

The Human Side of Island War Memorials by Geoff Allan (member no 392)

This is an edited version of the talk which Geoff Allan gave at the One Day Conference in May.

Geoff has been researching the Island's War Memorials for over 15 years. He is a Regional Volunteer for the War Memorials Trust and a fieldworker for the National Inventory of War Memorials.

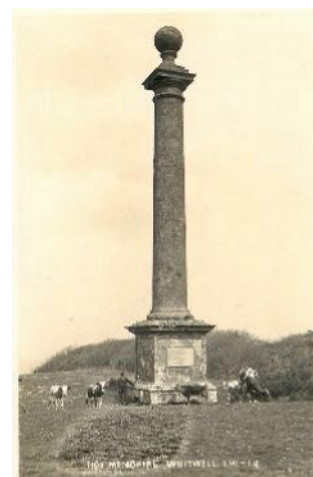
Before the mid-Victorian period, wars and battles were rarely commemorated at the soldiers' or sailors' level. Often, memorials were erected to honour distinguished Admirals or Generals, or massive structures such as the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. During the Crimean War, which is considered to be the first modern war, advances in telegraphic systems meant that the daily progress of the War could be followed from the despatches of Roger Fenton of *The Times* and this made it apparent that it was individuals in the rank and file who often contributed to the success or failure of the war. The instigation of the Victoria Cross for valour, available to all ranks, whether officers or men, emphasised the personal nature of the award.

The Isle of Wight has contributed much in the way of manpower and materials to war efforts, but for the purposes of this article, it is the human side of the Memorials which will be discussed. We know of very few Islanders who fought in the Crimean War. The next major conflict, the South African or Boer Wars of 1899 – 1902 saw hundreds of Island men volunteering for service; the Newport Memorial names 154 men, of whom perhaps 5 or 6 died. The Great War of 1914 – 1919 had the greatest effect on the Island's population. Very few families could not have been impacted, with thousands of men, Territorials and Regulars, conscripts and volunteers, going off to fight. As an indication, the Barton School Memorial names 79 old boys who died, but it also records the fact that 750 served. A total of 1650 men and women died in the Great War, according to the count made by the *Isle of Wight County Press* based on the casualty reports in *The Times* and it is this number whose names appear on the County War Memorial at Carisbrooke Castle. It is almost impossible to give a precise figure for the Second World War; over 800 names have been recorded on Island Memorials, but there must be more as even today, no names for the Second World War have been compiled for the Cowes area. According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, some 227 Island civilians lost their lives as a result of enemy action, mainly in air raids, between 1939 and 1945. Subsequently, a number of Island men have been killed in the small wars and campaigns of the 20th and 21st century, including in Korea, Malaya, the Gulf, the Falkland Islands, and Northern Ireland.



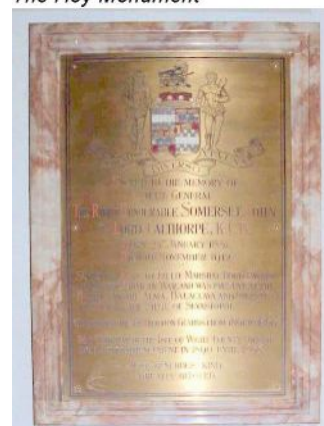
A group of Isle of Wight Territorials at Yaverland camp just before the First World War

On the Isle of Wight, perhaps the earliest example of a War Memorial is that placed by William Henry DAWES on the Hoy Monument on the Downs above Chale Green. This is somewhat ironic bearing in mind that the Monument was originally erected by Michael Hoy in honour of the Russian Tsar Alexander I. Dawes dedicated his plaque to the 22nd Regiment who fought against the Russians in Sevastopol, Alma and Inkerman. Little is known of Dawes; he was born in St Helens, lived for a time in The Hermitage, Hoy's former home, and died in Whitwell in 1863.¹



The Hoy Monument

A further connection with the Crimean War is to be found at St John's Church in Ryde, where the CALTHORPE chapel contains several plaques to members of that family including one to the Hon Somerset John Gough Calthorpe. It states that he was ADC (Aide-de-Camp) to Lord Raglan during this war, and mentions that he was first Chairman of the Isle of Wight Council from 1890 to 1898. What it doesn't mention is that he was embroiled in a law suit begun by Lord Cardigan, who believed that Calthorpe had libelled him in an account of the Cavalry charges of the War. Although the initial review of the case indicated that a libel had been made, the case never came to court, so neither was able to fully satisfy their honour.²



Memorial plaque to Lord Calthorpe at Ryde St John's Church

One further mention of Crimea can be found at St John's Church in Wroxall. In the porch is a plaque which records the gift of the church clock by Henry Charles MILLETT, RN. The church tower was built especially to receive the clock, supposed to have come from a London Department store. Although Millett is shown as formerly of the Royal Navy, further research is required to determine his role in the War, and for this, it is necessary to know which ships he served in. However, by examining the Census returns from Wroxall in 1901,³ we find that he was described as a Marine Engineer, born in Bradford in Wiltshire, and going further back he was engaged by Trinity House as a Lighthouse Engineer at Souter Point in Co Durham, where he was resident with his wife, eleven children and two servants.⁴ In 1887 he was posted to St Catherine's Lighthouse at Niton, and in the 1891 Census the family appears twice; once in the normal returns living in the lighthouse keeper's cottage, but also the returns for Vessels, lighthouses being considered as such at that time.⁵



Plaque commemorating Henry Millett at St John's Church, Wroxall



St John's Church, Wroxall

¹ RG9/661 Census return for "Wydcombe" Whitwell, 1861; GRO Death Index Dec 1861 Isle of Wight 2B 349

² The Cardigan/Calthorpe libel suit, from *The Justice of the Peace*, 12 Sep 1863, taken from <http://crimeantexts.russianwar.co.uk/sources/hansard/j630610a.html>

³ RG13; Piece: 1030; Folio: 27; Page: 20 Census return for "Vale" Wroxall, 1901

⁴ RG11; Piece: 5019; Folio: 30; Page: 58 Census return for Souter Point Lighthouse, Whitburn 1881

⁵ RG12; Piece: 896; Folio 79; Page 17 Census return for St Catherine's Lighthouse as a house, 1891

A link with the Second World War can be found in St Catherine's Lighthouse. On the 1st June 1943, the three keepers were engaged in storing bird perches in the boiler house when a Focke-Wulf Fw190 fighter bomber released its bomb on a tip and run sortie. A direct hit on the boiler room killed them outright, and all are buried in nearby St John's Churchyard. They were Principal Keeper R.T. GRENPELL, and Assistant Keepers C. TOMPKINS and W.E. JONES. In the remainder of this article I shall be concentrating on the Victorian wars and the Great War since space limits any further discussions of the Island in the Second World War. Returning to the Victorian colonial wars, there are several Victoria Cross holders buried on the Island. In Ryde Cemetery, there are General Samuel BROWNE VC (of Sam Browne belt fame) who gained his award during the Indian Mutiny, and William Thomas RICKARD VC (also a Crimean veteran). At St Mary's Churchyard in Brook, we find the grave of Colonel Henry GORE-BROWNE VC. Born in Ireland in 1830, Gore-Browne was awarded his VC for an action in Lucknow in India during the Mutiny, where he prevented enemy heavy guns from being used against British and loyal Indian troops, and it is supposed about 100 mutineers died in the process. Following the war he became the land agent for the Seely estates in the West Wight, marrying Jane Anne, the sister of Sir Charles Seely, in 1882. He died in 1912 after a long life serving his adopted County in a number of offices, most latterly as Deputy-Governor.

Just down the hill from Colonel Gore-Browne's grave is a poignant memorial bearing a midshipman's cap and sword in stone. Geoffrey GORE-BROWNE was the grandson of the Colonel, and died at just 15 years and 1 month old, in the sinking of HMS Aboukir. Over 60 officers and nearly 1000 men died in this incident, on 22nd September 1914. Gore-Browne had been Cadet Captain at Osborne Royal Naval College just months before his death. With no known grave other than the sea, he is commemorated at Chatham Naval Memorial.

The SEELY family figure largely in the history of the Island, and in their involvement with warfare. Colonel Gore-Browne's nephew was J E B Seely, nicknamed "Galloper Jack" because of his role in the South African War. Captain Seely raised a force of over 40 men to become part of the Imperial Yeomanry in South Africa. This body were formed almost exclusively of volunteers from the county militia regiments throughout the UK. Seely was engaged in a number of actions, where his horsemanship saw him allocated to communications duties – hence "Galloper". While in South Africa he was elected MP for the Isle of Wight in his absence. His name appears at the head of the list of volunteers on the



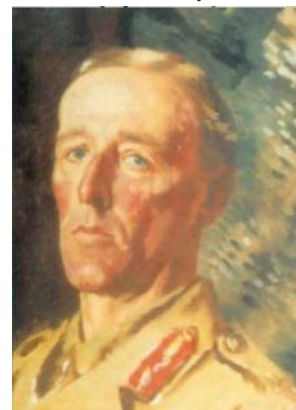
St Catherine's Lighthouse – Plaque in memory of the 3 Keepers who died in WW II



Colonel Henry Gore-Browne VC



Memorial to Geoffrey Gore-Browne



Ryde South African Memorial at the Town Hall. He continued his political and military career in parallel, and by the Great War he was Secretary of State for War in the Asquith government. However, a number of political setbacks caused him to be re-engaged as an Army staff officer and he embarked for France. During the war he had the misfortune of losing his son Frank (a Lieutenant in the Hampshire Regiment) in the battle of Arras on 13th September 1917. Three days later, his nephew Charles Seely died in action with many hundreds of fellow Isle of Wight Riflemen in Gaza, Palestine. Both are commemorated at St Mary's Church in Brook.



Newport South African War memorial (now at Calbourne Mill)

The Duke of Connaught's Own Hants Militia and Isle of Wight Royal Garrison Artillery were based at Sandown Barracks at the time of the South African Wars. A plaque in Christ Church, Broadway, Sandown, commemorates Major Charles Westrow HULSE and four Gunners from this unit who died in South Africa. Hulse was a career soldier, the son of a Baronet, who went to Oxford University and played one game of first class cricket for the MCC. He was killed in action at Braklaagte on 4th June 1901. Of the four artillerymen mentioned, three died of disease (probably enteric fever) which accounted for a substantial number of deaths in that campaign. Their names also appear on panels in Winchester Cathedral.



Winchester Cathedral Panels to South African casualties

One aspect of the war which is not well known is that the Royal Army Medical Corps were strengthened by several hundred volunteers from the St John Ambulance Brigade, 12 of them coming from the Newport area, and their names are to be found on the Newport South African Memorial which is currently displayed in the Military Museum at Calbourne Mill.



Typical St John Ambulance volunteers – the man on the right is wearing his South African war medals

A link between the South African War and the Great War is provided by Stanley Winther CAWS, who appears as Pte S W Caws on the Newport South African Memorial. He came from St Helens, and during the 1900's emigrated to Alberta in Canada, where he was engaged in opening up trade with that province. In 1912 he joined the League of Frontiersmen, a body of men formed in anticipation of a possible war in Europe. He came back to England with the Canadian Forces on the outbreak of war, and within a year he had joined the Royal Flying Corps. He was killed at a height of 11,000 feet in a dogfight. His Observer Flight-Lieutenant Nicholson managed to bring the aircraft safely to land. Caws was buried by the Germans with full military honours but his grave has subsequently been lost and he is commemorated on the Arras Flying Services Memorial in France. Nicholson survived the war. Caws' biography can be found in de Ruvigny's Roll of Honour, an ambitious work commenced early in the war which attempted to list every one who died. The scale of the project became too great; after 5 volumes it was abandoned. Returning to the ordinary soldier and sailor, an example of the type of commemorative display of Great War medals, death plaque and a photo of the recipient can be seen at Calbourne Military Museum. Stoker 1st class Arthur DOWNER died on 31st May 1916 in the sinking of HMS Invincible. He was the son of Harry and Lucy Downer of Yafford.



Stanley Winther Caws.
 feet up, a bullit MSBtag through Ma no
 R.F.O. also wrote that he WOK the life!
*Stanley Winther Caws from the
 pages of de Ruvigny's roll of honour*



*Stoker 1st class A K Downer's
 medals, death plaque and scroll*

Probably unrelated, Albert DOWNER was a bugler with the Isle of Wight Rifles who was killed in action during the Gallipoli campaign. Many of those who died have no known grave; he is buried in 7th Field Ambulance Cemetery alongside 640 others, half of whom are unidentified. The Isle of Wight Rifles, despite being a Territorial Force, served gallantly in many of the Great War campaigns, including Gallipoli, Egypt, Soudan and Gaza.



*Rfn A Downer (centre) at Yaverland
 in 1914*

There are two memorials to the regiment – at the Drill Hall in Newport, and at Carisbrooke Castle. 36 Officers and 489 other ranks lost their lives in the Great War.



Isle of Wight Rifles Memorial, Drill

Hall, Newport

One of those killed was Captain Charles SEELY, the nephew of Jack Seely. He fell at Gaza on the 13th April 1917 and he is remembered in St Olave's Church, Gatcombe by a sculpture of a box tomb which bears a recumbent marble likeness of the young officer.



Capt Charles Seely, memorial at St Olave's Church, Gatcombe

One of the features of the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission's work is that a standard headstone may be erected on the grave of anyone who died while serving with the colours during the two world wars of the 20th Century. There are many examples in local churchyards and at Parkhurst Military Cemetery of those who died while on home service. At Ryde Cemetery, for example, we find the grave of Rifleman Arthur WOODNUTT of the Isle of Wight Rifles, who died of pneumonia one month after enlisting at the age of 42.⁷



Rfn A Woodnutt, Ryde Cemetery.

There are few women commemorated on Island Memorials from the Great War era. An unusual pair of inscriptions at Binstead War memorial hints at the war service of an elderly married couple. Lt-Cdr Henry GARTSIDE-TIPPING is reputed to have been the oldest naval officer killed in the war. At the age of 67 he was in command of HM Armed Yacht "Sanda" which was sunk while operating out of Dover. A motor boat was named in his memory in 1916 which also operated from Dover. His name is also found on the Nieupoort Memorial in Belgium. His wife, Mrs Mary GARTSIDE-TIPPING was some 18 years younger than her husband. She joined the Women's Emergency Committee organisation and went to France to provide services such as canteens for the troops. She was killed by a deranged French soldier in 1917. As a result the French Government awarded her the *Croix de Guerre* and she was afforded a full military funeral.

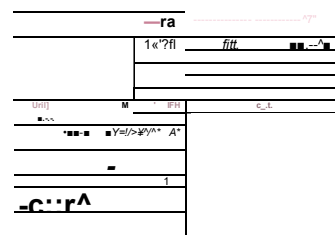


Binstead War memorial – panel showing Lt-Cdr and Mrs Gartside-Tipping

I have mentioned a number of those killed or who served in the Great War, but of course, many who served did return. At the Military Vehicle Museum in Northwood is a plaque which records the Island Old Contemptibles and their dates of death from 1935 up to 1985 when Frederick William ATTRILL of Brading died at the age of 93. His service papers survive – there is correspondence from the Old Contemptibles Association, his attestation papers showing that he joined the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) as a Driver, and his Medal Index Card.



Coincidentally, another Frederick William ATTRILL, this time from Ryde, also joined the RFA. His Medal Index Card and service papers tell a different story, as he was posted to Bombay in India where he was promoted to be a Corporal Shoeing Smith. He died of enteric fever, a common cause of death in the tropics. Since he was not in a war zone, he was only entitled to the British War Medal.⁸



Medal Index Card of F W Attrill of Ryde

In this article it has been possible to mention a few of the many thousands of people who served their country. Every one has a story which could be told. Geoff Allan is starting to add web pages to his website (www.isle-of-wight-memorials.org.uk) to tell their stories, and would be pleased to receive any further biographies for inclusion. His e-mail and postal address is in the inside back cover of this Journal. As a volunteer for the War Memorials Trust, Geoff is one of many throughout the United Kingdom who keep watch over the Memorials to ensure that they continue to serve their purpose of remembering in perpetuity those who died. The work of the War Memorials Trust is described on their website. See www.warmemorials.org.



Other websites of interest :

CWGC Debt of Honour

www.cwgc.org National

Inventory of War Memorials

www.ukniwm.org.co.uk

Channel 4's Lost Generation

www.channel4.com/history/microsites/L/lostgeneration/index.html The National Archives

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

The War Graves Photographic Project

www.twgpp.org/index.php

Ryde Social Heritage Group

www.rydecemetery.org.uk

⁸ Service Papers and Medal Index Cards can be searched for at The National Archives website, and downloaded with the appropriate subscription from www.ancestry.co.uk