

The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943-1945

NA15141

Summer 2015

Aim

To remember and further an interest in the experiences of all who took part in the Italian Campaign.

Welcome

Welcome to our Summer newsletter.

It has been a busy few months for many of our members. A small group with family escorts attended the Service of Thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey to mark the 70th Anniversary of VE Day. Our Standard, proudly carried by Mike Anslow was one of only twenty to be selected to take part in the Service of Remembrance in Whitehall on the actual anniversary and to head the parade from the Abbey to Horse Guards via Parliament Square, Parliament Street and Whitehall. Not so easy carrying a heavy standard so far, especially with a fresh head wind whipping up Whitehall! Not easy for our veterans either but thankfully they all made it to the reception in St James 's Park.



In June another group enjoyed a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace as guests of the Not Forgotten Association.

On a pleasant Saturday afternoon in May one hundred and twenty attended the Service of Dedication of our Standard at the National Memorial Arboretum. It was wonderful that thirteen veterans were able to join with the many sons, daughters and grand-children. The weather was kind, dry and bright. and we were able to process to the Memorial led by the band of the Black Watch Association Pipes and Drums. It was a memorable occasion, meeting friends old and new.

I hope that we will meet again next May—either at the Arboretum or in Cassino as we plan to hold both events next year.

Judith Coote

Daughter of the late Gerald Soady, 91st LAA Royal Artillery, 4th British Division

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Visit to Cassino, May 2016

News

Following the announcement at the Arboretum that we were considering a visit to Monte Cassino in May 2016 we have received 31 expressions of interest so there are limited places as we plan only to have one coach. The visit will be from Monday 9th to Sunday 15th May 2016 with flights from Heathrow to Rome though details are still to be confirmed.

The cost will be £620 per person for a double/twin room and £720 for a single room and includes flights, transfers, half

board at the Edra Palace Hotel in Cassino and all excursions.

If interested, please contact John Leach or myself, as soon as possible— contact details on the back page.

Nb Unfortunately here is no funding for veterans and carers.

Paul Taylor Son of the late Herbert Taylor, 28th Infantry Brigade Workshop, REME Page 2 The Monte Cassino Society

News (continued)

The Not Forgotten Association 95th Anniversary Event Thursday 3rd September 2015

We have received the following from the NFA

The Not Forgotten Association is very privileged to have been given an opportunity to entertain veterans at the prestigious Greenwich Naval College to commemorate our 95th Aniversary and many anniversaries of the second World War. This exciting event will commence with a Service in the Chapel, Beating Retreat by The Band of the Coldstream Guards followed by a Concert and Dinner in the Painted Hall.

Outside timings for this event are 5 pm—8.30 pm and to make travel easier for our guests we have arranged a series of coaches to pick our guests up from outside The Union Jack Club which is just across the road from Waterloo Station, London. At the end of the event coaches will return guests to Waterloo Station.

We would like to invite 6 of your ex-service members to attend and should any veteran require an escort this is acceptable but should be included in your total number. Sadly this event is not suitable for those who use wheelchairs as stairs need to be negotiated and some walking will be required.

Several of our members have been guests of The Not Forgotten Association over the past few years and can testify to the splendid events they organise. If you are interested in the above, please contact me immediately as names need to be forwarded very soon. The Not Forgotten Association will be in touch with guests nearer the time with final details. Judith

Tom Wigley, 3rd Btn Grenadier Guards & his Grand daughter enjoyed the Garden Party on 11th June. Tom writes that there were plenty of helpers on hand to assist



THOMAS WIGLEY WITH HIS GRANDDAUGHTER JILL BARKE OUTSIDE BUCKINGHAM PALACE

National VJ70 Commemoration Events Saturday 15 August 2015

Although this does not directly affect our members, we have received the following from the Royal British Legion regarding the VJ70 Commemorations on 15th August. I have explained we represent veterans of the Italian Campaign but offered to advertise the event as it is likely that many of our members will know Burma Star or Pacific Star holders.

A national programme of commemorative events will be held in London on Saturday 15 August in order to mark the 70th anniversary of VJ Day and to recognise all those who served the Crown in the Far East during WW2.

There will be a Drumhead Service and Flypast on Horse Guards Parade, (this element of the commemorations will also be open to the direct descendants of veterans who are no longer living or who are unable to attend in person); a Veterans' parade down Whitehall and an afternoon reception for veterans and VIP guests at College Gardens, Westminster Abbey hosted by The Royal British Legion.

We do hope that you are able to help us bring this programme of commemoration to the attention of as many qualifying veterans and their families as possible so that they may have an opportunity to attend.

Further details and Application forms for the event can be obtained from Judith, contact details on back page

Royal British Legion Cenotaph Ceremony 2015

We have already been asked, and have applied for tickets for the Cenotaph Ceremony in Whitehall which this year will be on Sunday 9th November.

Details will be published in the next newsletter due out in October but if you wish to order tickets now, please contact Judith with numbers. Contact details on back page.

We have not yet received details of the Opening Ceremony in the Field of Remembrance in Westminster. We assume we will be offered a plot and tickets to the Opening attended by a member of the Royal Family. Sadly last year, despite our best efforts, we were only allowed five tickets, many less than those who wished to attend. It does get very crowded and security is paramount but it is difficult to understand the reasoning behind the numbers offered to individual associations.

Accounts

Have Standard, Will Travel

Not such a busy year for travelling to various events with our Standard but a very proud year for the Monte Cassino Society.

When the Society was selected to take part in The Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall in November—which was a great occasion—I didn't think things could get any better than that, BUT THEY DID!

We were invited to attend the 70th Anniversary of VE Day Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph on Friday 8th May, we were one of only twenty standards to attend.

Then, on Sunday 10th May, it was the big day. The Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey, then parade to Horse Guards.

We all formed up behind the Pipes and Drums. At 1232 hrs we marched off, no more than 100 paces per minute, being followed by all the veterans—along Victoria Street, into and around Parliament Square, down Whitehall, left into Horse Guards, through Horse Guards



MIKE MARCHING UP WHITEHALL AS PART OF THE VE70 ANNIVERSARY PARADE

Arch and once on Horse Guards we formed two ranks either side of the Arch through which the veterans passed. It seemed like an age, they just kept coming to pass the royal box.

Then it was our turn, formed up into ranks by our Guards Officer, then in time to the Pipes and Drums, across Horse Guards, past the royal box where Prince Charles took the salute and into Hyde Park for the dismissal. Then to lunch and reception.

How do you follow the Royal Albert Hall, Whitehall, Westminster Abbey and Horse Guards? Well, we did with the Dedication of our Standard at our Memorial Day at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas on the 23rd May.

I think Judith will be reporting on this but it was a great day, enjoyed by all.

Mike Anslow son of the late D.E.H. Anslow, 5th Battalion, The Grenadier Guards



MIKE (3RD FROM LEFT) WITH THE MONTE CASSINO STANDARD AT THE VE70TH ANNIVERSARY SERVICE IN WHITEHALL WINSTON CHURCHILL'S GRANDSON IS AT THE PODIUM

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Service of Remembrance & Dedication of the Monte Cassino Standard National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire—Saturday 23rd May 2015

Of all we have achieved over the past ten years, the one thing that has been a show case for our Society has been the Standard, so it was only fitting that we should hold the Service of Dedication at our Memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas. The wording on the Memorial was chosen carefully and is a tribute to all those who fought for the capture of Cassino so it was a delight to meet together with the thirteen veterans

able to attend, and for whom the cairn was built.

It was a pleasantly warm day. As on previous occasions we met in the marquee for a cup of tea and coffee before the service. Time for introductions to new friends and happy reunions with old. The Pipes and Drums of the Stoke on Trent Black Watch Association led us in procession down to the memorial for the service. The one hundred and twenty or so Monte Cassino Society veterans, their families and friends were soon joined by bystanders attracted by the music.







The Service was conducted by our friend the Reverend Prebendary Tony Wood who has officiated at our previous services. It was a beautiful, moving service. Doreen Belcher read the lesson –John 14 verses 1-6 and Phil Soady read the Roll of Honour, remembering all those who have passed away since last we met at the Memorial.



DOREEN BELCHER READING THE LESSON



PHIL SOADY RECITING THE ROLL OF HONOUR

Veteran Jim Knox gave the exhortation after which wreaths were laid—The Monte Cassino Society wreath was laid by veteran Robert Randall. The standard was carried for the first time by John Leach





JIM KNOX GIVING THE EXHORTATION

ROBERT RANDALL WHO LAID THE SOCIETY'S WREATH

Rev Wood blessed the Standard, and Mike Anslow read Lyn Anslow's poem "Reflections" which she wrote following the service in Cassino War Cemetery last year.



REV. TONY WOOD BLESSING THE STANDARD

We were pleased to be joined by a party of pupils and staff from Northleigh House School. They took the opportunity to interview our veterans, I am not sure who enjoyed the experience most!

One person missing this year was our own bugler, Garth Wright. Garth, a Dunkirk Veteran, was in France attending the commemoration services on the 75th anniversary of the evacuation of Dunkirk. We were fortunate in having a Royal Marine bugler play the last post and reveille for us.

After marching back with the band, the catering staff at the Arboretum did us proud with a splendid tea. A time to chat and reminisce.

My sincere thanks to Mike Anslow who organised the afternoon. Mike is our Standard Bearer but being Master of Ceremonies for the day handed the honour to John Leach.

Finally, my thanks to all those who made the journey to the arboretum to join us, some from quite far away. I hope you found it as memorable as I did.

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Visits to Cassino

Northleigh House School has been awarded Heritage Lottery Funding to compare the bombing of Coventry Cathedral and the Abbey at Monte Cassino. While completing the project the students have interviewed three of our veterans, have recently visited Cassino and a documentary will be screened at the Leamington Spa Centre, Leamington Spa, on 3rd October at 7.30 p.m.

The teacher in charge of the project Tobia Bianco writes -

On the 29th of June I set off to Italy with a group of 19 people including Albert Darlington, Jim Aston, and Gordon Cruse from the Monte Cassino Society, veterans of the 1944 battle. In the group there were also: 5 students from Northleigh House School; teachers; the historian Perry Rowe and Terry Rowland, the son of William Charles Rowland, a soldier who fought and died in Cassino 74 years ago when Terry was only 18 months old. We went to Montecassino to make a documentary about the battle and how the city has rebuilt itself since then. We found a hotel just under Castle Hill/Rocca Janula, Hotel Gari, where the spring of the river Gari originates. There was a busy agenda but we were rewarded each day with a delicious dinner at the restaurant Sir Jasper's (run by Gianni, an Italian chef born in England).

On the first day, with the help of our guide Danila Bracaglia, we visited Mignano Montelungo and the Italian cemetery where thousands of Italian partisans, who fought the Germans, were buried. We then visited the ruins of St Pietro Infine, the ghost town left as it was 74 years ago. We headed afterwards towards St Angelo, visiting the river Gari, the Bell of Peace and the Monument erected after the visit of King George VI. One of the most memorable moments of the entire trip was our afternoon visit to the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Cassino. Albert, Jim and Gordon wandered around the graves paying respect to friends and soldiers who paid with their lives the price of freedom for Europe. Terry for the first time saw his dad's grave and it was very moving for him and for everyone.

The following day we went to Castle Hill/Rocca Janula, guided by Perry Rowe. Once there, we found some English army officers discussing the battle. From Castle Hill we moved on to Montecassino Abbey where we had the most interesting tour, guided by Patrizia, and we had a chance to talk to the Abbot and the monks at the Abbey. The Abbey remains a symbol of hope and reconciliation after the madness of war. We went afterwards to the Polish cemetery and to Hill 593 where, to our surprise, we found a



German platoon singing their anthem on top of the mountain! They were a friendly bunch who shared a glass of wine and a chat about the battle. At night, to the usual ice cream at Green Garden, we could add a refreshing beer as the Beer Festival in Cassino had just started.

On the last day, we visited the Historiale Museum, a multimedia based museum that recreates the battle through images, sounds, reconstructions and video clips. The veterans really liked it and it was hard for the guide to keep up with their questions!

We all enjoyed the trip, the food and the company and we felt privileged to have shared such a wonderful time with three friends who contributed to making the countries we live in, a better place. Thank you Albert, Jim and Gordon, and thank you William Rowland, along with all the others who fought there, who are present in our memories and hearts.

Another visitor to Cassino, Mrs Helen James writes -

<u>Visit to Cassino with Cassinobattlefields.co.uk – 7-10 May 2015</u>

I first visited Cassino in May 2014 for the 70th Anniversary commemorations. Having then only just discovered the Monte Cassino Society, I was too late to join their party, but was lucky enough to be there with an old comrade of my late father who was a member of 75th Medium Regiment Shropshire Yeomanry RA. He and dad had been gunner and signaller together throughout the Italian Campaign, including Cassino from March 1944, until being demobilised in 1947.

My few days in Cassino during the commemorations were truly memorable, especially being with a veteran who could point out some of the places where he had been with my dad. I had done some research before going, but nothing can prepare you for the place itself. Its unique setting amongst stunning scenery with that spectacular mountain backdrop is one thing, but when you see Cassino in its historical context, with those mountains as the formidable heavily-defended barrier which the Allies had to overcome, the whole area takes on a very different and darker dimension. I came away from Cassino wanting to see and learn a lot more.

With this in mind, I read about Frank de Planta and Cassi-nobattlefields.co.uk in the Society Newsletter and went to Cassino with him and a small group for four days in May 15. After I had signed up for the tour, I wondered just what I might be letting myself in for, as my idea of a battlefield tour was that it might be informative, but probably a bit dry and tedious. That was before I met Frank and experienced his total enthusiasm and depth of knowledge, and his ability to bring history to life. The Information Pack he supplied was really comprehensive, full of accessible charts and maps, photographs relevant facts and documents.

I had sent for the regimental diaries for Jan-May 44 some months before the trip, which at nearly 1000 pages take time to read, but from these I was able to identify a few places of particular relevance to my father's Cassino story. Others in the group had done the same - there were some amazing tales of late friends' and relatives' Cassino experiences, and we found that Frank was interested and very willing to divert from the busy itinerary where possible on several occasions so that we could explore these places of personal significance. There were some in the group for whom the visit was the starting point of their research into an individual Cassino history. Frank's military and historical expertise, his clear passion for the place and for the military strategy of the four battles, and his energetic delivery of information gave us all the impetus to find out more.

In all it was a brilliant trip, and I have a feeling it may not be the last time I visit Cassino. The place gets under your skin, and the more I learn, the more I respect those veterans for what they went through and achieved. Whatever your level of knowledge about the Italian campaign and Cassino, I can fully recommend Frank and Cassinobattlefields.co.uk.

Regrets? If only we could turn back the clock. Like so many veterans, dad never talked much about Cassino, preferring to leave the past behind and get on with living his life. We just knew he had "been there" and at times it had been a bit grim. Childhood questions always received the same response, some funny anecdote and a change of the subject. With what I know now, and have learned by being there, there is so much I would like to ask him and talk about.

Helen James, June 2015

In April John & Barbara Leach took their family to Cassino to visit the grave of John's Father in Cassino War Cemetery. The photographs are of their Grandson Dominic paying his respects to his Great Grandfather Harold Leach, 2nd Btn DCLI and laying a wreath on the grave of George Lance, The Grenadier Guards, on behalf of his daughter Mrs Pat Harris. Dominic also laid a wreath on behalf of the Society on the Cross of Sacrifice







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Philip Bujak's Father escaped across German lines and fought with 2nd Carpathian Division. He was wounded at Monte Cassino.

Philip is our link with Polish veterans' families

Za Polske by Philip Bujak

Of the many Polish units that formed part of General Ander's 2nd Corps at Monte casino was the 3rd Carpathian Division. This was an infantry division made of the usual rifle battalions and all the supporting arms of a full division. Prior to the battles at Monte Cassino the division numbered over 20,000 men and women.

There are many interesting aspects to this unit. Their battle cry as their mortar and machine gun units made their way up the hills around Cassino was Za Polske - or 'For Poland!' The various formations of this division, which suffered awful casualties at Cassino and in further battles in Italy, were made up of men and women who had escaped capture in 1939, trained and equipped in England and formed up with the division in Palestine before its transfer to Italy. They had waited nearly 5 years to get back at the Germans and were more than ready. Others had walked from Siberia when Stalin, disingenuously, allowed Polish troops his forces had captured in 1939 and placed them in Gulags and camps in Siberia, to join the fight - but they had to walk to the Middle East to do it. This long forgotten march saw terrible conditions for men, women and children to get into the fight against Germany. Lastly quite a number of men in this division had escaped from the German lines. Many had been forced labourers since their capture in 1939 and with mounting casualties on the Eastern Front they were conscripted into the Wehrmacht - to refuse was to be shot. But as soon as they came into contact with 8th Army they began to escape each night and make their way to the allied lines.

Thus this division was more than equipped with brave and committed soldiers for the battle ahead. The division was resettled and demobbed in the UK in 1947 and 1948 the descendants of which I hope we can start to encourage to join the Monte Cassino Society.

Philip Bujak

Joe (Giuseppe) Grossi has asked if anyone can help in his research. He is writing the autobiography of his Father, Silvio Grossi, now aged 82 who was an eleven year old boy in Italy in 1944

The family lived at **Via Capo D'Acqua 41**, a three storey farmhouse just uphill from the Bailey Bridge, which is very near the Fountain (la Fontana)

The main question I have is about the military name or code/map reference for the house where Giuseppe Grossi, his wife Mary and his brother Giovanni lived with their families. The house was partly requisitioned by the Germans, then the British and the Polish during late 1943 until May 1944.

As you all know, the soldiers came over the mountains, past Capo d'Acqua to get to Cassino.

My Father Silvio has told me many events that he and his family witnessed. The many nationalities passed by their house and some of them stayed there on the Grossi family land. My questions are about these soldiers.

In around November 1943 Germans arrived in vehicles and set up a radio station on the family farm. They took one of the rooms in the house. They were very polite and were not soldiers. I presume that this radio station had a military name? These German engineers then moved down to Cassino.

The next soldiers to arrive were German Infantry followed later by soldiers of different nationalities.

Because the main route (the Via Casilina) was flooded and impassable, all the soldiers—from the Germans to the Moroccans—all came down the mountain road from Cervaro, through Capo D'Acqua where the Grossi family were living. Was this Route 6? Did it have a military name?

When the fourth battle of Montecassino took place, the Polish soldiers had huge guns pointed at Monte Cassino. One of them, a tailor back home, cut down a Polish uniform for my Dad to wear. My Father would go to them every day as there was no school. During the bombardment he helped to throw water and wet towels into the big gun as it glowed from being fired so often.

I would be grateful for any information -where might I find photographs of the area etc. I have some footage shot by camcorder in 1984 and 1991 interviewing my Grandmother, Mary Lanni. I realise now that I should have done hours of interviewing with my Grandmother who even at 82 had a very good memory for names and details.

Please get in touch with me if you can help me—in English, Italian or Polish. londonjoegrossi@gmail.com

Mille grazie Many thanks Joe (Giuseppe)Grossi

VE70th Anniversary - Service of Thanksgiving, Westminster Abbey

A few of our veterans were invited to attend the service in Westminster Abbey on Sunday, May 10th. The following is from Les Wenham, The Royal Sussex Regiment -

The event on Sunday 10th May was a truly wonderful occasion. The panoply of overseas dignitaries uniforms was spectacular, apart from the array of our own forces. Several bands were in attendance, Royal Marines, Guards Regiments and Scottish Pipes.

The marshalling was brilliant and smooth bearing in mind the numerous wheelchair cases. The Met Police outshone themselves in their able assistance HM The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh were present together with several Royal Princes and the Duke of York. Several MPs were also to be seen.

The salute was taken by Prince Charles and Lady Camilla. The luncheon was excellent and very much appreciated after the march up Whitehall etc.

The organisation by the RBL was brilliant. An outstanding success and credit to them.

Les Wenham

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VE70 continued

In the last issue of our newsletter we printed Winston Churchill's Speech on 8th May 1945. The 70th anniversary of VJ Day, the end of WW2 hostilities is, perhaps, a good time to remind ourselves of the speech made by HM King George VI on VE Day

Today we give thanks to Almighty God for a great deliverance.

Speaking from our Empire's oldest capital, war-battered but never for one moment daunted or dismayed—speaking from London, I ask you to join with me in that act of thanksgiving.

Germany, the enemy who drove all Europe into war, has finally been overcome. In the Far East we have yet to deal with the Japanese, a determined and cruel foe. To this we shall turn with the utmost resolve and with all our resources. But at this hour, when the dreadful shadow of war has passed from our hearts and homes in these islands, we may at last make one pause for thanksgiving and then turn our thoughts to the tasks all over the world which peace in Europe brings with it.

Let us remember those who will not come back, their constancy and courage in battle, their sacrifice and endurance in the face of a merciless enemy; let us remember the men in all the Services and the women in all the Services who have laid down their lives. We have come to the end of our tribulation, and they are not with us at the moment of rejoicing.

Then let us salute in proud gratitude the great host of the living who have brought us to victory. I cannot praise them to the measure of each one's service, for in a total war the efforts of all rise to the same noble height and all are devoted to the common purpose. Armed or unarmed, men and women, you have fought, striven and endured to your utmost. No one knows that better than I do; and as your King I thank with a full heart those who bore arms so valiantly on land and sea, or in the air, and all civilians who, shouldering their many burdens, have carried them unflinchingly without complaint.

With those memories in our minds, let us think what it was that has upheld us through nearly six years of suffering and peril. The knowledge that everything was at stake—our freedom, our independence, our very existence as a people, but the knowledge also that in defending ourselves we were defending the liberties of the whole world, that our cause was the cause not of this nation only, not of this Empire and Commonwealth only, but of every land where freedom is cherished and law and liberty go hand in hand. In the darkest hours we knew that the enslaved and isolated peoples of Europe looked to us; their hopes were our hopes; their confidence confirmed our faith. We knew that, if we failed, the last remaining barrier against a world-wide tyranny would have fallen in ruins. But we did not fail. We kept our faith with ourselves and with one another, we kept faith and unity with our great allies. That faith and unity have carried us to victory through dangers which at times seemed overwhelming.

So let us resolve to bring to the tasks which lie ahead the same high confidence in our mission. Much hard work awaits us, both in the restoration of our own country after the ravages of war and in helping to restore peace and sanity to a shattered world.

There is great comfort in the thought that the years of darkness and danger in which the children of our country have grown up are over and, please God, for ever. We shall have failed, and the blood of our dearest will have flowed in vain if the victory which they died to win does not lead to a lasting peace, founded on justice and established in good will. To that, then, let us turn our thoughts on this day of just triumph and proud sorrow and then take up our work again, resolved as people to do nothing unworthy of those who have died for us and to make the world such a world as they would have desired, for their children and for ours.

Some additional photographs from the Remembrance & Dedication Service at the Arboretum in May













Standard Bearer Mike Anslow

WHO ATE ALL THE CAKES?

LILY OR PAUL?



MIKE WITH THE GARRISON SARGEANT MAJOR AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS AT THE FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE IN THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL



ARMED FORCES DAY, HENLEY -IN-ARDEN

Garth Wright in France for the 75th anniversary of D Day. We missed you at the Arboretum Garth but pleased you were able to make it to France. Photo courtesy of The Daily Telegraph, Friday 22nd May





fichael Bentall, 94, and Garth Wright, 95, on board the Princess Freda yesterday, their first meeting since 1940. Above, Mr Wright entertains Wren Lauren Parsons

New Members

Mrs K.M. Buck—Friend of the Society
Roy Chodaczynski-Steele, son of Waclaw, with Polish
forces in North Africa & Cassino
Frank Collinson—son of Joseph, 42nd Field Company,
Royal Engineers
Peter J Jackson—son of Leslie, 5th Field Rgt. 7th
Mountain Regt, Royal Artillery
Hilary Nicol—daughter of Antoni Katowicz, 1923/69
Plut. Pchr, 3Bn CKM
Lesley Teasdale—daughter of Robert Randall, 2nd
Battalion London Irish Rifles
John Turner—son of Herbert, 1/6 Battalion, East Surrey
Regiment



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