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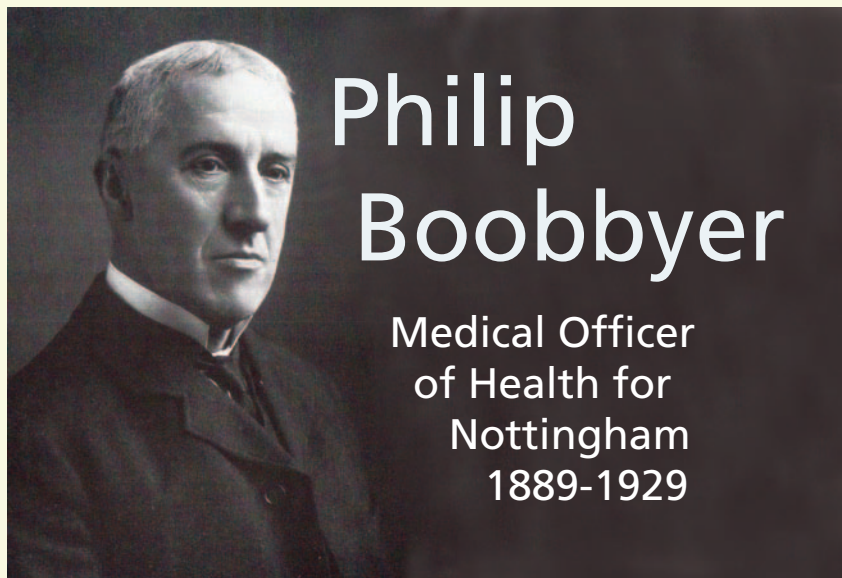
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## **Philip Boobbyer**

**Medical Officer  
of Health for  
Nottingham  
1889-1929**

This year marks the 160th anniversary of the birth of Philip Boobbyer, born 1 June 1857. He was the longest serving Medical Officer (MO) for the City of Nottingham and only the third MO to serve the city after their introduction in 1875.

Until 1872, Nottingham's public health had been the domain of the Sanitary Committee which had been established in 1848. Prior to this, health had been left to individuals to sort out the problems. Unfortunately, for many years, the local authority had been more interested in saving taxpayers money than investing in improvements. Like many Victorian cities, Nottingham had to cope with a great increase in population during the 19th century and this placed enormous pressure on its inadequate sanitary

infrastructure. The consequent overcrowding and poor housing conditions, coupled with poverty, led to disease and widespread suffering. The situation was exacerbated in Nottingham as it was still surrounded by its ancient common fields and meadows and all the early additional housing had to be accommodated within the mediaeval core of the town. Only after the passing of the Nottingham General Enclosure Act in 1845 did land become available for building.

Nationally, the government attempted to address the problem of overcrowding and disease with a series of Public Health Acts, especially those of 1848 and 1875, but many local authorities were dilatory in taking up these powers. The act of 1848 was a significant piece



of legislation as it marked the first clear acceptance by the state of a responsibility for the health of people. The act provided for the creation of local boards of health empowered to appoint a member of the medical profession as their Medical Officer of Health. Unfortunately, this was a permissive rather than mandatory option and many local boards did not take up this initiative. Nottingham, along with many other large towns, made no move on this front until compelled by the 1872 Public Health Act. The appointment of a Medical Officer of Health was finally mandatory, as was the appointment of nuisance inspectors for all local sanitary authorities throughout England and Wales. It was the 1875 Public Health Act which provided a complete statement of powers and duties of local sanitary authorities setting out their responsibilities and which legislated for the permanent appointment of a registered doctor as Medical Officer of Health.

Little is recorded about Philip Boobyer who spent nearly forty years attempting to change public health conditions in Nottingham. It is a sad omission that, in Robert Mellors' 1924 book, *Men of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire*, which has a foreword stating it is 'a record of those who in some way were distinguished for usefulness to others', that he is not mentioned.

Boobyer was born 1 June 1857 and was a native of Brighton and was educated at Brighton College between 1873 and 1875. In 1876, before commencing his medical studies at King's College and King's College Hospital (London), he spent two years in an engineer's office. After qualifying as MRCS (Member of the Royal College of Surgeons) and LSA (Local sanitary authority), he became resident Medical Officer at the hospital and spent twelve months as a demonstrator of anatomy and subsequently obtaining degrees in both medicine and surgery. In 1884, he secured the post of Medical Officer to the Basford Rural Sanitary District, which encompassed a large number of districts around Nottingham.

On his appointment as Medical Officer for Nottingham in 1889, he resided on Forest Road. His initial salary was £500 pa with a £50 travelling expense but was raised by £200 in 1898. He married Annie Forbes Watson, daughter (b.c.1869) of the Nottingham architect, Watson-Fothergill on 27 April 1893. The marriage took place at St Andrews and they set up home at Uphill House, Wellington Square, off Derby Road, Nottingham.

Dr Boobyer was a religious man, a member of the Plymouth brethren and from the beginning he set out

*Dense working-class housing in the Narrow Marsh area of Nottingham*

Courtesy of Nottingham City Council  
and [www.picturethepast.org.uk](http://www.picturethepast.org.uk)



as a 'crusader' against the grim conditions confronting him in Nottingham. He was once described as being an 'open-air-crank' because of his belief in pure air to help cure illnesses. With his methodical approach, year after year he demonstrated by indisputable facts and statistics that many of the epidemics which affected Nottingham were largely attributable to the insanitary system of public scavenging and that thousands of lives were needlessly lost every year due to the poor state of public health conditions.

Throughout his term of office, Boobyer showed a keen interest in the spread and isolation of diseases and wrote papers on subjects such as notification and



Courtesy of Nottingham City Council and [www.picturethepast.org.uk](http://www.picturethepast.org.uk)

### **Ruston's Place, Bellar Gate, Barker gate area, Nottingham 1919.**

*This is one of a series of photographs taken by the City Council Health and Engineers Departments to record poor housing conditions, prior to their demolition as part of the post World War 1 housing programs of the 1920's. The photograph shows back-to-back housing with no internal plumbing, no through ventilation, open drains in the communal yard with a water tap at the end of the drain. The people living there would have shared toilet closets and a wash house at the end of the yard. The women here are probably 'rag picking' to supplement their income, by sorting through old clothes, repairing and salvaging some, removing buttons and lace, before selling the remainder for rags.*

hospital isolation and the treatment and vaccination of smallpox cases.

At the start of his term of office, the main method of excrement removal in Nottingham was by the pail closet, adopted by the Corporation in 1868. However, in 1895, the Town Council adopted the recommendation that the pail-closet system should no longer be recognised and that water-carriage was the way forward, even though it would take nearly twenty five years to implement.

Boobyer was only too aware that the use of pail-closets was responsible for the huge numbers of deaths from typhoid (enteric) fever and diarrhoea, especially in infants, every year. He demonstrated this by showing that typhoid had rapidly diminished in other large towns, such as Leicester, where practical sanitation had developed, but in Nottingham this was not the case where the reduction had not been so pronounced or so continuous.

He wrote two articles emphasising his concerns on the matter in the influential *Public Health journal* of 1896-7. Using his knowledge of epidemics he showed that, during a ten-year period between 1887-96, occupants of houses with pail closets were four times more likely to suffer from typhoid than those houses fitted with water closets and showed that these were usually in the poorer, densely-populated areas of the city. The combination of poor excrement management, together with heavily populated areas and hot dry summers, proved a fatal cocktail, demonstrated in the high number of cases and deaths recorded in the third quarter of the year, such as 1899. A downward trend could be detected after this period until 1911 when another hot summer was experienced and the number of cases and deaths rose dramatically by nearly 100 per cent.

The reasons for the disappearance of typhoid in Nottingham by the start of the First World War are complex, but it is difficult to attribute it to improvements in housing and waste removal, as both were still in a very poor state in the city until the mid-twenties. It was estimated that approximately 7,000 slop closets (halfway between pail and water-closets) were still to be found in the city in 1924.

The 1920 Enquiry, convened after the rejection of a boundary extension application by the Nottingham Corporation, revealed a catalogue of failures on the part of the Corporation in its statutory responsibilities

towards sewage disposal. Boobyer was called as a witness and it was noted that in nearly all of his Annual Reports he had drawn attention to the problems caused by the almost universal use of the pail closet and that he had recommended their abolition continually since 1889.

Once again, Boobyer's systematic examination of diseases can be seen in his treatment of respiratory tuberculosis (phthisis). Despite it being the leading killer, throughout the nineteenth century, a great deal of secrecy surrounded tuberculosis. The disease affected adults in their prime 'industrial' years between 15 and 55 years. Women tended to suffer less than men. However, this was not always the case and there were often obscure and complex differences with age and sex-specific patterns.

Boobyer's investigations showed that employed males were more at risk, suggesting that the work place might have been instrumental in spreading the disease. However, the type of employment was not necessarily the significant factor, more depended on the conditions of work. Certain occupations involving hazardous materials, such as masons, tailors or boot manufacturers, were more at risk. Other factors such as irregular hours, cramped working conditions, fatigue and under-nourishment were also influential in its spread.

In 1900, Nottingham was at its peak as a lace manufacturer and the industry came under scrutiny as a source of phthisis but the 1903 Health Report found that, where men and women of a similar age and social circumstances were employed side by side in lace manufacture, the men were at greater risk and that the death rate for women was exceptionally low. However, in 1907, two rather alarmist headlines suggested its prevalence among lace-girls. As he had done with typhoid, Boobyer set out to examine every possible cause of phthisis in the city. Between 1907 and 1915, he carried out a series of investigations. He concluded that tuberculosis as a public health problem was purely a matter of poverty and unhealthy environment and, through his housing investigation, he was able to draw attention to the close correspondence between deaths from phthisis and housing conditions. He was also a keen advocate of notification and isolation of people with contagious diseases.

One of his greatest achievements in the city was the adoption of the Mother and Babies Welcome

Scheme in 1908. The Health and Estates committee and the Social Guild Institution opened a 'Welcome' on Howard Street as an initial experiment to reduce the excessive infant mortality in Nottingham and to improve the general health and stamina of the mothers. Dinners were provided for mothers and babies were weighed and advice given on rearing babies. The 'Welcomes' encouraged women to breast feed their babies.

Nottingham had, for many years, suffered extremely high infant mortality rates. Boobyer concluded that many of the infant deaths were as the result of the poor excrement removal system operating in the city, especially in the poorer, overcrowded districts. He applied the same evidence to infantile diarrhoea as he done with typhoid fever and again showed that Leicester's infant mortality rate had significantly decreased after the replacement of pail closets with water closets at the end of the nineteenth century.

After 1918, the clinics passed from the voluntary sector to an official status and by 1929 there were ten centres attended by over half the mothers who gave birth in the city. The benefits of the service could not be overstated, as there was a fall of nearly 50 per cent in infantile mortality since the scheme's inception in 1908. He considered the provision of a maternity hospital a most important requirement for the city and made this plain in his report of 1910, but it was to be nearly two decades before he saw this become a reality and, for many of the poorer women, childbirth still occurred in the home.

He was appointed the School Medical Officer of Health in 1908 after the introduction of compulsory inspections. This involved him with the treatment and inspection of schoolchildren and his ultimate goal was to eliminate preventable diseases and to lay the foundations for a better and higher standard of national physique.

Boobyer took an active interest in the food and drink supply of Nottingham, a considerable amount of which was sold below standard and very often dangerous to health. In 1921, he sat on a committee of the Ministry of Health on the problems of meat inspection. He was an active member of the Royal Sanitary Institute and was instrumental in proposing a course for training the Inspectors of Nuisances at the University College of Nottingham and arranged the course of lectures and practical demonstrations for their examination and the Royal Sanitary Institute

accepted attendance at the College as evidence of training.

Dr Boobyer retired from his post in 1929 and received many tributes from Nottingham Corporation and the Health Committee. He was presented with a magnificent inscribed silver boat-shaped rose bowl and was wished a long and happy retirement. Unfortunately, this was not to be and, on 30 January 1930, after taking a cold bath, he died from a heart attack. His funeral took place on 24 January 1930.

During his long career, Boobyer was also a member of the Nottingham Medico-Chirurgical Society. He served both as secretary, President and Vice-President. During this time, he regularly gave papers to the Society on subjects such as smallpox, typhoid fever and phthisis. When he retired, the Health Department was considerably larger and more efficient and had departments including a pathological department, a

maternity and child welfare department, as well as a hostel for unmarried mothers, a VD clinic and clinics dealing with tuberculosis.

Dr Boobyer's pioneering work in public health was sometimes considered cranky because of the methods he used but, to many in the medical profession, he was noted for ignoring politics and for working towards the good of the community. His knowledge was profound, his medical instinct was uncanny and, despite his apparent aloof appearance, he had a great concern for the suffering of humanity and in improving the lives of the poor. His cornerstone was Christianity and he said that 'Everything worth having in civilisation finds its best expression in applied Christianity'.

*This article, by **Dr Denise Amos**, is based on her presentation to FONA on 20 May 2017.*

## Welcome to new members

FONA extends a warm welcome to the following new members:

**Carol Lovejoy Edwards**  
**Lisa De Vivo**  
**Colin and Peta Hyland**  
**Mr R and Mrs D Wakefield**  
**Carly-Emma White**  
**Andy Johnson**



## It's that time of year AGAIN!



Your FONA Membership is due for renewal on 1 January 2018.

I shall be sending out reminders to Friends in December. To save postage costs I will contact as many people as I can by email so please ensure that

**treasurer@FONA.org.uk**

is added to your 'safe senders' list.

**Judith Mills**  
Treasurer & Membership Secretary



# Unsung Hero honourable mention

Chairman Richard Gaunt presented Sheila Leeds with her Inspire award in the Unsung Hero category earlier this summer. Our heartfelt congratulations to Sheila on this most deserved achievement.



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## Discovery of a lost uncle

Harold Parker was the oldest of the four brothers and was the uncle I never met. He was born on 27th November 1894 and died at the age of 26 on 28th December 1919 as a result of the First World War, (long before I was born). I hold a mug in my bedroom which is inscribed with his name and date of birth.



Before joining the Forces he was a millinery salesman.

On 14th January 1914 he joined the Territorial Force (TF), as 3596 Private, 7th (Robin Hood) Battalion, Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Regiment). Harold was then aged 19 and 10 months. His medical inspection at the time of enlistment stated he was 5ft 8½ ins in height, girth 35½ ins and weighed 126 lbs. The Battalion was closely associated with the city of Nottingham, with a drill hall on Derby Street, and was popularly known as 'The Robin Hoods'. During the last week of July 1914 the battalion was at annual camp at Hunmanby near Filey and returned by train to Nottingham on the evening of 3rd August 1914. It was 'called out on permanent service....on the 4th day of August 1914' and paraded at 0900 5th August. On

the 10th August the Battalion marched to Derby, on 15th August they were moved by two trains to Luton and on 21st August marched to Harpenden and began 'strenuous training'. On 1st September the Battalion was asked to volunteer for overseas service. About 150 men did not volunteer and a further 5 Officers and 30 men were not passed as fit, all were replaced by 'drafts'. On 8th October the Battalion dug its first trenches on Sundon Hill. On 16th November 1914 the Battalion began a three day march the 61 miles to Bocking near Braintree. It was here that 'the Machine Gun Section was most efficiently trained under Lieut A M Williams'.

On the 16th January 1915 Harold was discharged from the Territorial Force for re-enlistment in M/C

Gun Corps. He presumably had an interest in motor cycles and enlisted as 53284 Private, Motor Machine Gun Service and was posted to 3rd Motor Machine Gun Battery. He did not deploy with the Battery to join the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1915 (had he done so he would have received the 1914-15 Star) and presumably remained in England. The unit was renamed the Machine Gun Corps (Motors) in October 1915 and he was probably serving at the MGC(M) Depot at Belton Park in Grantham, Lincolnshire by August 1916 when the MGC(M) was disbanded on the formation of the Heavy Section MGC which was to be renamed the Tank Corps. He was transferred into the mainstream MGC on 14th August 1916.

Harold sailed on 13th September 1916 and was deployed to join the British Expeditionary Force in France on 14th September 1916. He was taken on strength of the MGC Base Depot at Camiers. On 20th September 1916 he was posted to 122nd Machine Gun Company in 122nd Brigade in 41st Division on the Somme. On 7th October 1916 the Brigade advanced against German trenches during the Battle of Le Transloy and was destroyed. The Battalions and other units were made up by Drafts and returned to routine in the trenches.

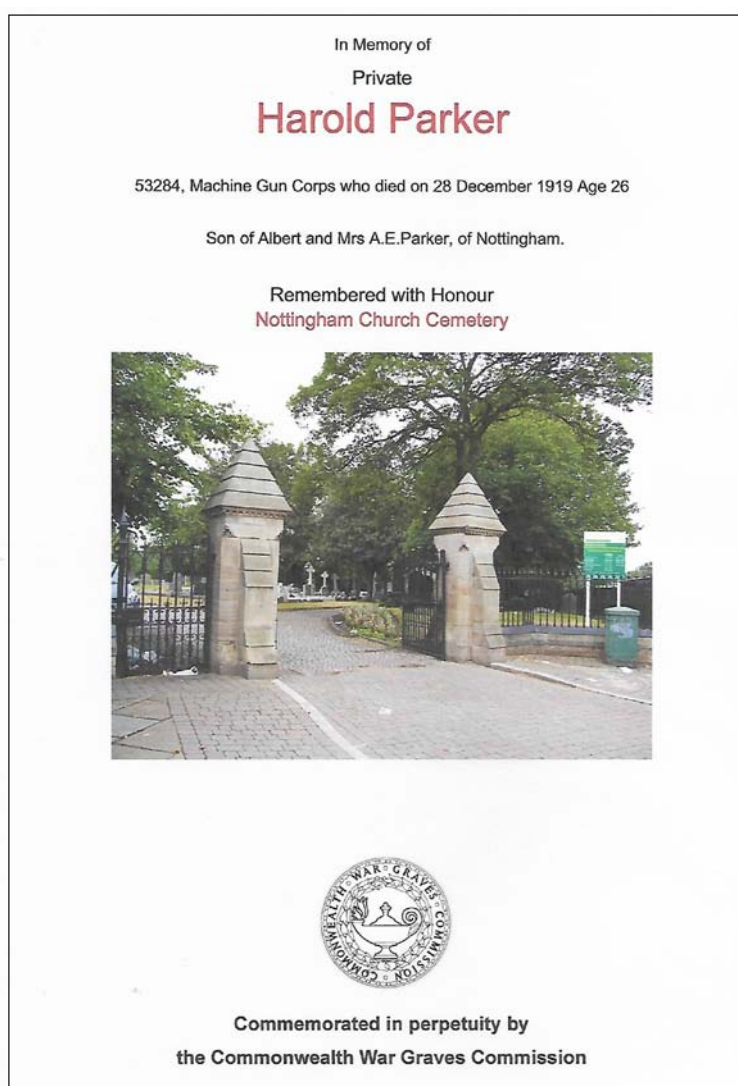
Harold's service record states that he had suffered from laryngitis, a fractured left finger and disability attributed to diabetes. He was declared no longer physically fit for war service and on 1st February 1917 the record says "Invalid R H". He returned home on 2nd February 1917 and was discharged on 18th October 1917.

He was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

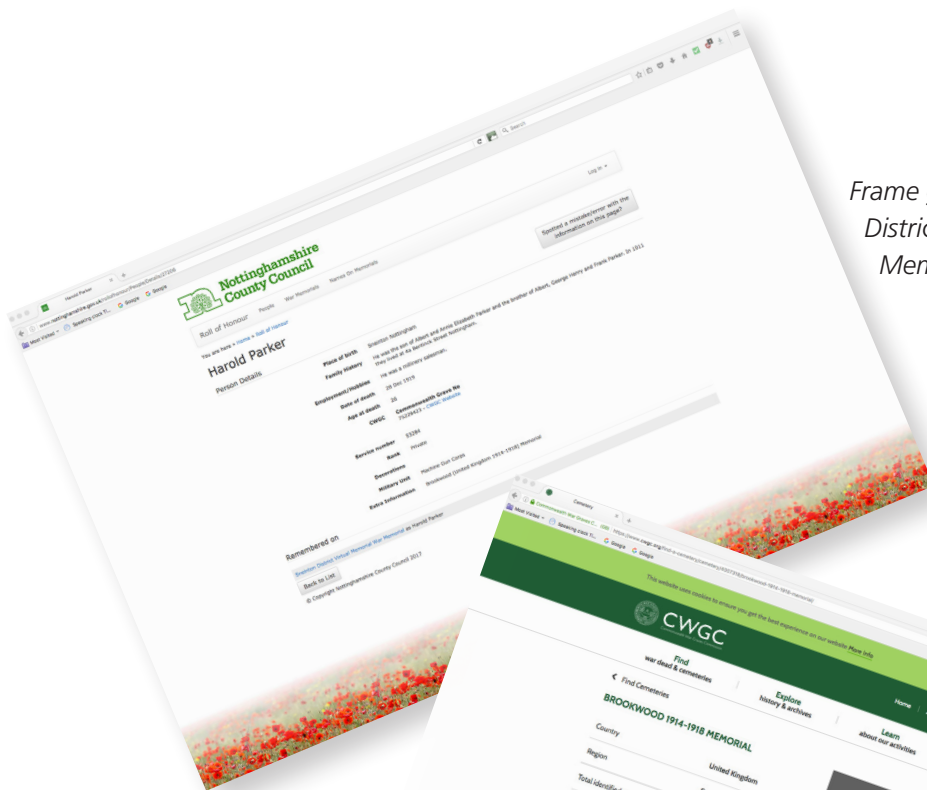
In December 2016 I received the following information from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission:

## “ Private Harold Parker

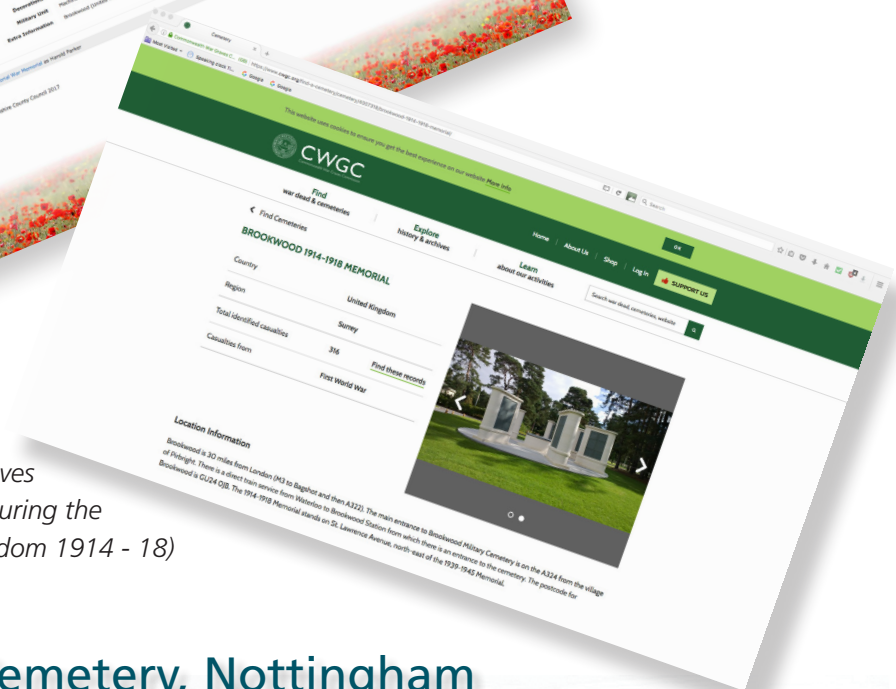
Casualty of the Great War. Harold served with the Machine Gun Corps, service number 53284. He was 26 and the son of Albert and Mrs A. E. Parker of Nottingham. He was accepted for commemoration as war dead on 23rd June 2011. He was previously commemorated on the Brookwood (United Kingdom 1914-1918) Memorial, Surrey and the United Kingdom Book of Remembrance. He is also remembered on the Sneinton District Virtual War Memorial as Harold Parker. (A certificate in memory of Private Harold Parker is illustrated on the next page). His Commonwealth Grave No is 75229423 and recent research has shown that Private Parker is buried in the Nottingham Church (Rock) Cemetery, Plot Laburnum, 6498. ”



The certificate referred to above.

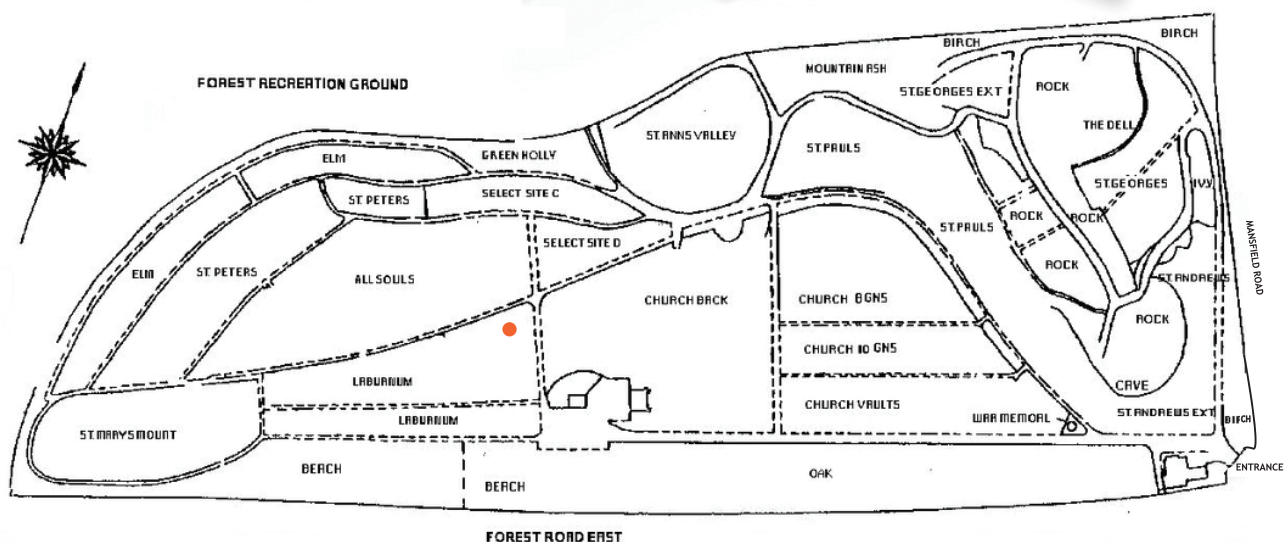


Frame grab of the Sneinton District Virtual War Memorial.



Frame grab from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website featuring the Brookwood (United Kingdom 1914 - 18) Memorial.

## Church (Rock) Cemetery, Nottingham



- Approximate position of Harold Parker's grave. N.B. Recent research has shown that Private Parker is buried here. The Commission is in the process of producing a headstone to mark his grave.

This article has been researched with the assistance of: Nottinghamshire Archives, The War Graves Commission and Robin Hodges, Military Historian, Potterne, Devizes. It is an extract from 'The Story of my Life & Family History'. This is a 24 page illustrated booklet published in July 2017 which contains many interesting and amusing stories from the past. Copies of the booklet are available for £4. Contact Howard F. Parker, Tel. 0115 877 0875. Email: hpsauce.bed87ale@btinternet.com



# Emma Wilmot - the Forgotten Artist of the Victorian Dukeries



*"Starting for the show at Retford, Sparken, 1842"*

In July, FONA's chairman Dr Richard Gaunt told members about the fascinating detective story which led to the re-discovery of a lost Victorian Artist. The journey began in 1994 when the Nottinghamshire historian Rosalys Coope was shown a sketch-book containing about eighty leaves of

called upon her friend and fellow historian Neville Hoskins for assistance and the couple proceeded to explore both the content of the

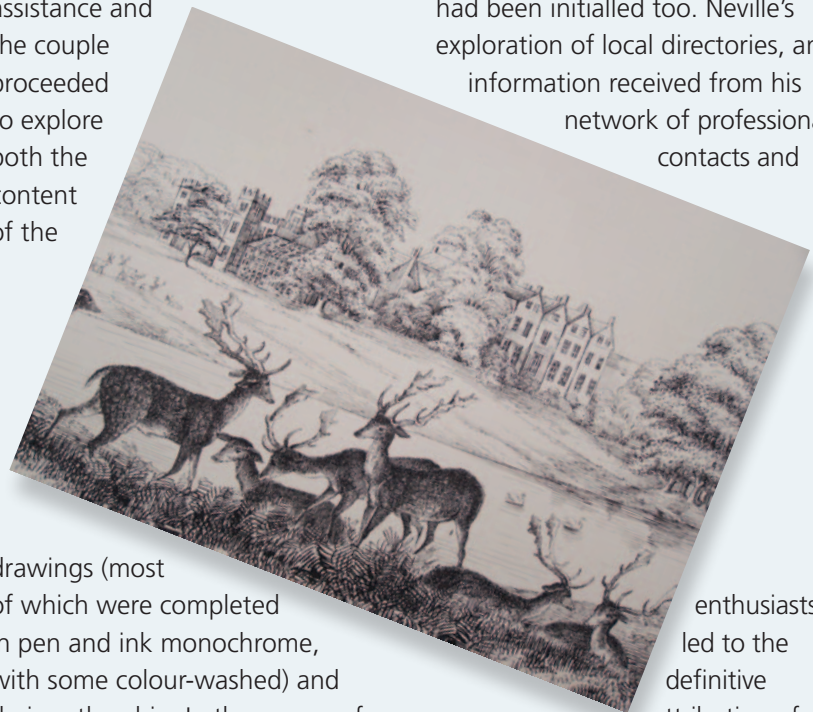
Retford book not only had dated drawings but examples which had been initialled too. Neville's exploration of local directories, and information received from his network of professional contacts and



*Dr Rosalys Coope.*

illustrations, produced by an (as yet) unidentified hand. Rosalys

drawings (most of which were completed in pen and ink monochrome, with some colour-washed) and their authorship. In the course of their exploration, during a visit to Bassetlaw Museum, a chance remark by the curator about the existence of their own unidentified sketchbook led to the crucial discovery that both were by the same hand. Fortunately, the

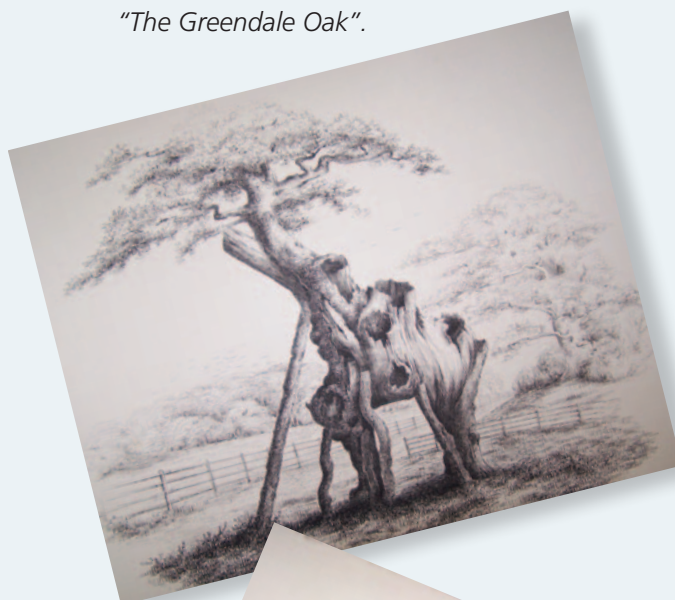


enthusiasts, led to the definitive attribution of

both sets of sketches to Emma Elizabeth Wilmot (nee Darwin) (1820-1898), the wife of the local land-agent and surveyor Edward Woollett Wilmot (1808-1864), who was the 4th Duke of Newcastle's agent at Worksop.

Richard went on to describe his own contribution to the detective story and the discoveries which he has made since taking up the case. Key amongst these must be the discovery that Edward Wilmot had a first wife, Augusta (nee Champion) (1809/1810-1838). The circumstances of Augusta's death (in 1838) remain a mystery because the death certificate was incorrectly completed at a period when civil registration was still in its infancy. The case demonstrates the continuing importance of accurate record-keeping! Richard commented on the fact that he has discovered much more about Edward Wilmot's subsequent career than Emma's life - a reminder of the bias in historical records towards recording the activities of men rather than women. However, Richard is piecing together a picture of Emma's life, not only during the period in which the sketchbooks were completed (1842-6) but, with more gaps, in subsequent years. A Darwin by birth, and thus raised in a lively and enquiring household, Emma is likely to have been tutored in her art by family members - although Richard is still keen to discover the sources of her proficiency. However, Richard continues to be excited by the chance and unexpected nature of discoveries relating to the lives of Emma and Edward Wilmot. A trip to Worksop Priory Church led to the unexpected discovery of a memorial tablet to Augusta. Similarly, the same museum curator who drew the attention of Rosalys and Neville to the Retford sketchbook recently drew Richard's attention to some later sketches produced by Emma, prints of which were being sold online. This has led to the discovery that some of Emma's work from the mid-1850s (when she was

*"The Greendale Oak".*

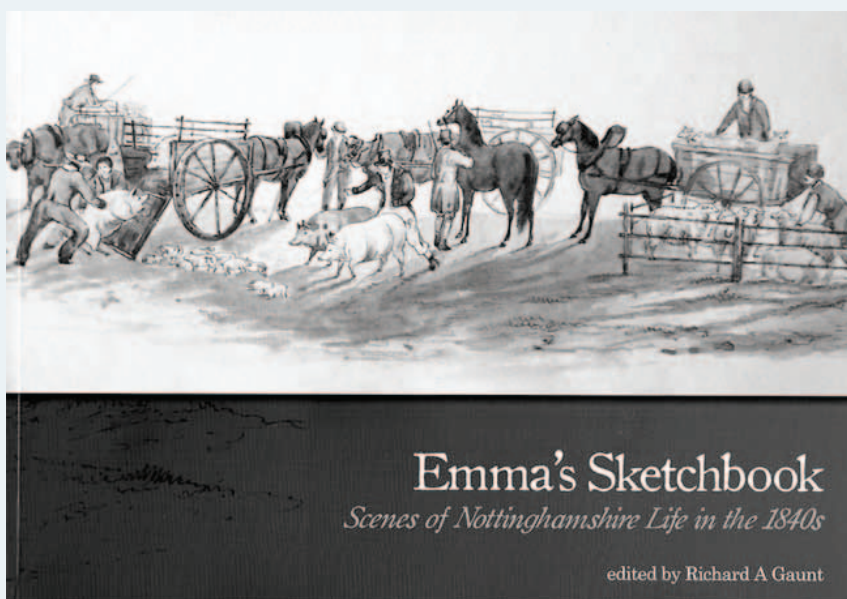


*"Seven Sisters Oak".*



living in Derbyshire) was produced for private publication by a group of subscribers to the Anastatic Drawing Society, depicting antiquities and medieval architecture, including memorials of the Eyam plague. After many years of knowing Emma purely from her artwork, Richard has lately discovered examples of her correspondence as well - a particularly satisfying discovery for a historian. Having been 'bitten by

the bug', Richard hopes that he will continue to learn more about the fascinating lives of this most Victorian of couples.



A collection of Emma's sketches, edited by Richard, is available from Nottinghamshire County Libraries at £7.95.



# Forthcoming Events

Admission to non-FONA members £4.00 including refreshments. Places may be booked at the Archives with payment by non-members on the day.

Two events reflecting on the local impact of international conflicts.

## 11.00am, Saturday 18 November 2017 at the Nottinghamshire Archives

In this talk Carol Lovejoy Edwards looks at the impact of the Great War on those left behind at home here in Nottinghamshire - from the food shortages and hardships of coping alone to the new opportunities for women and also the criminal fraternity.



## 11.00am, Saturday 20 January 2018 at the Nottinghamshire Archives

This presentation by Edward Hammond discusses the extent of the impact of the Napoleonic Wars on domestic life in Nottinghamshire during the early 19th century, with a special focus on the Luddites, the Pentrich Revolution and the debate around economic and political motives at the time. Also get a chance to view and handle parts of a Napoleonic French infantryman's uniform.



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If you would like to contribute articles to the FONA Newsletter please contact Richard Gaunt, Chairman.

chairman@fona.org.uk