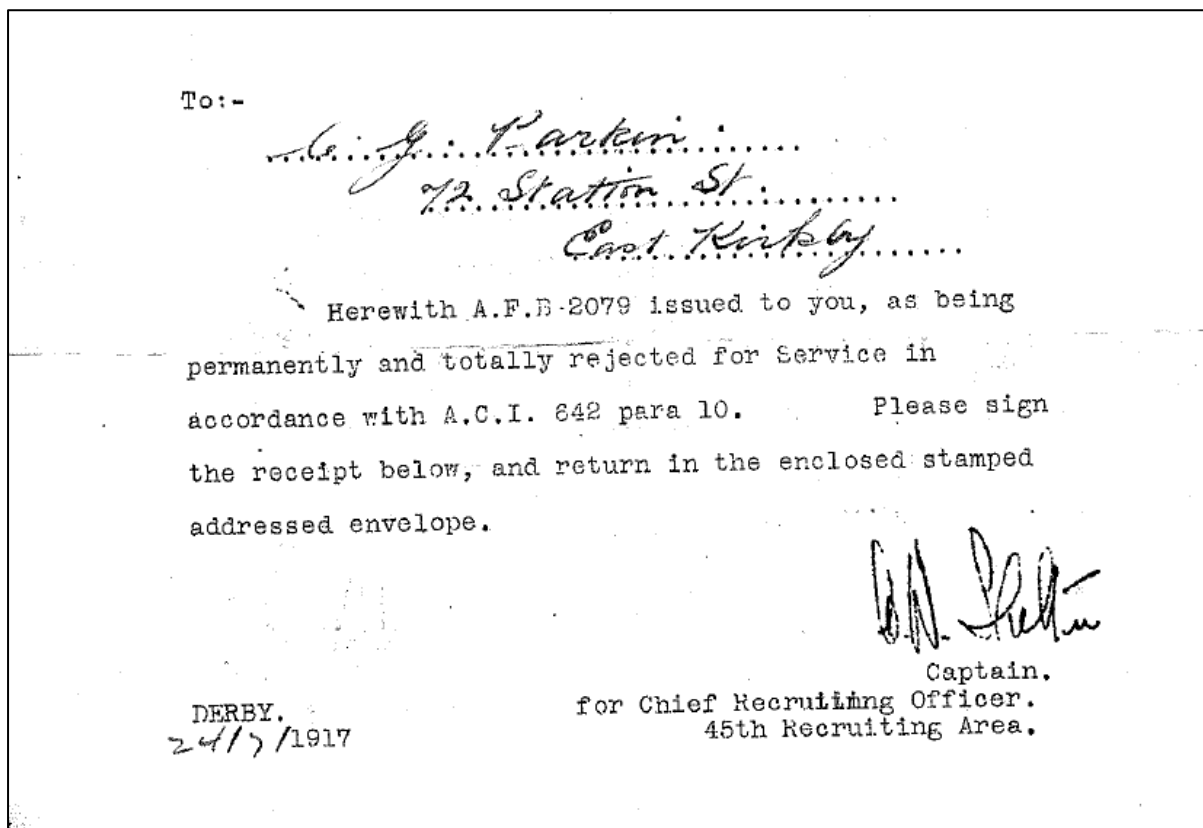
<sup>8</sup> This appears to have consisted of [liquid paraffin](#).

<sup>9</sup> I am not sure exactly what was in these tablets but they were described as a nerve tonic and [marketed](#) for a wide range of disorders from headache to anaemia.



Some of the remedies grandad used during this period. At the back are bottles for a free sample of Hall's wine tonic, St Jacob's oil and Dr Cassell's tablets. There is also a small tin of Zam-Buk. In front of those are adverts for Dr Cassell's tablets and Hall's wine and, in front of those, another advert for Dr Cassell's tablets and one for St Jacob's oil .

In August 2015, he filled in “degeneration forms”. I assume this was some kind of deregistration form in relation to military call up for consideration by a Tribunal. In June 1917, he recorded that his papers came from Mansfield and, in July 1917, he went to Mansfield to be examined. As a result of this, he wrote the single word “discharge”. At the end of July 1917, his discharge papers came from Derby (see below). In January 1918, he received a doctor’s bill of one guinea for his certificates.

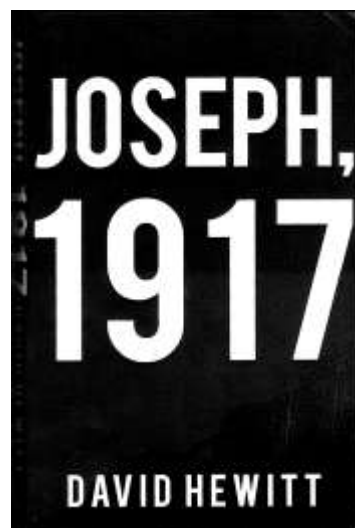


Above – grandad’s discharge papers

Below – book about the experiences of Joseph Blackburn and the Tribunal during the first world war

So, it seems he was discharged from military service on health grounds but there was then the matter of what happened to his brothers. In January 1917, he noted that “Cyril & Len went to Derby”. It is not clear if this referred to the place or the Tribunal, i.e. as part of the so-called Derby scheme. It seems that it was related to the Tribunal in some way as, on 1 February 1917, grandad noted that “Len got Cond Ex at Mansfield”. I assume that this means a time-limited conditional exemption. In June 1918, “Len got discharged at Pinxton”. It is not clear why Len was discharged while others in the family were called up. One factor may have been that, from May 1918, Len had been running the Pinxton business on his own. It is also possible that the decision to take this business on by himself might have been influenced by the pending Tribunal appearance.

In Cyril’s case, in May 1917, he went to Mansfield for his medical examination and was “passed grade III”. On 4 June 1917, he saw Dr Battle and also went to the Tribunal. On 18 June 1917, he appealed to Nottingham but the Tribunal was “on strike” on the 19<sup>th</sup>. While I am not sure why this Tribunal was on strike, there is one [fairly well-documented case of such a strike](#) which relates to the case of Joseph Blackburn. In this case, the local Tribunal, in Thornton, decided that an exemption should be given on the basis that Joseph was a market





gardener. However, the exemption was overturned by the Central Tribunal who considered that he was merely a “hawker” of fruit and vegetables and he was sent to the front. The Thornton councillors were outraged and vowed not to entertain any more military service appeals until Joseph was sent home. However, he was not. He was killed in action in August 1918.

At the end of July 1917, Cyril “went to Derby”. On 10 August 1917, “dad went to Derby” and on the 13th “Cyril went to Derby Passed in C1 Domestic”. It appears that this meant he was considered to be free from serious organic diseases and able to stand service in garrisons at home. On the 14th, grandad noted that “Cyril came from Derby in khaki”. He was then sent to barracks in Nottingham the following day but was granted a permit to come home on the 21st. In April 1918, grandad recorded that Cyril had 14 days leave and, in September, he was promoted to corporal.

Concerning Joe, grandad recorded that, in May 1917, “Joe went to Mansfield for exam grade III”. In July 1917, grandad noted, “Joe got Cond Ex at the Tribunal”. Again, I assume this means he received a time-limited conditional exemption. On 3 December 1917, he once again appeared before the Tribunal. In December, he had another medical examination and “passed in grade III”. On New Year’s Eve 1917, grandad noted that “Joe got 3 months final at the Tribunal”. On 4 February 1918, “dad appealed for Joe at Nottm” but to no avail. On the 8th, “Joe had his calling up papers”. Grandad’s father did not give up. On the 11th, he once again went to Nottingham about Joe’s calling up papers. However, it seems that his appeals were overtaken by events which are covered later in these notes.

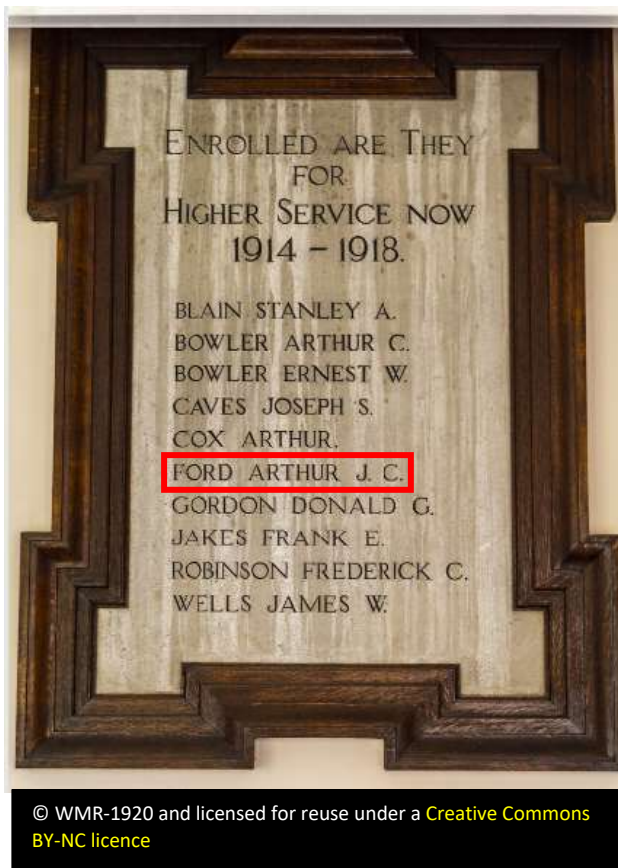
On 8 September 1915, grandad simply records that his friend “Len Teece was missing”. Len’s name is recorded among those killed in the war on the Trinity Sunday School memorial in Kirkby in Ashfield. From [other sources](#), Leonard Teece had been born in 1897 in Hucknall. His father (Philip) was a coal miner. His mother was called Annie (nee Holland). Leonard had two brothers – James William and Frank. As of 1911, they were living in Milton Street in Kirkby-in-Ashfield. Leonard enlisted with the sixth battalion, Lincolnshire regiment and was killed in action on 9 August 1915 at Gallipoli. He was 19 when he was killed. His name is commemorated on the [Helles Memorial](#) in Turkey along with 20,770 other names.



On 29 September 1915, grandad noted that there was “a Milertary [sic] Funeral a soldier who died of wounds”. However, he did not name the soldier. On 10 June 1918, grandad’s friend Willie Clover “joined the colours”. On 7 November 1918, just four days before the armistice was signed, “Billy Clover got wounded”. I have as yet been unable to find anything about how serious his wounds were or what happened to him.<sup>10</sup>

So, towards the end of the war, grandad and his brother Len had been discharged from military service. Cyril had been called up and was serving locally as a corporal. Joe had received his call up. Of his friends, Willie Clover had been injured and Len Teece had been killed.

Grandad recorded that a number of discharged soldiers “started to learn the trade”, i.e. shoemaking with one starting in 1917, two in 1918 and one in 1919. In addition, the business bought in a large number of old army boots. It is not exactly clear where these came from but, presumably, they were from dead or injured soldiers. There was a whole grading system, presumably based on quality, which determined price.



*Bunyan Fellowship Hall war memorial with name of Arthur James Cirket Ford highlighted*

I have less information about anyone on grandma’s side who served in the first world war. On the extensive Cirket family tree that mum had there is reference to an Arthur James Cirket having been killed in action in France. He was the son of Sarah Jane, the sister of grandma’s father Charles, and her husband James Alfred Ford. So, he would have been grandma’s cousin. Arthur James was born in 1892 and, of course, his surname was Ford, so Cirket was presumably a second middle name. He died on 5 March 1916 and is buried at Lapugnoy Military Cemetery in France. He is also remembered on a war memorial at [Elstow Bunyan Meeting House](#).<sup>11</sup> He was a corporal in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Northamptonshire regiment and he died of his wounds.

There are two Bowlers mentioned on the Elstow Bunyan Meeting House war memorial. [Arthur Charles Bowler](#) was the son of Christopher Ernest Bowler.<sup>12</sup> He died on 17 November 1916 aged 20. He is buried in Contay British Cemetery in France. The other Bowler is Ernest Webb Bowler who was in the Machine Gun Corps. He died on 26 November 1916 and is buried in Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord. I don’t know if and

<sup>10</sup> He appears to have survived the war as, in October 1921, grandad bought him a wedding present. According to FreeBMD, he married Elizabeth M Cuddy in Mansfield in Q4 1921 and they had five children – William H (1922), Ronald (1923), Dorothy M and John (1926 – twins?) and Joseph D (1928). Grandad noted going with him to Colwick to the Nottinghamshire show in June 1922. In 1929, he became unwell. Grandad and/or grandma visited him in hospital in March, April and May of that year. He died in October 1929 aged just 30. Grandad went to his funeral and visited his grave.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, his brother Stanley Edgar Graham, named his first son David Arthur Cirket Ford.

<sup>12</sup> Grandma’s mother’s younger brother. So, grandma and Arthur Charles were first cousins.

how he is related to our family but, as a Bowler from Elstow, he is likely to be related in some way or other.

Among mum's photographs, there were also some of grandma's brother Ray in uniform. I have found out that he served in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment.<sup>13</sup> I also found out that, on 7 January 1918, he was transferred from No 11 Casualty Clearing Station to No 2 Casualty Clearing Station.<sup>14</sup> From the original records, it appears he was suffering from influenza.



*Left – grandma's brother Ray in uniform. It is dated 13 November 1917 and says "To Ethel with fondest love Ray"  
Above – grandma with her brothers Bert and Ray (in uniform)*

I came across a photo in one of mum's albums that I have found extremely intriguing. From the other photos that are with it, it seems to have been taken in 1949 or 1950. It shows the Portsmouth Naval Memorial in Southsea with a group of people standing in front of two cars. It is annotated on the back and says "off Southsea near Portsmouth. The war memorial for the naval losses in 1914-18. Ted's name is on the panel facing the camera, the Cirket family & two cars". From a [map](#) of the site, the visible panels seem to be numbers 9-16. However, there is no-one with the name Cirket anywhere on the memorial and I was unable to find



*off Southsea near Portsmouth  
The war memorial for the  
Naval losses in 1914-18  
Ted's name  
is on the  
Panel facing the camera  
The Cirket family & two cars*

*Above – Cirket family group in front of Portsmouth Naval Memorial  
Left – annotation on the back of the photograph*

<sup>13</sup> Also known as the [Sherwood Foresters](#).

<sup>14</sup> From a [list](#) of locations of Casualty Clearing Stations, it appears he was transferred from [Godewaersvelde](#) to Authersteene (I have not been able to locate this place).

any reference to a Ted or Edward Cirket in any of mum's papers. I tried multiple lines of enquiry over several months, including reviewing all the Edwards listed on the memorial to see if any seemed familiar. I drew a blank.

Then, I wondered if perhaps mum had visited the memorial with the Cirkets who lived in Hastings when she visited them in either 1949<sup>15</sup> or 1950.<sup>16</sup> and if Edward could have been related to grandma's sister-in-law Doris. Her maiden name was Wright and she was born in 1905. Based on the 1911 [census](#), she was living in Hucknall with her father Joseph and her mother Mary. She had two older siblings, Joseph (b1893), who was working as a coal miner (road repairer below ground), and Rachel (b1895). Intriguingly, her brother's middle name was Edward and, given that he had the same first name as his father, whose middle name was Armstrong, it seems plausible that he would have been known as Edward or Ted. I then found a [record](#) of a Joseph Edward Wright who had been a British Royal Navy seaman. His birth date was given as 4 May 1893 and his place of birth as Alfreton, Derbyshire. Viewing the [original record](#), his occupation was given as a pony driver in a colliery. It seems he joined the navy on 13 March 1912, that is before the war started, and his service number was SS3878.

Joseph Edward Wright's naval record was as follows. From 13 March 1912 to 15 May 1912, he was assigned to [HMS Victory I](#) which I believe refers to [shore-based training](#) in Portsmouth.

From 16 May 1912 to 8 November 1912 he was stationed on [HMS Prince of Wales](#) and then served on [HMS Superb](#) for two years, from 9 November 1912 to 1 November 1914.

He then returned to [HMS Victory I](#) for two days, presumably for further training before being assigned to the shore establishment [HMS Excellent](#) for six months from 4 November 1914 to 13 May 1915. Might this have been for further training?

From 14 May 1915 to 8 May 1916, his record noted that he was serving on [Blake \(Broke\)](#) and then from 9 May 1916 to 31 May 1916 on [Hecla \(Broke\)](#). I don't quite understand these records but it [may be](#) that the unbracketed name is a shore accounting base and the name in bracket a seagoing ship. However, it seems that HMS [Blake, Broke](#) and [Hecla](#) were all navy vessels during WW1. But, Blake and Hecla were both described as depot ships.



Public domain image provided by Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

He was killed in action at the [Battle of Jutland](#) on 31 May 1916. HMS Broke was hit by fire from the German battleship Westfalen resulting in 50<sup>17</sup> crew being killed and a further 30 injured. The helmsman was killed and this caused HMS Broke to collide with HMS Sparrowhawk leading to the loss of the latter. In a [record](#) of British Armed Forces Overseas Deaths and Burials, Joseph Edward Wright was recorded as buried at sea. His father's name was given as Joseph Armstrong Wright who, at that time, was living in Rotherham. I confirmed that his name is [indeed on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial](#) on [panel 14](#).<sup>18</sup>

*HMS Broke in dry dock in Tyneside following the Battle of Jutland in 1916. The picture shows the damage caused when she collided with HMS Sparrowhawk*

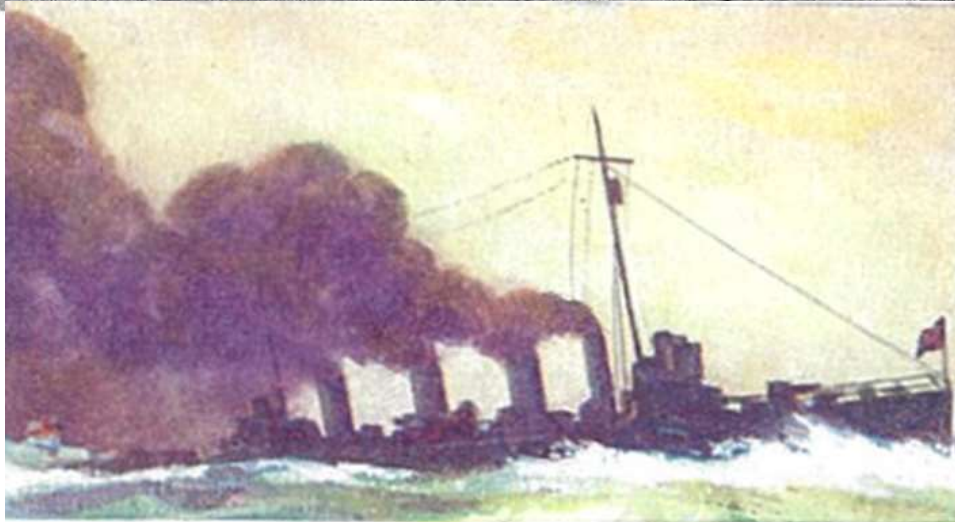
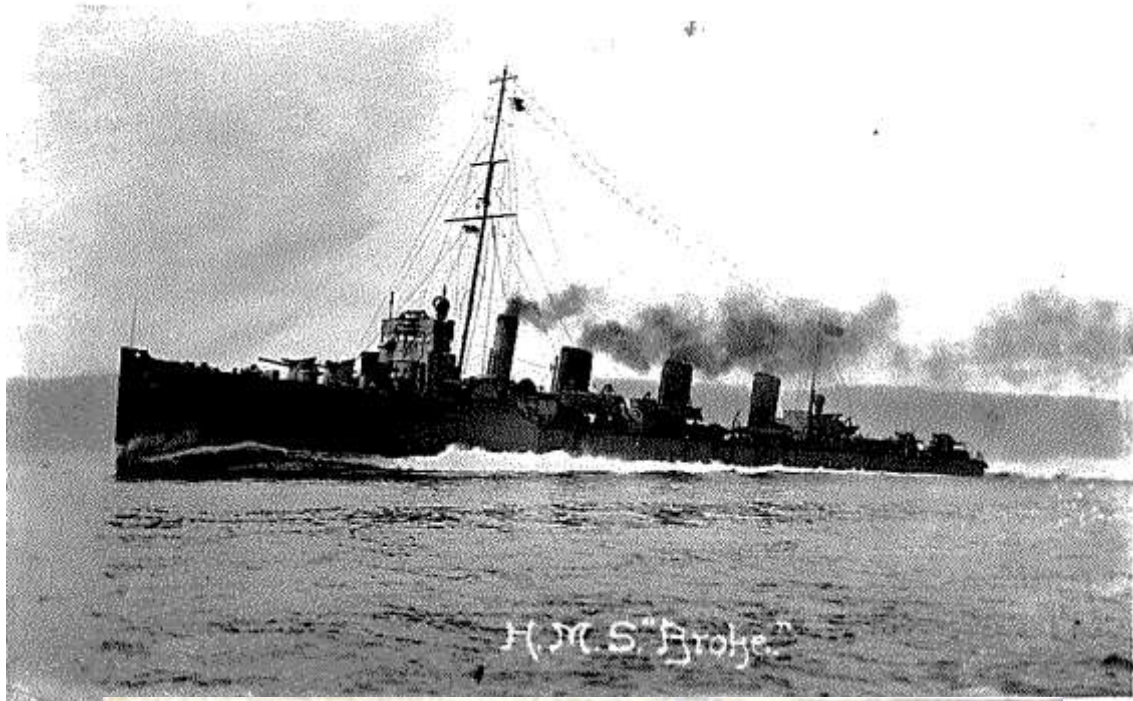
<sup>15</sup> Chapter 40.

<sup>16</sup> Chapter 52.

<sup>17</sup> According to a [list](#), the number killed was 46 and included Joseph Edward Wright and John William Wilson.


<sup>18</sup> There is a photo of the entry related to him on the Wooster family [website](#).






BROKE. 1914-18

Top – postcard showing HMS Broke  
Above – cigarette card showing HMS Broke produced by R & J Hill Ltd. The reverse side (right) gives some details of Broke but focuses on a later battle and does not mention its involvement in the Battle of Jutland



## FAMOUS SHIPS



No. 10.  
H.M.S. "BROKE."

This vessel helped to make history during the conflict of 1914-18, under the command of the Arctic explorer Captain E. R. G. R. Evans.

In company with the Swift, she fought an action with six German destroyers, April 20th, 1917, off the Belgian coast, in complete darkness. One vessel was sunk by ramming, and a fierce hand-to-hand battle took place on the Broke's decks.

Broke formerly belonged to the Dover Patrol, but was sold to the Government of Chile in 1920. Her displacement was 1820 tons, and speed 31 knots. She carried six 4-inch and two machine guns, as well as four tubes for torpedoes.

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*Top – large commemorative medallion from the Battle of Jutland in 1916  
 Above – “death penny” for John William Wilson who was also killed aboard HMS Broke during the Battle of Jutland. He is also commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial but on panel 20 as he was a Stoker First Class*





*This is a photograph of panel 14 of the Portsmouth Naval Memorial with the details for J E Wright highlighted. I am grateful to Nick Wooster, who took the pictures in 2017, for permission to include these here. His death was recorded in the [Sheffield Independent](#) of 9 June 1916 along with seven others. There was also a photograph of him and this is also inset here.*



I believe this may be a photograph of grandad's oldest brother James (Jim) Henry Parkin

I also found another photograph among mum's papers. She did not know who it was of and it is simply labelled "Your Old Sport, still smiling 1917". It is clearly a photograph of a soldier from the First World War.

Initially, I thought it might have been Cyril, grandad's brother as I knew from the diaries that he was drafted in 1917. However, with some help from the [Kirkby Living Memory Facebook group](#), I discovered that the cap badge in the photograph is from the Royal Artillery. But, from the diaries, I knew that Cyril had been in the Army Pay Corps, at least at the time he was discharged. I learned that it was common for soldiers to be drafted into one regiment and then posted to another. I managed to locate quite a lot of detail about Cyril's military service<sup>19</sup> but this showed that he was initially drafted to the Sherwood Foresters and then transferred to the Army Pay Corps.<sup>20</sup> So, it seemed unlikely that the photograph was of Cyril.

I also found a record of a James H Parkin who was in the



Royal Artillery cap badge

army from 1914 to 1920 initially as a gunner in the Royal Field Artillery<sup>21</sup> and then with the Labour Corps.<sup>22</sup> My suspicion is that this photograph is of grandad's older brother James (Jim). Grandad's diaries say nothing about any military service Jim might have had during the first war. However, there is a note to say that Jim started work at the Summit in March 1920. This would fit with him leaving the army at that point and the fact that he served in the Labour Corps might indicate that he had prior experience as a miner.

In her book(let) "I Remember" (from p23), Edith Searson describes her experiences of the first world war. Her family were farming in an area adjacent to one the government chose for a new air base at Cranwell. She described going to the funeral of the first trainee pilot to be killed there and also Zeppelins coming over to bomb the airfield. She recalled a number of young men killed during the first world war. They included a farmhand, Sam, her cousin, Richard and a farmer's son, Harry. Her brother, Alfred, served in the war and she describes in detail journeys she used to make to Sleaford by bike to collect letters from him. Eventually, letters stopped coming from him as he was killed on 31 July 1917 aged just 21. He was a private in the Lincolnshire Regiment and he is remembered at the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial in Belgium.

I got some details of the experiences of the Newcombe family of the first world war from Helen Jay. William Newcombe was a Bombardier in the Royal Field Artillery and his service number was 82032. He was killed on 9 October 1916 and he is buried/remembered at St Sever Cemetery, Rouen B 16 61.

<sup>19</sup> From the website [Find My Past](#).

<sup>20</sup> According to those records, he was drafted on 13 August 1917 and transferred to the Army Pay Corps on 15 August.

<sup>21</sup> Apparently, [one of three regiments](#) within the Royal Artillery in World War One. The other two were the Royal Horse Artillery and the Royal Garrison Artillery.

<sup>22</sup> This was [in operation from 1917 to 1918](#) and consisted of men with experience of picks and shovels, e.g. miners who might be unfit for fighting.



His name is also included on the memorial at Trinity Methodist Church.<sup>23</sup> William's older brother Phil also served in the first world war. His service number was 61099 and he reached the rank of Corporal in the West Yorkshire Regiment.



*I am grateful to Helen Jay for these photos and permission to include them*  
*Above far left – notice of William's death that was sent to people to post in their windows*  
*Above left – Phil Newcombe's medal*  
*Above – Phil Newcombe (top right) with his colleagues. It looks like he may have been Acting Sergeant at this point. The photo appears to have been taken in Bury St Edmunds*  
*Left – Phil Newcombe's dog tag. Note the service number*

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 8.