

# MARCH MEETING

## There Was One Soldier

**The Life and Times of Joe Shepherd of The King's Own Royal Rifle Corps**

**A talk by Dr Andrew Richardson**

**Reported by Alan Lee**

After introducing himself, Andrew said his talk was to be of a personal nature as Joseph 'Joe' Shepherd was his great grandfather. He lived most of his life at 13 Kent Road, Cheriton, Folkestone.

Andrew's interest was aroused when an old wooden box, containing medals and various artifacts, and an old shoebox, full of photographs, was left to him by his mother.

The box itself was remarkably interesting as a Boer prisoner of war had made it. More unusual was that it had not been made in South Africa but in India. This Boer, along with other prisoners, had been captured in South Africa but had then been transported to India when the regiment returned there. Andrew is of the opinion that the crest on the box lid is that of a Boer unit, but he cannot be sure.

The earliest record that Andrew could find of Joe was in the census of 1881. It records that his father was in the British Army and had been posted to Ireland. It turned out that of all his brothers and sisters Joe was the only one born in Ireland.

By 1891 both of his parents had died and the census from that year showed that he was living with his aunt in London.

By the late 1890s Joe had enlisted and was serving with the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC) in India. Between 16th and 30th September 1899, the battalion was sent from India to Natal, South Africa to take

part in the 2nd Boer War. They first saw action on 30th October 1899 at Rietfontein, outside of Ladysmith and were present during the Siege of Ladysmith 2nd November 1899 to 27th February 1900. They had advanced as part of General White's force but had been surrounded by the Boers. During the siege, through hunger, they had been forced to eat their horses. As reinforcements they took part in the great attack, on 6th January 1900 which saw furious fighting at Waggon Hill, one of the hills surrounding Ladysmith.

There are many interesting stories of what happened during the siege. One Andrew recounted was when, at Christmastime, a shell landed in the middle of the cricket pitch but did not explode. After some time, a brave, but inquisitive, soul approached the crater and discovered, after close inspection, that the shell did not contain any explosives. It was instead found to be filled with Christmas puddings!!

In Andrew's opinion, it was advice, terribly wrong, from the British High Commissioner of South Africa, Sir Alfred Milner and other top officials, that the Boers would be overawed by the British, that led to the agitation for conflict. The Boers were excellent shots, armed with the latest rifles, mainly German-made, and with the new smokeless bullets, so that when fired they did not give the rifleman's position away.

After Ladysmith they marched north to the Transvaal-Natal border. In July 1900 they set

sail with prisoners to Colombo, Sri Lanka. The audience was then shown a series of photographs including one of a group of Boer prisoners. Andrew hopes that one day he will be able to identify one of them as the person who made the box he had inherited.

On leaving the army, Joe returned to England. His sister Clara, Andrew's grandmother, had moved from London so Joe went to live with her at 13 Kent Road, Cheriton, Folkestone.

Then came World War One and in 1916 Joe got called up and by October of that year he was in Camberwell on an army cooking course. It was not long before his regiment saw action, for in March 1917 he was posted to the 'Western Front'. In the wooden box was a sheet of typed paper listing the names of the men who had trained as regimental scouts. Joe's name was amongst them so that we know one of the things that he was employed in during that time.

Also found in the box was a copy of the 1917 British handbook that was issued to officers posted to the 'Western Front'. Most were young and inexperienced so trench warfare and the rules for engaging the enemy had to be explained to them.

It was here on the 'Western Front' that Joe was shot in the elbow, the bullet travelled up his arm and exited near his shoulder. On his



ARP Wardens

record it shows that he had his wound dressed at 11.15pm on 5th April 1917. This wound may have saved his life as many of his comrades in the regiment were killed in later fighting. On 21st April Joe returned and was sent to convalesce with a Voluntary Aid Detachment at Leeswood Hall Auxiliary Hospital, Flintshire, North Wales. Andrew showed a picture of the nurses and patients, one of them, Ada Hodgkinson, kept a detailed autograph book.

*Many thanks to Mary Marrow and Robert Hodgkinson for sharing their lovely family archives online.*

Meanwhile back in Folkestone on 25th May 1917 a German Gotha aircraft had dropped a bomb on Tontine Street killing sixty people and injuring many more.

In March 1918 Joe was discharged and returned to the family home in Cheriton. He then got a job as an electrician although he never did have much mobility in his arm.

Then came World War Two, and Joe joined the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV). He was disappointed that he was too old and not fit enough to fight against the German forces. He became an Air Raid Precautions (ARP) warden. We then were shown a slide of the ARP wardens, Folkestone 'C' Group, 1937-1942. Joe was identified as no. 8 in the photograph.

Later in life Joe, in ill health, went into hospital. During his last few days, he relapsed into the past and became worried that the family around him were in danger from shelling.

Joseph 'Joe' Shepherd, a thoughtful and kind man passed away in 1965.

Andrew concluded his talk with a question and answer session with the audience. The Society chairman, Derek Leach, gave thanks for a most interesting and illuminating talk.