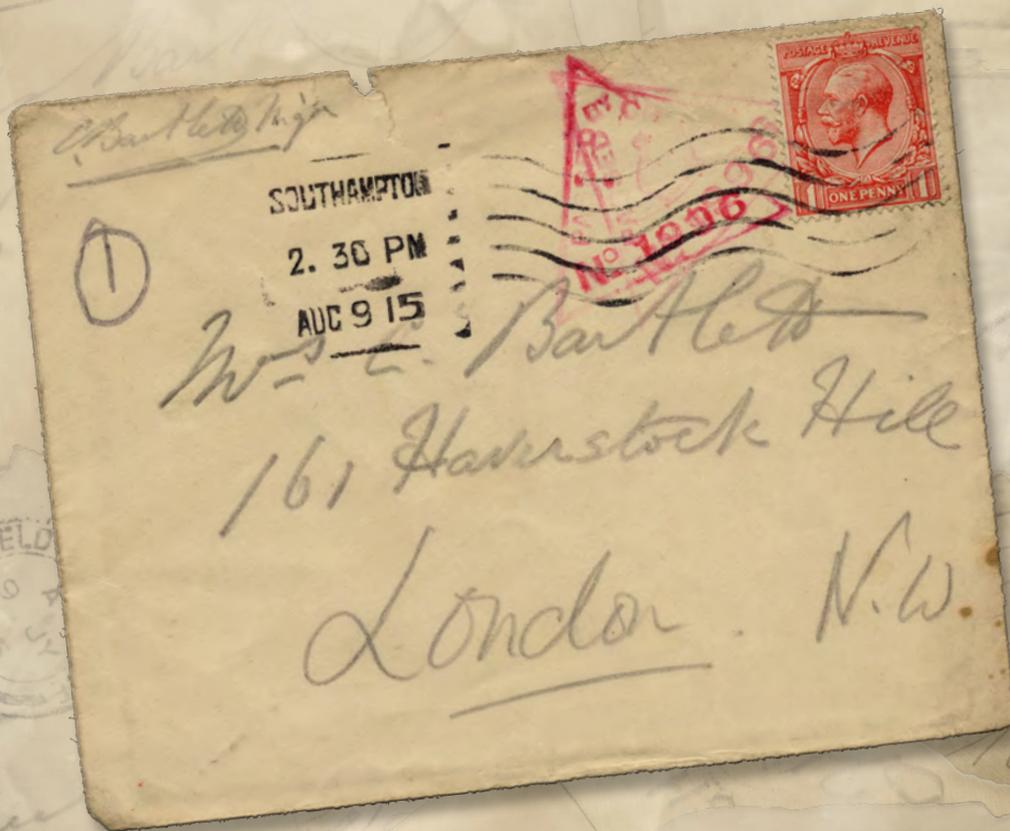


'Moving, Powerful, Important' Michael Morpurgo

I Shall Not Be Away Long

The First World War Letters
of Lt Col Charles Bartlett



Presented by ANDREW TATHAM

Foreword by WILLIAM BOYD

On His Majesty's Service

Lt Col Charles Bartlett was a larger-than-life and slightly roguish infantry officer who served on the Western Front from August 1915 to March 1917. Not only are his letters almost completely uncensored and full of incident described with directness and bluff humour, but the people he mentions along the way give a full spectrum of supporting characters, from his actress wife and their friends on the West End stage, to soldiers noted for their heroism or eccentricity or insubordination or complicated love lives (or combinations of all of these), to men avoiding conscription, to spies, royalty and a newspaper magnate. The letters give a portrait of a man, a marriage, and a time of traumatic uncertainty. Charles Bartlett is not an exemplary hero, but his flaws make him all the more human as he struggles through leading his Battalion at the Battles of Loos and the Somme and the frights and labours of life on the Western Front.

Andrew Tatham has presented the letters so that you see the originals and have a chance of feeling you've just opened them yourself. Insights and atmosphere come through pictures and details of the events, objects, people and places that Charles Bartlett encounters along the way, and behind it all has been the aim of giving voice to the variety of war experiences as well as showing how families dealt with their losses and what the survivors did with the rest of their lives.

This book is designed to be read alongside his first book *'A Group Photograph – Before, Now & In-Between'*. As well as having many characters in common, both books explore the same ideas of what it is like to be a human being in any time, how our beliefs and hopes compare to reality, and what remains of us after we are gone.

***'Compelling reading' 'Absolutely intriguing'
'Of human interest that we can all relate to as
all our lives are more complex and nuanced
than they might seem at first glance'***

Helen Tovey, Editor of *Family Tree* magazine

***'The book is beautifully illustrated and the
depth of research is most impressive'***

Professor Ian Beckett, author of *'The Great War'*

***'The achievement of it, the depth, breadth,
humanity, suspense (what on earth was
Charles going to be up to next?), the 300-strong
cast, the meticulousness, brilliant structure and
design... It is a more than worthy sequel to
'A Group Photograph' and the two fit
beautifully, seamlessly, together'***

Patrick Miles, author of
'George Calderon - Edwardian Genius'

www.groupphoto.co.uk

www.ishallnotbeawaylong.co.uk

Sample pages

As well as the front and back covers with associated flaps, this sample includes 25 of the 464 pages in the book. I hope it gives you a flavour of what to expect from the whole thing. (The page numbers given are those from the original book).

Individual Pages:

- Picture of Charles Bartlett's daughter (p.2)
- Table of Contents (p.7)
- Foreword by William Boyd (p.9)

2-Page Spreads:

(If you're viewing on a big screen you might want to go to View, Page Display, and pick Two Page View, with no tick next to 'Show Cover Page in Two Page View' so that you can look at the following spreads correctly together)

- Photographs of Charles Bartlett and his wife Margaret (pp.30-31)
- The First Letter (pp.36-37)
- 2 Early Letters pre the Battle of Loos (pp.44-45)
- 6 Letters in the Run-up to the Battle of Loos (pp.76-81)
- 4 Letters when in the trenches near Loos in March 1916 (pp.206-209)
- 2 Pages of Additional Stories (referred to by one of the sample letters) (pp.402-403)
- 4 Pages of 'Following in Charles Bartlett's Footsteps' (pp.430-431 & pp.438-439)



Charles Bartlett's daughter Paula in 1911

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Foreword by William Boyd

Lt Colonel Charles Bartlett, the author of these revelatory and compelling letters, is a figure that could easily come from a novel by Evelyn Waugh or J.G. Farrell. Bourgeois, privileged, raffish, lazy, self-indulgent, hedonistic, with a wispy fair moustache and a weak chin, his attitude to life appears utterly typical of his class. However, no-one can prefigure where the most telling witnesses to history will spring from and Charles Frederick Napier Bartlett is exemplary in this regard.

Born in 1878 – four years after Winston Churchill, to place him in a context we can grasp – Charles Bartlett’s world was, like Churchill’s, entirely Late Victorian with all the rigid value systems that were implied by the classification. Bartlett was 22 years old when Queen Victoria died. The British Empire was in its pomp; half of the map of the world was imperial red; the Englishman, and his peculiar ethos, reigned supreme, unchallenged. Modestly educated at public school (Rugby), with a substantial trust fund due on his 21st birthday, Bartlett went straight into the army, that professional safety-net for the not-very-bright sons of the well-heeled. In his case it was to the Royal Berkshire Regiment where he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1900.

Bartlett left his regiment for unspecified reasons in 1906 (possibly as a result of some financial improprieties), and then, to his family’s quiet shock, married a very young actress, Peggy Bethel – the recipient of almost all of these letters. When war broke out in 1914 he was 36 years old, and he re-joined his former regiment. He was elderly to be returning as a junior officer – most of his peers were in their early 20s – and because of his previous military experience he was quickly promoted to higher ranks. Moreover, his life and times had already shaped him, irrevocably, as his letters demonstrate. He is, in a way, a classic throwback, and all the more fascinating for it.

Once the war was underway, and once the couple were separated, letter writing on an almost daily basis – at both ends of the correspondence – sustained husband and wife. One forgets how, in that era of super-efficient postal services, letters were almost like emails. Even on the front-line Bartlett complains when his wife’s letters don’t arrive promptly.

These letters home, as they steadily accumulate, provide a wealth of astonishing detail and paint a guileless but superbly textured picture of the mundane realities in the life of an officer in the British Army as the war progresses. Bartlett’s letters to Peggy detail the minutiae of army life, all the material that doesn’t make it into official histories. One is reminded – and one needs reminding – that most soldiers in any war throughout history, even the privileged officer class, quickly become reluctant Stoics as their lives become a constant search for modest comforts – warmth, dryness, victuals, alcohol, safety from harm. The same subjects – the same gripes – appear again and again. The weather, the billets, the tedium, the deplorable state of French WCs, food, drink, health and discomforts dominate. Because Bartlett is writing home to his young wife the language is at times almost clichéd – *‘we’re giving the Bosche absolute hell’* – and the sentiments, though fondly expressed – *‘My darling*

wife’ – are familiar and worn with over-use. And then a letter of the 27th September 1915 draws you up short.

Bartlett’s battalion takes part in the Battle of Loos, whose first day is second only to the Somme’s in its grim casualty count. *‘Our officers fared as follows,’* he writes, tersely. *‘Brakspear wounded in knee / Oldman wounded / Hanna missing believed dead reported seriously wounded / Tosetti wounded, not seriously / Paramore missing no hope / Cassells dead / Berlein dead / Peacock dead / Glen missing’* and so on for another nine names. What makes it so chilling is that many of these people have already figured in Bartlett’s letters home as he detailed anecdotes and grumbles to Peggy about life in the battalion. The jolt of this grim reality is palpable and, for the reader, the tenor of the letters home changes thereafter, despite the humdrum realities of life after the battle – food, billets, discomfort, ill-health – coming to the fore once again. We become all too aware of the desperate, fatal subtext of the First World War; it thrums as a kind of baleful basso profundo drumroll under the banter and the reportage – *‘a ghastly business too awful to describe,’* Bartlett says.

The letters continue as the war continues. Bartlett is promoted to Lt Colonel and becomes the CO of the battalion and his responsibilities increase dramatically. The Royal Berkshires participate in the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and more casualties are recorded. Despite his shortcomings as an individual Bartlett seems to have measured up as a soldier. However, the sentimental verities of Charles and Peggy’s married life come under strain and the resolution of their problems adds a poignant and all-too-human undertone to the reports from the front line. The letters home cease in March 1917 when Bartlett is sent to the Côte d’Azur to convalesce after a period of ill health. He never returned to active service. He died of pneumonia in Putney, London, in December 1940.

Of course, these letters were never intended for posterity – and thereby lies their appeal. The voice, the attitudes, the feelings, the anecdotes, the remorseless toll of warfare reverberate in them with an absolute authenticity. But they only achieve their full resonance as a result of Andrew Tatham’s extraordinary research into the background and context and his copious and fascinating annotation to the throwaway remarks and references. Lt Colonel Bartlett’s life is illuminated and referenced in a way he could never possibly have imagined and we are all the richer for it.

This is not only a beautiful-looking book, generously and wonderfully illustrated, it is also a remarkable human document, as rich in detail and commentary on the human condition as a long novel. Tens of thousands of books have been written about the First World War and who would have thought that, over a hundred years since it ended, there was anything more to say. But *‘I Shall Not Be Away Long’* fully earns its place in the Pantheon of literature about the Great War. We come away from it amused, moved, informed, baffled, shocked, saddened and, with a bit of luck, wiser. It is a classic of its kind.

William Boyd, London, May 2020



Major Charles Bartlett flanked by Colonel William Walton (*left*) and Captain Lionel Edwards (*right*).

I Shall Not Be Away Long



Margaret Bartlett (signed 'Peggy' – it was her stage name and how she was known in her family, but Charles never calls her that in the letters).

At end of order write

Operation Order No. _____
by _____

Copy No. _____

Issued at _____

by _____

to....Copy No. _____

....Copy No. _____

etc.

Place

Alfais Home

Date

2.8.15.

Reference.

Dear Sir, I was very sorry not to see you at station but never mind I shall not be away long. At 6 A.M. we are just going ashore. I came over with 9 officers 316 men all horses transport etc, & the C.O took the rest in another ship. Being senior officer on board I had the best State Room & dined at 5.30 last night being asleep by 8.30 & got up at 4.30 this morning, with a nice bath, so so far I have not

At end of order write
Issued at _____
by _____
to....Copy No. _____
....Copy No. _____
etc.

Reference.

All Love
Thine
Charles

Place *Alfie's Home*¹
Date 8.8.15

Dearest

I was very sorry not to see you at station but never mind I shall not be away long.

6 A.M. We are just going ashore. I came over with 9 officers 316 men all horses transport etc., & the C.O.² took the rest in another ship.³ Being senior officer on board I had the best State Room & dined at 5:30 last night being asleep by 9:30 & got up at 4:30 this morning, with a nice bath, so so far I have not roughed it very much. All our orders were different with regard to embarking when we got to Southampton, which I left at 4 pm the others following at 7 pm. Must stop now, some staff officers coming aboard.

*All love Thine*⁴
Charles



8 AUG 1915

Item 1

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London

SOUTHAMPTON
2.30 PM
AUG 9 15

Charles looks like he is showing off by writing this first letter on an Operation Order pad.

He had been in command of the first train taking the Battalion from Warminster and his wife arrived down on the line just as the train pulled off so she was not able to say goodbye.

'*I shall not be away long*' is such a loaded statement, especially viewed from the present day when we have a view of the whole war. Of course he is trying to allay his wife's fears as he goes off to fight, but he is also showing the confidence that then seemed to infect so many people. Another battalion's commanding officer said in his memoirs that at this time betting on the Stock Exchange was four to one on the war ending in the next month. Knowing what we do now, it seems astonishing that at this stage anyone can have thought that the war was not going to last long, or that they would have a good chance of surviving it. The Western Front had stagnated into lines of trenches and attempts to change that had shown little movement accompanied by huge numbers of casualties. They may not have known the precise numbers but the casualty lists occupied columns and columns in the newspapers. According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the British Army had lost a total of 91,189 dead in all theatres by this day of the war. So in only one year the loss was just under half the 219,420 that it is estimated the British Army lost in the whole of the Napoleonic Wars from 1804-1815 (and that number included 193,851 who died from wounds, accidents and disease).

Before Charles went ashore he must have given this letter to someone on the ship who

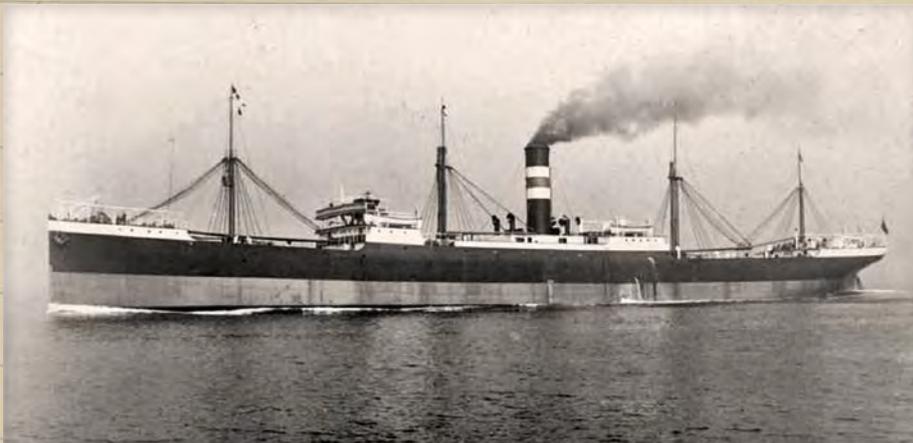
posted it in Southampton (as you can see on the first envelope on the front cover of this book).

- 1 Alfie = Charles's brother-in-law **Alfred Fraser**, aged 41. He had married Charles's youngest surviving sister, **Florie** (now 47), at the Cathedral in Singapore in 1900, his job then being in North Borneo. By the time he joined up in August 1914 he had become a brewery manager in Northampton with three young daughters. Now a Captain in the Army Service Corps, the huge Base Supply Depot in Le Havre had been his home for 2 weeks when Charles's ship arrived there.
- 2 C.O. = commanding officer of a battalion, in this case **Colonel William C Walton** ★ (aged 50 and my great-grandfather).

3 The C.O. was on the packet & passenger ship *RMS Viper*, whereas Charles was on the cargo steamer *SS Inventor*, (*below*).

4 'Thine' as a way of signing off has continued in his family even into the email era.

As Charles heads off on his adventure into the unknown, spare a thought for his wife. At the age of 26, Margaret was not only left at home with sole charge of their 5-year-old daughter and of their household and staff, but she also now had the unaccustomed role as a senior officer's wife, providing support for the families of those fighting at the front and acting as a hub to pass on any information she received from Charles, all whilst not knowing whether she would ever see her husband again.



Charles Frederick Napier Bartlett

Item 10

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London



5 pm

Dearest Margaret

At last we have arrived at our destination. We are at Bethune¹ only please dont put it on the envelope or the Brigade we are in, which is the 1st Brigade 1st Division 4th Army Corps of 1st Army. I will write you fully tomorrow morning, as we do not go into the trenches until 6 pm tomorrow night and then only for 2 days, & as the Battⁿ Headquarters are some 2 miles in rear of the fire trenches you need not worry about me.

By cheering them on & swearing & joking I managed to whip up the Batt so that we did not leave a single man on the road, but there were some terrible lame ducks & there are some awful sores on the feet. Au revoir or I miss the post.

All love

Thine

Charles

1 This time there is no attempt at encoding their location (or his unit details!).



17 AUG 1915

Item 11

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London



Tuesday

Dearest Margaret

I have not much news since I wrote last night. It has rained heavily & we hear all the communication trenches are a foot or more deep in water and as my Cording¹ boots have not arrived I look like getting wet feet tomorrow. Each company goes to a different Regiment in the trenches tonight, & the Regimental H^d Q^{rs} are about 2 miles in rear. Tomorrow morning we are going to make a tour & see all the trenches returning at night to sleep in comfort at H.Q. This morning I rode about 3 miles to within a mile of the fire trenches, & saw our 1st Battⁿ or what is left of it.² They were in the reserve and only two officers who were with me in the Regiment are left. I only saw one of them Bird³ by name, as Radford⁴ was out on duty. We have had no letters for two days but hope to get some tonight. We look like having a very easy time for a bit as our Division is going to be sent for a rest, and we are sure to go with it. I believe the Division has not had more than 3 days rest since Dec last. The country I rode through this morning had been shelled to blazes, and there were some nice large holes where the Jack Johnsons⁵ had fallen.

I Shall Not Be Away Long

The Rain here is a caution,⁶ the storms start with large drops of about a pint each, & then it rains more in 10 minutes than it does in a month at home. I must try & buy another mackintosh, mine having been stolen, & I hear there is a good store here. The post has just arrived 5 mailbags full, I hope to hear from you. If I have time I will answer any questions you may have asked.

All love to all

Thine

Charles

Just rec^d nice long letter of Sat. morning. There being no questions I can give no answers. Money seems to crop up again. Je n'ai rien de tout.⁷ My French has all come back to me.



1 **Cordings** is a still existing clothing company that made its name in the 19th Century with waterproof products & clothing for explorers like Henry Morton Stanley. As proof of quality, one of their canvas and leather Newmarket boots stayed submerged in a glass tank full of water in their Piccadilly shop window for so many years that it became part of 'the knowledge' for London taxi drivers.

2 Our 1st Battⁿ = 1st Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, his old unit from before the war. They had been one of the first battalions to go out to France, embarking on 12th August 1914, and had been heavily involved since their first contact with the Germans near Mons on 25th August 1914.

3 Major **Lawrence Bird**, 31, had been a regular Captain in India in August 1914. He arrived in France in November, was wounded whilst out digging a trench in the open at 9 o'clock one night in February, was back in France in May, and became C.O. at the end of June after the previous C.O. was killed. At the Battle of Loos in September he would be wounded & earn the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), but survived to marry twice, get an OBE & reach the age of 76. His pre-war scarlet tunic is in the collection of the Regimental Museum.



4 Capt **Clive Radford**, 31, was also in India in 1914, as a regular Lieutenant. In June 1915 he had rescued men from a mine which had been filled with gas & then blown up by the Germans, & was awarded the DSO. He would be killed at the Battle of Loos, one week after his investiture at Buckingham Palace. →402

5 **Jack Johnson** = the British Army nickname for a type of heavy German shell that exploded with big clouds of black smoke. It was a tribute to one of the most famous men then on Earth. In 1908 Jack Johnson had become the first black heavyweight boxing world champion, and he beat all comers to keep his title for over 6 years. People packed out music halls all around the world to see 'The Galveston Giant' during his promotional tours.

His autobiography doesn't mention what he thought of being compared to a shell, but amazingly it does say that he was living in Haverstock Hill at the time of this mention in Charles's letter. He was in exile having skipped the US after being convicted on trumped up charges that were racially motivated (it didn't sit well with some folk that a black man kept beating the latest Great White Hope or that he enjoyed the company of white women, three of whom he married). He tells of being followed by a Zeppelin as he drove his white Benz through the streets of London, and it would be his love of driving fast that would kill him. Ironically, the pardon for his 1913 conviction would come from Donald Trump.



6 'a caution' = an amusing/surprising thing

7 'Je n'ai rien de tout' = I don't have any (!)



Charles Frederick Napier Bartlett

DAY
42
SAT

18 SEP 1915

Item 44

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London



Saturday

My dearest Darling

I missed writing altogether yesterday, I was out all day. We are not getting so much fresh meat as we should like which is not to be wondered at, half the Regiment has fresh meat one day, and half tinned, so I thought I would go & try buy some extra. I rode off in the morning and went to many places before I found a farmer with some sheep who would part with them. He had fifteen & I offered him £45 for the lot, but he would only sell at 1½ francs a kilo live weight, so I had to accept and it was arranged they should be weighed and paid for this morning.

I got back late for lunch & just as I was sitting down to write Oldman came in with a very good idea¹ which I thought was a brainwave on his part and might save a life or two so I rode out to the range and explained it to the Colonel who there and then sent me off to the town 5 miles to buy the necessary stuff and I did not get back until 6.30 much too late to write for the post. I cannot tell you what Oldmans idea was at present as it is in connection with something we are under oath not to mention.

Well we had dinner and in bed by 9.30.

Up at 6 a.m. and drove over the farm where the sheep were all weighed with the whole family looking on much talking, and it was a most serious ceremony. After the ceremony we had to adjourn at 7.30 a.m. to the farm house and a bottle of white wine & biscuits were produced. We sat round the table everyone added up the weights & made them different, the farmer & his wife had a row over it and everyone talked & eventually I paid over £44, so he would have done better to take my first offer. I then returned to billets and have since done some work and hired a yard to kill the sheep in which operation commences at 12 mid day.

This afternoon we have a Staff Ride to discuss the military situation, & tonight I am dining with a Captain Saunders, who is sending a car for me and Ronald, at a town some 12 miles off. Berlein has made an utter fool of himself by being found kicking up a row in an estaminet at 10.30 at night in company with a private soldier.² I have got to tell him off about it. The Colonel is disgusted and if we were not going to move soon he would have been Court Martialed. He is a fool, and it means the next time he misbehaves a Court Martial for certain. I think the boy must go off his head sometimes. Many



I Shall Not Be Away Long

thanks for the handkerchiefs. Paula going to Hilda as a P.S. is the limit. The puzzle will do well in the trenches. I have not heard any more about the C.O. going yet, but of course it is only a matter of time. If I was made Tempy Lt. Col. wouldn't Tilly be mad.³

Well dearest I must stop now. All All All Love

Thine

Charles



1 Oldman★'s idea must be the one reported in the Battalion's war diary. The men would be wearing smoke hoods as protection against poison gas and the plan involved getting safety pins to attach them to the coat and elastic to enable them to naturally close around the throat. It just goes to show how primitive gas protection was at this stage in the War.

2 An estaminet was a French bar, and it was a strict rule that officers were not allowed to socialise with the men. **Leslie Berlein★**, (**opposite**), wasn't one for rules or avoiding fun, though, and nor was he hidebound by ideas of class. **Above** is his silver cigarette lighter, engraved 'Leslie January 30 1914' for his 21st birthday. I can just imagine him using it in the bar that night.

3 If he was to command the battalion, he'd be promoted to Temporary Lieutenant Colonel. All those who were commissioned for the duration of the War (as opposed to being regular officers) were granted 'temporary' ranks. His pathway to higher rank was rather different to those who'd stayed in the Army whilst he'd left for civvy street, and maybe Tilly's husband was a regular.

Sunday

3.30 p.m.

Dearest Darling

Just got your letter written on Thursday. We have had no letters since Friday morning. I wrote you a long letter yesterday, & have no news or time to write it if I had.

I only wrote to Bathurst about a guardian for Paula, as that has to be attached to my will. I heard from Gracie today, go & see her at 22 Redcliffe Sq., also from Florrie. I think they are going to bring in a Colonel from a Hampshire Rgt. to command us, but nothing is settled. I have not dressed Berlein down yet as he went up to the trenches yesterday & is not back yet. I will give handkerchief to Paramore & will write again tomorrow.

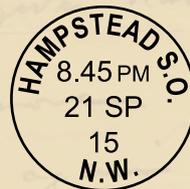
All Love

In haste

Thine

Charles

X



19 SEP 1915

Item 45

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London



Charles Frederick Napier Bartlett

DAY
44
MON

20 SEP 1915

Item 46

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London

8th Royal Berkshire Rgt.

Sept 20th 1915

7.30 A.M.

Dearest Darling

You are rather scored off for a letter as late last night I was ordered to go off at 8 am this morning so shall have no time to write and this is all I can do. The Regiment leaves here tomorrow and we shall not be sorry to go. I now must eat a meal as I shall not get one for sometime today and suppose I am for the trenches but shall not know until I reach Brigade HQ^{rs}.

All Love

your own

Charles

P.S. just got your Friday letter many thanks



TRENCH MAP.

SHEET 36c N.W. 3 AND PART OF 1.

DAY
45
TUE

21 SEP 1915

Item 47

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London

Tuesday

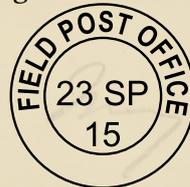
Dearest

Am quite well on the move at last. Will be d-d cold sleeping in the open. I will write whenever I can. Many thanks for letters & photos rec^d last night.

All Love

Thine

Charles



The Battalion marched to Bois Marquet (near Allouagne) and bivouacked there. That evening the Commanding Officer read to all officers the Battalion Operation Orders for the attack.

Thine
Charles

I Shall Not Be Away Long

Wednesday

Dearest Darling

We are well on the move trekked early yesterday morning and slept in a wood last night moved on early this morning and are hidden in another wood which we leave tonight and go up into back line of trenches. From there we move up in due course and I am just as sick and fed up as muck as I am being left behind with 6 other officers with the transport, the idea being that officers are valuable and all are not to be under fire at once.

As I am writing this Generals French, Douglas Haig & Rawlinson are standing within 100 yards of me.

I dont believe those people who say they like sleeping in the open, give me a bed and a roof & none of this imitation thunder & I am quite happy. It really is a most wonderful sight this soldiering and I would not have missed it for worlds. I did not get a letter from you yesterday or today but dont expect them at present as I dont think the field post offices are open.

I will stop now it has taken me over 1½ hours to write this, the interruptions have been so frequent.

The C.O. is at a conference & everyone is nervy it just takes me all my time to keep cool answer questions and keep my temper.

All my love Dearest

Thine

Charles X



22 SEP 1915

Item 48

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

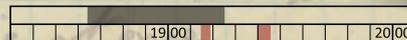
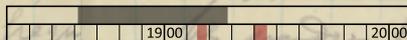
161 Haverstock Hill London



General Sir John French, 62, was in command of the whole British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front (and at odds with one of his sisters who was an ardent pacifist, suffragist & Sinn Féin activist).

General Sir Douglas Haig, 54, commanded First Army (in 1899 he had saved John French from bankruptcy & the ruin of his army career by loaning him £2,500).

Lt-Gen Sir Henry Rawlinson, 51, commanded IV Corps (including the 8th Royal Berkshires). He would go on to lead Fourth Army at the Battle of the Somme.



DAY
49
SAT

25 SEP 1915

Item 49

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill
London

FIELD POST OFFICE
26 SP
15

HAMPSTEAD S.O.
8.45 PM
28 SP
15
N.W.

Saturday
25th Sept 1915

Dearest Dady

Am quite safe so far.
The shoot started at 6 am
this morning. I join them
tonight. Stehman is wounded
& I hear Aldman also but cannot
vouch for it. Hicks I know is
bad, and I don't think the Y.C.
has had a very good time.

Ia haste
X Three X
X V X Charles X

13



There were no publishable photographs of the fighting and the dying, so it was left to artists to come up with images for people at home. These mostly fed the sensibilities of the time, with derring-do and sacrifice into the arms of Jesus featuring strongly.

GERMAN.



Guard Rifles. Pioneer. Infantry Officer. Guard Field Artillery Officer. General. Hussar. Mounted Foot Lancer. Cuirassier. Dragon. Rifles. Artillery.



Infantry. Train. Guard Machine Gun Battery. Medical Officer

The booklet, (left), was issued as a guide to the armies of the main combatants in the war. Due to their underground existence many of the British soldiers of the new armies would not have yet seen a German soldier – and in fact, as they advanced with fixed bayonets through the fog of no-man’s-land, many died without ever having seen their enemy.



The map shows the front line, with the hatched area being the ground gained during the Battle of Loos. The 8th Royal Berkshires attacked left to right on an axis between Vermelles and Hulluch.

Charles Frederick Napier Bartlett



11 MAR 1916

Item 172
Letter to Margaret

Envelope
161 Haverstock Hill
London



March 11th 1916

Dearest Darling

Many thanks for two letters received last night. The most important thing at the moment is will you please send me out two sets of underclothing & a shirt or two. By the time they will arrive the warm weather will be here. It was truly a terrible accident that befell me this morning.

I was in a sap at 5.30 am this morning (for sap see illustration) when I was taken violently short, and could not get back to a latrine with the result there was an appalling accident in my breeches, so when I did get

back to the trench I had to cut off my pants & throw them away. All I had to wash in was snow, but now I have got back to Battⁿ HQ, & had a good wash with hot water & a complete change I feel better, but I had to cut off the tail of my shirt. With regard your letter of the 8th, I think you & Renée must have been drinking very heavily, because I still cannot make out why a Rhinoceros is like a centipede. However it may be that the letters got very wet in transit, & the writing was very hard to read. Poor Col Graehame¹ commanding the Camerons was killed yesterday by a big shell which just happened to land plumb in the trench, as he was walking back from our HQ^s to his. The D^r who was with him was blown some distance along the trench, but otherwise than being much shaken was untouched. The kippers have arrived & were excellent eating, for which many many thanks.

All All All Love

Thine

xxxxxxx Charles xxxxxxxx

I am writing to Paula



Possibly the most extraordinary and surreal of all these letters. The crux of the main incident is that when he was so suddenly caught short, he was in a sap. As his drawing shows, a sap was a trench dug out into No-Man's-Land, the idea being to be able to observe and listen to the enemy more closely. Through all this, Charles had to keep deadly quiet or risk having German fire directed onto him.

1 Lt Col Lawrence Graeme CMG, 43, (left), was a male line descendant of the second son of the 1st Earl of Montrose, who fell at the Battle of Flodden in 1513. He'd served throughout the Boer War, and became C.O. of the 1st Camerons in May 1915, taking them through the Battle of Loos. His father, also a Lt Col, who had fought through the Indian Mutiny, never got over his loss and died in 1917.



I Shall Not Be Away Long

March 11th 1916

3.50 pm

Dearest Darling

I have written you one letter today, & have just received another from you written on the 9th. Pte Gerrard, c/o Major Bartlett, 8th R Berks Rgt is quite sufficient address & will get him a day quicker than otherwise, as the men only get their letters in the trenches if all is quiet, and we have a mounted groom waiting at the Field Post Office 7 miles back. Directly the mail arrives the H^d Q^{rs} letters are given him. He rides full tilt to Brigade Reserve 3 miles, where a cycle orderly waits for him & he bicycles 2 miles to the mouth of the trench & a runner is waiting there who runs down 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles to our Head Q^{rs}, & that is the way we manage to get our letters, when they do arrive at the Div. Post Office. Perhaps rather luxurious but horses bicycles & men all have to be exercised. It is 9 days in front & support line, but here the support line is so close it does not matter, & now the Reserve billets have been done away with as being too far away, so the whole 12 days we are up close. Also the Brigade Reserve billets have been moved up, so when we are back for 6 days we shall still have these d-d shells whistling over our heads. Well I have no more news. All All Love

Thine

Charles

Item 173

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill

London



March 12th 1916

Dearest Darling

Just a line to say all's well. We had a quiet night last night, but had no luck this morning two men getting badly hit, one killed & I fear the other wont last long.¹ I hear I may be given command of the Divisional Company, about 400 NCO's & men, I dont know what the work is exactly but I dont think I shall have much to do with the trenches, if I get the job, but then again I may be too senior. Anyway another Major has turned up for the 10th Glosters so there is some chance. It is a beautiful day today, but as we are underground & have no intention



12 MAR 1916

Item 174

Letter to Margaret

Envelope

161 Haverstock Hill

London

Charles Frederick Napier Bartlett



of putting our noses out, it does not make much difference, & the worst of it is that we have run out of oil, so are all in a bad temper trying to work with one candle. I hope Paula will give you some nasty conundrums after my letter about the stork. What about your Family Tree, have you discovered you belong to the Stuarts or to the Bosche. Personally my family were woolpackers & money lenders I think.²

All All All Love

Thine

xxxxxxx Charles xxxxxxx

1 A sign of how accepted this sort of incident had become is that it does not merit an entry in the Battalion's war diary. Unless an officer or lots of casualties were involved, most of these incidents just ended up in the numbers of dead and wounded totalled at the end of each month. To be able to identify the men in this incident requires a look in the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). I haven't been able to identify the man who was wounded (a few men of the 8th Royal Berkshires died in this period, and this one may have survived), but the man who died was Pte **G Crawford**, N^o 18813.

The CWGC have no further details about him – not a first name, not an age, not an address or next of kin. I found that this applies to thousands of British dead even though

they had been formally identified. The reason for this is that the policy was not to include these details unless they had been verified by their families, which was sensible given that lots of men had signed up under false names and ages which the Army had not checked on enlistment. The Army had provided the details they had on each man, but with so many men to bury and register (a process that was still continuing into the 1930s) by the time a lot of families were being written to, they were no longer at the known contact address – and with no verification, the details could not be included in the register. Index cards did exist for each man with the details given by the Army, but a paper shortage in 1942 led to the decision to pulp them all. The sole piece of paper that led to George

Crawford's full identification was amongst over 6 million pension index cards that were nearly destroyed by the MOD but saved by the Western Front Association in 2012 and only put online after the War's Centenary.

George Crawford was actually Joseph Crockford, born in south London, the son of a labourer. Two of his elder brothers were regular soldiers killed in 1914 at Mons and in East Africa, and Joseph must have joined up with an alias to beat the rule that said he was too young to serve overseas. He was still just 19 when he was killed. By coincidence, the day I started researching him was 12th March 2018, 102 years to the day that he died.

2 Discussion of Charles and Margaret's family trees follows in a few letters' time.



13 MAR 1916

Item 175
Letter to Margaret

Envelope
161 Haverstock Hill
London

March 13th 1916

Dearest Darling

Many thanks for your letter of 10th I rec^d last night, but I have not had one from you today. Last night we had a good relief, & got back to the support line by 10.15 pm, but owing to rations losing their way did not get any dinner until 11.15. Bed at 12.15 in a dug out about 30 ft below the ground. It is an old German one & very comfortable with two bunks in it. This morning it was like a hot summers day, and we went out to find 3 of our companies, who while in support, are under the orders of another Battⁿ. Well we wandered

I Shall Not Be Away Long

for hours in trenches sometimes up to our knees in water, & eventually found D Coy, & then started back to find Dug & Robinson's, but it was no good. In this sector none of the trenches are marked, they are knocked in daily, & are all among the Ruins. I dont suppose there is one whole house standing in the place, & certainly not a pain of glass. At last we climbed into the open, & ran to the church, or what is left of it, which is 4 walls about 40 ft high,¹ & from that point we got into another trench, & wandered home. Owing to the clear day there was so much shelling going on it is far from pleasant. We were all wet through with perspiration, & I have got no change, so am sitting in a dug out on the trench level with my overcoat on & a rug round my legs to keep me warm trying to get dry. It is a rotten existence. The ground just shakes every time a shell drops anywhere near, & I shall be very glad when one side or the other gets a move on. The worst part is we are all getting "lively".² I think these old German dug outs have many too many inhabitants, which are not on the regimental strength. I had a letter from James Hay who is out here somewhere but I cannot gather from his letter where; he has had to revert to Captain on coming abroad, but has some staff appointment.



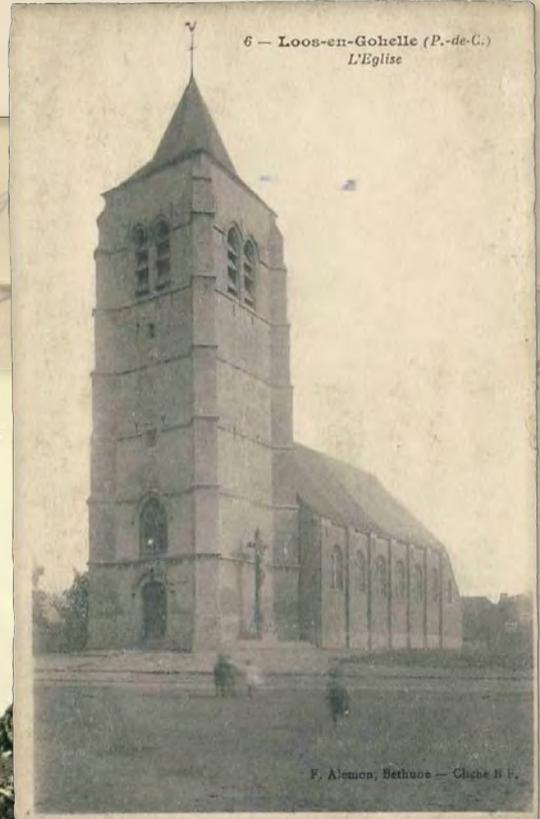
All All All Love

Thine

xxxxxxx Charles xxxxxxx

1 The church in Loos-en-Gohelle, as shown in these postcards, was completely destroyed in the war. Its former site is now a car park next to the Town Hall.

2 By 'lively' he means 'lice infested'.



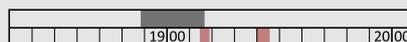
RADFORD, (Maurice) Clive. There are three extraordinary stories that I found when researching Clive Radford. Firstly, he was the brother of probably the most famous music hall star at the beginning of the war. Basil Hallam Radford appeared under the stage name '**Basil Hallam**'. He'd started out in the theatre playing minor Shakespearian roles, but by 1914 he'd moved into musical comedy and it was in April that year that he personified the role that would make his name, appearing in '*The Passing Show*' with 16 dancing girls and singing,

*I'm Gilbert, the Filbert,
The knut with a 'k',
The pride of Piccadilly,
The blasé roué;
Oh, Hades, the ladies,
They'd leave their wooden huts
For Gilbert, the Filbert,
The colonel of the knuts.*

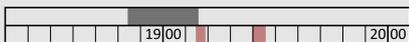
As PG Wodehouse explained in an article at that time, a 'knut' (pronounced 'nut') was the '*descendant of the Beau*' or Dandy,

beautifully turned out, living on his father's money and cultivating '*a certain air of world-weariness*'. '*His chief forms of relaxation are dancing and bread-throwing*'. Basil as Gilbert the Filbert, (**below**), caught this trend to a T, and he was soon all the rage, with the 15-year-old future Queen Mother writing to a friend for pictures of him and receiving letters from another friend, Lady Lavinia Spencer (great aunt of Lady Diana), signing herself '*Basilette*'. The brutal realities of the war and the heightened valuing of duty and sacrifice would see the knuts go out of fashion. Basil himself saw the result of that when still performing in 1915 and being presented with white feathers and other 'suggestions' that he should be doing his bit. Little did his accusers know that he had tried to enlist right at the start but been rejected as unfit by the Army. An injury to the arch of his foot when he was 9 meant that he needed a steel plate in his right boot and when he and his American dancing partner introduced the Foxtrot to London, he was doing it through the pain. Even so, he was still trying to join up and

in September 1915 succeeded in getting a commission in the Royal Flying Corps to act as an observer in the balloons that were winched up behind the lines to spot for the artillery and note information about the enemy positions. He did this despite suffering from 'sea sickness' nearly every time his balloon was in the air. In April 1916 he was sent home with an inflammation of his bowels and at the beginning of May he had an operation to try to sort out his crippling leg problems. His bone-setter attempted to get him to take a longer rest to recover but his reply was, '*I must go back to the boys whether I am well or not*'. So it was that in August 1916 he found himself in a balloon that broke free from its moorings as it was being winched down in a high wind. It quickly gained height and started to drift towards enemy lines much to the horror of the thousands of soldiers watching on the ground. Little did they know as they saw the drama unfold that one of the men in the basket was someone they knew from the music halls and from concert parties behind the trenches. There is some debate



as to exactly what happened next, but the majority of eye-witness accounts tell of one man jumping out of the basket and landing safely by parachute but that something went wrong as the other tried to jump, possibly getting his parachute caught in the balloon's rigging, and then suddenly dropping like a stone from over 3,000 feet. He hit the ground a few yards from an officer of the Scots Guards who searched his body and on finding his cigarette case discovered he was Basil Hallam. It seems so desperately unfair that a man who had brought so much joy to so many should die in such a miserable, frightening and very public way.



Basil and Clive's parents were to go through more misery in June 1918 when, in a strange twist, Clive, (**above**), was named as a co-respondent in a very widely reported divorce case, despite having been killed in action nearly three years earlier.

In a bid to find an explanation for the erratic behaviour of his wife, a Captain William Myers had searched his house and found, tied up with ribbons, a collection of letters from a Captain in the Gordon Highlanders, and from Clive Radford.

I think it's fair to say that William Myers' wife Agneta could be described as 'lively' (she was familiarly known as 'Jimmie' and liked to drive about in a cowboy costume). Maybe that is the very thing that attracted him to marry her in 1911 when he was 33 and she was 19. He had had problems with her erratic behaviour even before coming back on leave during Christmas 1914 and finding her not at home. When she did turn up in the New Year she brought with her two officers 'to see the horses' and, not long after, she returned to London with them. It turned out that one of those officers

was Clive Radford and he had completely fallen for her. At the end of his leave she gave him a lift down to Folkestone, and then, at his invitation, wangled her way on board the boat with the promise that she would not set foot in France, only to do so after getting a permit from the French authorities as Clive's 'sister'. She returned on the next boat but he was soon writing to her: *'Listen, go to some really good place and have a really good miniature of yourself done and mounted in a good locket ... Your ring is a firm fixture. I can't remove it even if I wanted to. They noticed it here and wanted to know if I were married. I said, "No, but that I wished I were." And so I do if only it were to you I were married...'* Their correspondence continued until June 1915, when Clive sent her what the judge called 'a beastly dirty postcard', writing, *'It might amuse you, darling'* but by that time Jimmie had moved on in her affections and he never heard from her again.

The case involving the Captain in the Gordon Highlanders included a particularly bizarre story in which Jimmie had one day rung him up pretending to be her maid, saying that she and her sister had started off for Gallipoli by aeroplane but had been shot down over Swindon and her sister had broken her neck while she had had a leg amputated. They then borrowed a stretcher, sprinkled it with bullock's blood from the butcher, and were bandaged with their faces made pale with powder in time to give the Captain one of the shocks of his life. Other evidence was insufficient for the jury to find Jimmie guilty of adultery with him but they did pronounce guilt in the case with Clive Radford and that was enough for the divorce to go through.

Jimmie married again but died in 1939 after an operation for kidney disease just three years after the birth of her third child (each child having had a different father).

The divorce case was not the last of Clive Radford in the afterlife. In November 1928, the War Office received a letter saying, *'A report has been received that Capt Radford is still alive and is in a mental home, having been taken prisoner when lying wounded.'* The letter was from the General Secretary of a society set up to help ex-servicemen with mental problems but when he was spoken to on the phone, he could add no further details – and after a check with the Imperial War Graves Commission who confirmed that Clive had been buried in Vermelles, the case was closed. Who knows where the original report came from, but

there can be little doubt that he had been killed. His death was categorically reported in the war diary of the 1st Royal Berkshires, so there must have been a reliable witness. In addition an inventory of his effects returned from the front listed only a single item: *'One Identity Disc'*. →45



REDDIE, Anthony Julian, (above). At the beginning of the war, he was a major with the then unusual distinction of having seen no active service in his 22 years in the Army (though he'd won many polo cups and shot a lot of big game in India). That soon changed after he arrived in France on 13th August 1914 with 1st South Wales Borderers, and he had had to take over command on 1st November 1914 when his C.O. was wounded in the middle of desperate fighting during the First Battle of Ypres. After his promotion to command 1st Brigade, he would lead them for over two years. Being among the observers at the trials of the first tank back in England in February 1916, it was his favourable report that was possibly the first detailed analysis that General Sir Douglas Haig read about the new weapon. After a six month break with the reserves in Wales, in April 1918 he returned to command a Yorkshire Territorial Brigade in France for the rest of the war. In 1919, having been mentioned in dispatches seven times and awarded CMG, DSO and Légion d'honneur, but with the Army shrinking to peacetime numbers, he reverted to being C.O. of 1st South Wales Borderers and then was a Territorial Brigadier for 4 years before his retirement in 1928. During the Second World War he was an area organiser for the Home Guard in the Scottish Highlands. →55



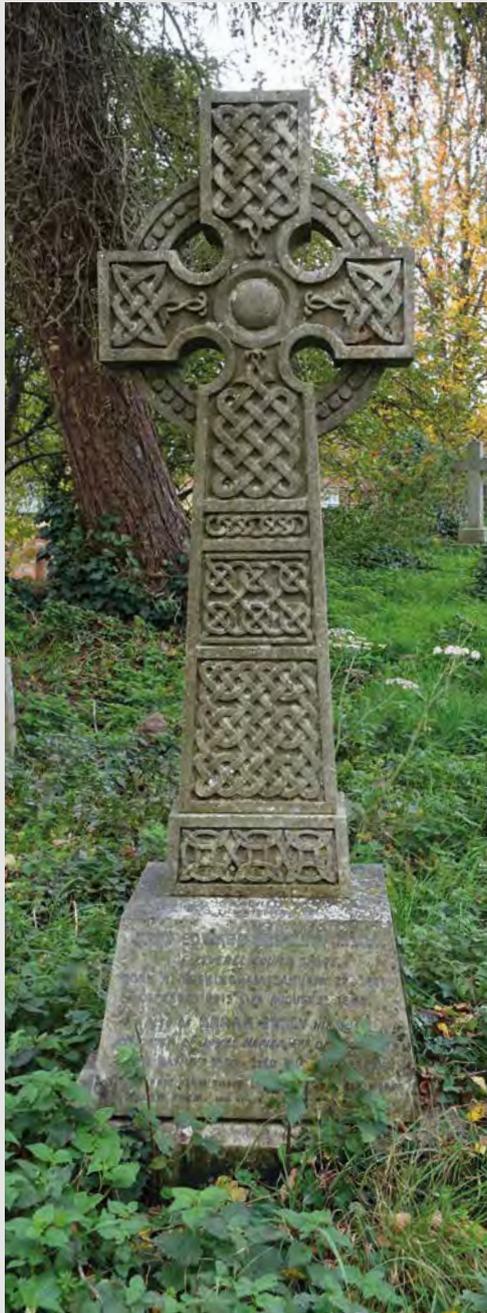
Following in Charles Bartlett's Footsteps

Following in Charles Bartlett's footsteps wasn't just about finding pictures and information for this book. I'm interested to see what remains of us after we leave this world and I like to see if I can get a feeling of what it might have been like to be the person who had stood in a particular place all those years before. With Charles Bartlett this was not easy. I could find the locations but sometimes it felt as if he had been erasing history as he went with whole buildings having disappeared or the environment having so radically changed as to eliminate all feeling of its past. Some of these absences or changes have been mentioned in the notes with the letters but I've picked out a few in more detail here. There were even two places where I did actually get a feeling of his presence.

The outside of Charles's birthplace, Peverel Court, may have stayed almost the same throughout its existence but inside it is no longer a family home. However comfortable it may be for its elderly and cared-for residents, it has the feel of an institution with notices on doors, rooms that are offices and wall-to-wall brown carpet with metal tread-edges on the stairs.

Charles was not baptised in the church near his home in Stone but in Aylesbury. His father had initially lived there after leaving Buckingham and appears to have remained a member of the congregation even after moving into Peverel Court. The font in St Mary's Church, (*opposite*), is famed as one of the 'Aylesbury fonts' that date from the late 12th Century. It was found buried in three parts during the total refurbishment of the church not long before Charles's arrival in the world. Another refurbishment in 1978 saw the church being gutted, with the pews removed, and the installation of new wooden flooring and a refectory area with plastic seats. The day I visited had the bustle and singing of a children's group and the clink of crockery for morning coffee.

The Buckinghamshire Lunatic Asylum, for which Charles's father chaired a committee and which was such an important institution in their village of Stone, closed in 1991 and nearly the whole site was



demolished in 1994, leaving only the chapel, now derelict with keep-out fencing around it.

The family grave, (*left*), stands on its own at the edge of the churchyard in Stone. It bears the names of John Edward Bartlett and his wife Sarah Emily – *'They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them'* – and their children Edith Constance – *'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God'* – and John Francis Napier and Lilian Emily but not that of their son Charles Frederick Napier Bartlett. When Charles knew it before the First World War, the churchyard would no doubt have been immaculately kept by then-affordably-paid staff. Today it is down to volunteers who must be busy earning a living elsewhere and whilst it is by no means overgrown, I had to pull ivy from the grave.

Charles's two prep schools have had very different fates. Hazelhurst School is now a private home (it housed Canadian troops during the Second World War and closed not long thereafter). Lockers Park School still has its original schoolhouse and chapel but they are now but a part of a large campus of modern buildings as the school has expanded to take 170 pupils.

Charles's old house at Rugby School is still there but it is no longer known as 'Donkin' after his housemaster, and since 1992 it has been a boarding house for girls.

Inkerman Barracks in Woking (the scene of the 1903 group photograph) became the headquarters of the Royal Military Police after the Second World War but then was demolished in the 1970s and replaced by housing.

The original St Saviour's Church in Paddington where Charles & Margaret were married was demolished in 1972 and replaced with a new church.

The Royal Berkshire Regiment no longer exists, having merged with the Wiltshire Regiment in 1959. Their old depot at Brock Barracks in Reading is still used by the Army Reserve, though the distinctive tall keep has been outside the military compound since 1980 when it became an affordable studio & exhibition space for contemporary artists including at one time Cornelia Parker, OBE, RA.

161



When looking for a picture that I could use as background for a section when Charles was on leave, I thought I'd have a look at the area around where he and Margaret used to live at 161 Haverstock Hill. Their house is no longer there (by 1935 it had been knocked down along with the neighbouring houses and the land used to put up a block of luxury flats called 'Havercourt' with a frontage onto Haverstock Hill). There is a 161 Haverstock Hill but the ground floor is an estate agent, (*bottom left*), and it is in the area where Charles & Margaret's front garden would have been, their house having been set back from the road. In scouting around I could see a few buildings that were from their time including Belsize Park Tube Station just across the road and the old Hampstead Town Hall up the hill, but pretty much everything at ground floor level was covered in modern glass and plastic fittings. Further down the road, I spotted a post box. It had the insignia 'GR' on it so it was from one of the King Georges' eras and without further research I wasn't to know whether it was there during the First World War but I thought,

did I miss a post box nearer their house? So I went back up the road, and there it was: a post box less than 100 yards from their old front door and not only that, it had the 'VR' of Queen Victoria on it, (*left*). This could have been the very post box in which Margaret posted her letters to Charles when he was in the trenches. It had been repainted many times (you could see the cross-section of the layers in the places where the paint had been chipped) and with the modern label showing collection times (as well as a ripped sticker saying '*demand a vote on the final Brexit deal*') it wasn't suitable for a picture for me to put alongside the letters in this book, but I just had to include it somewhere. It's been there for at least 119 years and seen so much change around it. In the picture, (*opposite*), it is the oldest thing visible – the tarmac and pavement and trees and shopfronts and vehicles (and the bricks and windows of Havercourt you can glimpse through the leaves at top left) have all come in its lifetime. It has remained a constant as thousands of people have passed it by. Maybe some even still post letters in it.





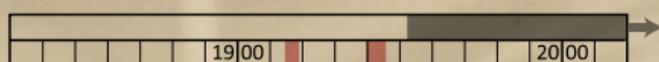
Andrew Tatham is an artist and historian. His military experience was confined to the Territorial Army, finishing as the second-in-command of an infantry company of 3/51 Highland Volunteers (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders). The closest he came to the experience of war was during a live-firing exercise supported by Chieftain tanks, one of which nearly reversed over him.

In 1994 a First World War group photograph inspired him to find the families of all 46 men pictured, and the result was a major exhibition at the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres in 2015. Entitled **'A Group Photograph – Before, Now & In-Between'**, this was a mix of the traditional with innovative new ways of showing history and human life, ranging from intimate mementos to large scale installations. An appearance on the Jeremy Vine Show to talk about the book of the exhibition led to the busiest Christmas of his life. Still to come is the book based on his experience of this whole project: **'One Shutter Click – How A Single Photograph Took Over My Life'**.



William Boyd is a prize-winning writer renowned for his novels and screenplays. Not only is he an acute observer of human beings with all their foibles but his attention to detail in his historical research is matchless. All fifteen of his novels are still in print and include two that strongly feature the First World War: **'An Ice Cream War'** and **'The New Confessions'**. Another, **'Any Human Heart'**, has provided particular inspiration in the creation of this book – its central character grows up in the shadow of the First World War and attempts to navigate the 20th Century with the imperfect compass of a public school education coupled with a strong libido.

William Boyd also wrote and directed **'The Trench'**, a film with stars including Daniel Craig and Danny Dyer and early roles for Ben Whishaw and Cillian Murphy. Set in the two days leading up to the attack on the Somme, it gives a portrait of humans battling with their own minds and each other as well as with the enemy. It doesn't just show the war's history but also how humans deal with beliefs and the unknown.



His grandfather William Boyd was in the Royal Engineers for two years before being wounded by a shell fragment at Passchendaele in 1917.



His great uncle Sandy Boyd was a sergeant in the Australian Infantry, being awarded the DCM and losing three fingers on the Somme in 1916.



London

CHELSEA S.W. A
29 JY
11. — PM
1
1 AUG 16

wife of a Colonel.



Peggy
1913.



I hope this time we are up to
be able to get proper crosses
put on the graves of the officers
who were killed on the 25th
Well I count all my love to you Paula

Thine always,
Charles
XXXXXXXXXXXX

Pictured: Charles Bartlett's wife the actress Peggy Bethel (before and during the war); their daughter Paula; a letter from November 1915.

