

WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

May 2024

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Tonight's talk

Peter Hart: Rupert Brook and the Glitterati of Gallipoli 1915

CAPTAIN JOHN CURRIE LAUDER & SIR HARRY LAUDER From the Norfolk Branch 'Poppy'

John Lauder was the only son of the famous Scottish entertainer Harry and his wife Ann. John was shot by a sniper and is buried in the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders at Ovillers following his death on 28th December 1916, aged 25. His father Harry was in Australia at the start of the war, as was John it seems. But Harry went on to promote recruitment into the forces and did concerts for troops at home and overseas. When John died in December 1916, Harry threw himself into charity fundraising work and arranging entertainment for the men at the various Fronts, travelling to other places such as Canada raising funds. He set up the Harry Lauder Million Pound Fund to help wounded Scottish soldiers and sailors return to civilian life.

But apparently a mystery comes along, in that - was he killed by a German or a disgruntled Scot who may have resented his father..... This comes about due to the release of a book in the 90's called Empty Footsteps, a novel - but..... With all the information on the internet I will leave you to decide.

David Hedges: This struck a chord with me as I remember on my very first trip to the Western Front in 1982 (!!) the Holts Battlefield Tours guide said he was shot by his own men. This has happened throughout history when a much hated soldier was killed by his own side, taking advantage in the confusion of the heat of battle.

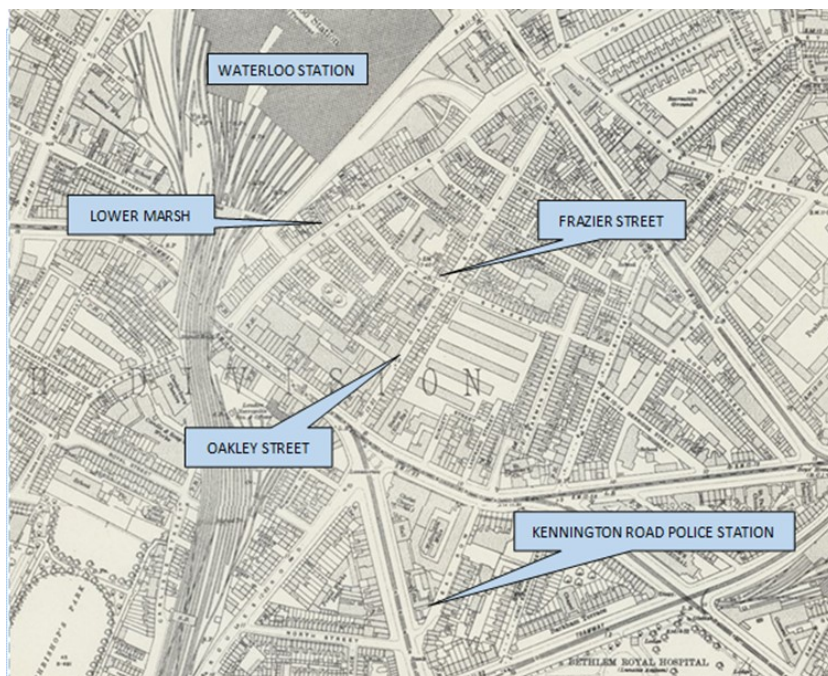
Perhaps you know more ?

THE SHOOTING OF PRIVATE SAVAGE Kelvin Dakin

This story was widely reported across the country in national and local newspapers.

What follows is a precis of the coverage - mainly from the Daily Mirror, from which the pictures have been reproduced.

At 2.00pm on Thursday, 10th April 1919, six soldiers convicted by Court Martial in France arrived at Waterloo Station, London. They were under an armed escort of a Lance Corporal and three Privates. Having missed their connecting train to Portland, where they were to serve their sentences, the party was marched to Kennington Road Police Station just over half a mile away. At 4.00pm the group started the march back to Waterloo to catch a train leaving at 4.50pm.



The prisoners were handcuffed in pairs and Private Savage (Army Service Corps) was handcuffed to Private Kitching (11th Royal Scots). As they walked to Waterloo, Savage said to Kitching "I should like to see my wife and children before I go to quod, and, if there is a possible chance, I will see them. Will you make a dash for it?" Kitching said "I will leave it to you."

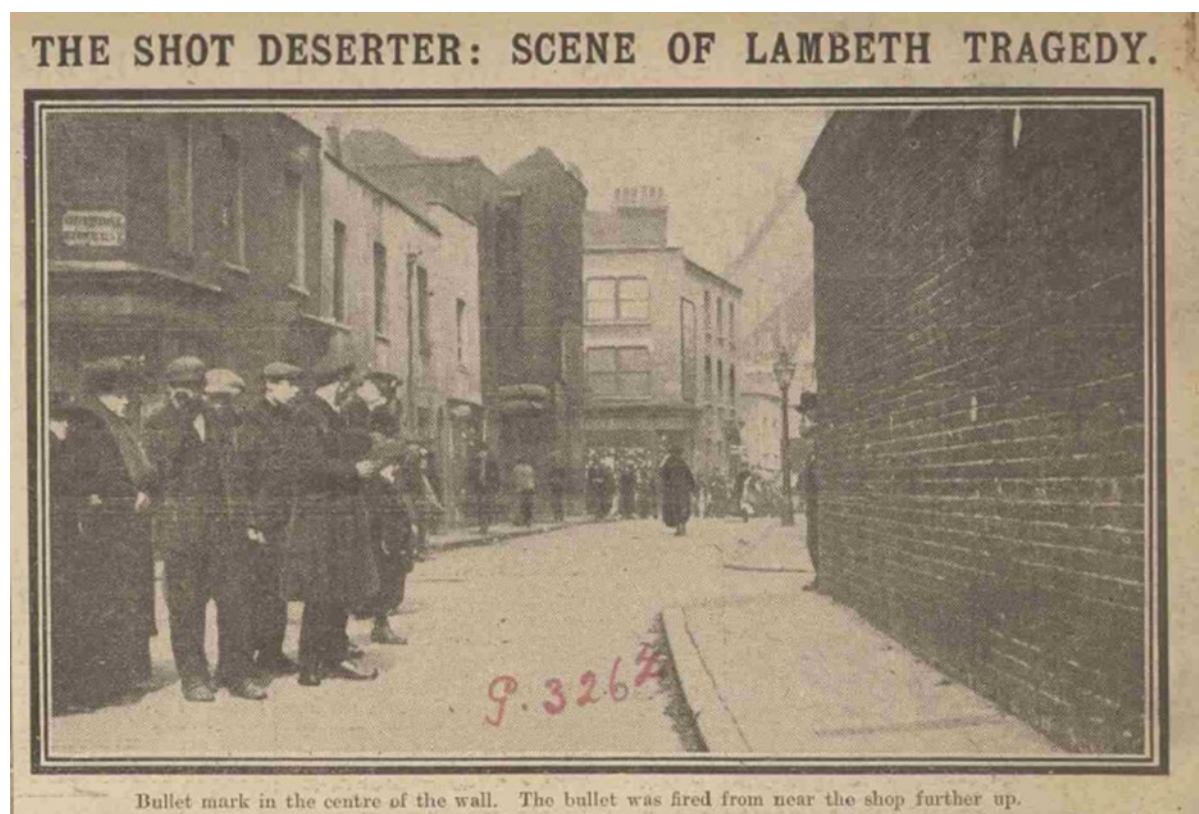


According to Lance Corporal Debues, in charge of the escort, he became suspicious of Savage's intentions and when Kitching and Savage started to get ahead of the rest of the group he moved up to be nearer them. A few yards down the road Savage hit one of the escorting soldiers, Rifleman Clarke, in the chest and Debues in the neck as well as trying to trip him up. As the pair ran down the street Debues shouted for them to stop and called on civilians in the area to help but with no response. Clarke and Debues tried to catch the men but were being outstripped by the handcuffed pair. Debues shouted "Stop or I fire!" and said to Clarke "We shall have to bring them down. Load your rifle and aim low."

Rifleman Clarke, who had never been on escort duty before, tried to catch up with the men but as he suffered from valvular disease of the heart, he couldn't run very fast. Acting on Debues instructions he fired, aiming, he said, at Savage's boots from about 10 to 15 yards away. The bullet entered Savage's back and

exited his chest. Savage's wound was initially treated by passers-by and residents before being taken to King Georges Military Hospital where he later died.

The exact route taken by the party is not clear, although one report mentions that they went via Oakley Street and Lower Marsh. However, it appears that the men broke away from the escort while in Lower Marsh and they ran towards Frazier Street. From a contemporary photograph of the scene of the shooting the street name plate on the left appears to say "Grindal Street".



Looking down Frazier Street towards Lower Marsh and Waterloo Station

This area has been extensively redeveloped and Grindal Street does not now exist. However, there is still a school on the same site in Frazier Street.



A modern-day view of the same area



Location of the shooting on a 1914 OS Map of the area

It is clear from reports that members of the public were not keen to help Lance Corporal Debues and Rifleman Clarke - in fact, following the shooting, the crowd turned hostile. In response to a question by the Coroner at the Inquest he said "... no one helped me at all" and added that "he was quite heavily assaulted afterwards by the excited crowd".

Private Savage's sentence was originally for ten years imprisonment, but this had been reduced to five. Private Kitching was to serve three years.

Mrs Savage was represented at the Inquest by her Solicitor, Mr Robinson. He cross-examined Debues saying to him: "You were served out with live ammunition. You had no directions of any sort, and it was left to your own responsibility to do what you thought right?" In answer Debues said "Quite right".

Mr Robinson also asked him if he was aware that no soldier, either in uniform or civilian clothes, must be taken through the street in handcuffs. Debues said that he had only found this out after the event.

Questions were also raised about the fact that Regulations required a conveyance of some sort for the transport of prisoners although Captain John Francis Eastwood, the Court Martial Officer for the London District, said that this was advisory rather than an absolute requirement. He also gave evidence saying that if escorts lost prisoners, then their punishment could be severe depending on the circumstances. He stated that "The duty of an escort in charge of a military convict, when the convict tried to escape was to stop him, and if he could not be stopped then to shoot him."

The Coroner, in summing up expressed the opinion that: "...the escort was unsatisfactory in view of the fact that the prisoners were not ordinary prisoners, but convicts sentenced to long terms of penal servitude for a very grave offence. He thought that the absence of any regulation for the guidance of the escort in the use of ammunition put a very heavy burden on Debues. The selection for an escort of Clarke, a man with valvular disease of the heart, seemed indefensible."

The jury returned a verdict of "Justifiable homicide" and added a rider that the escort was insufficient. Private Savage was buried in Islington Cemetery and is commemorated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission on the screen wall at St Pancras Cemetery.

Daily Mirror 23 April 1919:

FUNERAL OF PRIVATE SAVAGE. The funeral of Private Savage, who figured in the Lambeth drama on April 10, took place yesterday at Finchley Cemetery. The hearse was filled with dozens of beautiful wreaths. One of the relatives told The Daily Mirror that the military authorities had offered a military funeral, but that Mrs. Savage had preferred that the ceremony should be private.

Dundee Evening Telegraph 2 May 1919:

TO CELEBRATE PEACE. King's Pardon for Soldier Convicts. The sad case of Private Savage, shot dead in London streets a few days ago while trying to escape from escort conveying him to convict prison, is likely to have a happy sequel in connection with the official peace celebrations. Mainly through the publicity given to this case, the attention of the Government has been drawn to the case of hundreds of soldiers who are undergoing sentences in different prisons for offences committed on the different fronts, such as desertion, sleeping on duty, and breaches of military law. It has been decided to order immediate review of such sentences, and where the offence involves no moral turpitude, the King will be advised to grant a pardon to the offenders, part of the official recognition of the coming of peace. In other cases where the authorities cannot see their way to recommend pardon, reduction of sentence may be ordered.

HUTTED HISTORIES — UPCOMING TALKS

Pinched from Taff's latest Great War Huts newsletter, here is their speaker programme held on the **4th Wednesday of every month here at Brook Farm Camp.**

22nd May: Taff Gillingham - The Suffolk Regiment in Normandy, 1944

26th June: Simon Jones - Underground Warfare 1914-18

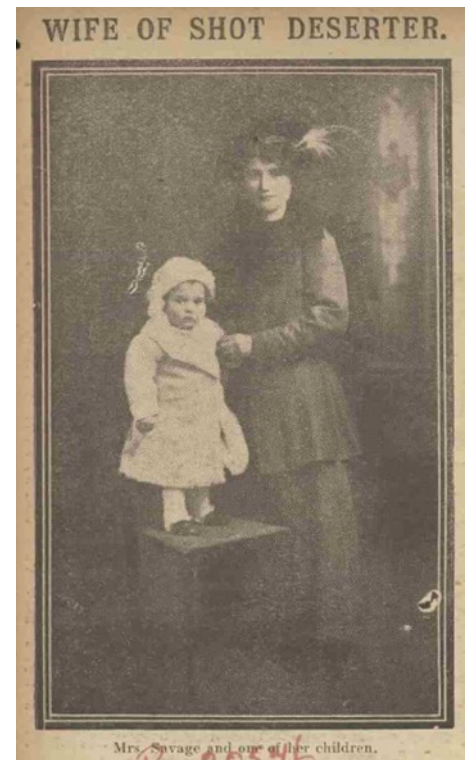
24th July: Dr Meghan Kelleher - Commemoration & Care of the First World War Dead

28th August: Andrew Thornton - The Old Contemptibles

25th September: Roy Larkin - London Buses at the Front

16th October: Tim Godden - Understanding British War Cemeteries

27th November: Helen Frost - Women's Land Army



LEST WE FORGET

12735, Private Harold Joseph John Holland, 1st Battalion, Suffolk Regiment

Born in 1894 the son of John Holland, a gamekeeper of College Farm, Great Blakenham and his second wife, Emma Maria Harvey.

Harold was working as a gamekeeper with his father before enlisting at the outbreak of war. He crossed to France on the 6th March 1915 to join the 1st Battalion.

Suffering a head wound, Harold was captured, either at the Battle of St Julien (24th April – 4th May 1915) or the Battle of Frezenberg (8th – 15th May 1915). He was taken behind the German lines to a Kriegslazarette (war hospital) established at Iseghem, Belgium, where he died on the 14th May 1915. Initially buried locally, his grave was moved to Harlebeke New British Cemetery.

Harold is commemorated on the Great Blakenham War Memorial in St Mary's Church.

His father's headstone in the churchyard bears an inscription commemorating his son (as pictured) but incorrectly placing Iseghem in Germany.



Note:

Two of John Hollands older sons by his first wife, Sarah, died serving in South Africa.

Benjamin Robert Holland (Pte 3404, 1st Suffolk), died 1st April 1900 and Ernest George Holland (Pte 3303, 1st Suffolk), died 8th January 1901. Both died of enteric fever at Pretoria.

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

Talk at the Norwich Branch Tuesday 4th June

Rob Burkett and Andrew England :

“A Great War Miscellanea..... aspects, stories and encounters on the Western Front”.

Our next month's talk Wednesday 12th June

John Peaty: Lawrence of Arabia

Please send any contributions for the *Branch Briefing* to:
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Next Committee meeting: tba
Approach a committee member if you want any issue raised.