

This little fellow's on a Roll



He was awarded the Croix de Guerre in final WW1 Battle of the Somme

The names of 42 local men who served their country in WW1, together with one addition from WW2, are included on this commemorative roll. One of them is Bandsman William Brown, who is pictured above in his Trafalgar Square School Uniform. William's son and local history enthusiast, Adrian Brown, has been trying to locate this Roll of Honour, which disappeared following the closure of the Army Citadel on Old Street in Ashton on 4th December 2005.



Former Ashton Salvation Army Citadel

The building is now occupied by the Pavilion Furniture Store, having extended its premises in the former Pavilion Cinema to include the Salvation Army building.

Adrian is a member of Tameside Local History Forum (<http://www.tamesidehistoryforum.org.uk>). They have been trying to locate and record the WW1 Rolls of Honour in Tameside, as part of the current programme of national commemorations.

Pavilion Furniture proved extremely helpful and located the Roll of Honour behind stacks of furniture in a store room, where they had kept and protected it. Peter Hayes, the Manager, handed it over to Adrian, who has now secured an appropriate home for this record of local heroes in Tameside's Portland Basin Museum.

William is pictured here, as a teenager, in the uniform of his first regiment, the Lancashire Fusiliers. Alongside him is his father, Ernest. These two tiny hand coloured photographs are from a small locket carried by William's mother Amy (née Backhouse), whilst he went to war. He 'joined the colours' (signed up) on 3rd of February 1917 and undertook his military training around Prestatyn, Kinmel Bay and Rhyl in North Wales. His first posting was to Egypt and then to France, where he joined the 11th Hampshire Regiment on 1st August 1918 as solo cornet player.



William served in six different regiments prior to joining the Hampshires. Cornet players were in great demand – they were the first choice to play the 'Last Post' for fallen colleagues.

On 29th March 1919, the Ashton-under-Lyne Reporter published a notice headed **"Awarded Croix de Guerre – An Ashton Salvationist Bandsman's Bravery"**, announcing that "Mr and Mrs E Brown, of 80 Cranbourne Road, Ashton, have received news that their only son, Bandsman W Brown, has been awarded the Croix de Guerre for conspicuous bravery on 2nd September 1918.



The Salvation Army newspaper, the 'War Cry', published on 12th July 1919, gave more details: "..... Bandsman W. Brown, of Ashton-under-Lyne, has been awarded the French Croix de Guerre for saving a French Officer's life while under shell fire and complete enemy observation. Our comrade bound up his wounds, carried him from one shell hole to another, and finally rushed with his burden through the barrage, the whole operation occupying about six hours".

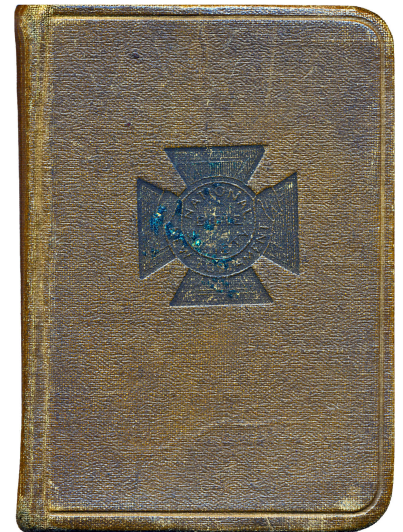
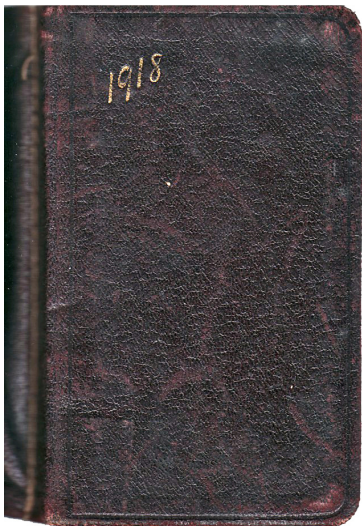
News did not travel fast when messages were sent by 'runners', in the days when mobile phones and the internet were the stuff of fiction.

In the course of a letter to his parents, he wrote that "Arras was the first front I was on (26th August – 3rd September, 1918?). From there we went to Lens, Cambrin (8th – 9th October 1918?), La Bassée, and there we held the line when Jerry began his final retreat. From La Bassée we chased him through minor villages to Loos and from there made for Lille. He fought desperately for Lille, but he was pushed from there, and I am proud to say I was a member of the first band that entered Lille (17th October 1918?). It was great. I shall never forget it. The people rushed on the band in thousands. The trombone players in front were holding their instruments up in the air to enable them to play. From Lille we chased the Germans through Cysoing, Seclin, and at Pont au Mareq he put up a rearguard action. We fought side by side with the Black Watch there until we chased him out of the town. From Pont au Mareq we chased him to Antoing, where he offered a strong resistance. This place was a large town, and the Germans had built concrete walls around it and fortified it with machine guns. After a weeks struggle he evacuated. From Antoing we pushed on to Valenciennes, and in the struggle for Valenciennes I got bowled over, and my chum was killed. We followed the Germans 126 kilometres, marched every inch of the way, and going three days at a time without food only what the poor French people gave us, and they could not afford to give food away."

A number of reports appeared in the media, including part of a centre page spread in the Daily Mirror dated 9th April 1919. Not too many WW1 Soldiers can lay claim to appearing as a centre-fold in a national newspaper!

It is evident that the euphoria of successful battles belies the reality of the horrors these men experienced. William wrote: "I got bowled over, and my chum was killed". He later related how he received shrapnel wounds when his friend was blown to pieces by an enemy shell! He also spent time in a field hospital after being the victim of a gas attack.

Adrian has a collection of many of his father's war time possessions and mementos, including



the pocket diary and pocket bible he carried into battle and his campaign medals. He has his medal card, demobilisation and national insurance papers and his transfer to the Army Reserve on 30th July 1919. Much of the information above is confirmed by his diary entries. Also in his collection is this photograph of his father in another uniform.

It is the uniform of a bandsman in the Kings Liverpool Regiment. William joined this regiment following his demob' from the Hampshires and was posted to Dublin. Although the Kings Regiment were said to be respected by the Irish insurgents for their professionalism and humane treatment of prisoners, he witnessed what he described as "the appalling brutality of many British soldiers and ex-soldiers recruited to the Irish Police. He spoke of his horror at seeing them treating the Irish people in a manner similar to, or worse than that which he had recently been fighting to stop the German troops from doing.



In William's pocket bible above he has highlighted various passages, including the following: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Many years later, when Adrian questioned his father about his feelings towards his German adversaries and his actions to rescue the wounded French officer, he replied: "In order to rescue that poor soldier, I had to grenade two German machine gunners who were firing at me. I killed those two men and probably deprived two young families of their father. War is futile and solves

nothing. The German people are predominantly good people, just like us. War is the product of a few demented individuals who seek and abuse power at the expense of others.”

In the current spirit of remembrance, we rightly focus on those who gave their lives to protect our future. Let us also remember those who fought and returned, having witnessed and suffered experiences that no person should ever be subjected to. War impacts adversely on the lives of all those it involves.

William lived his post war life as a sad and mainly humourless man. He could be extremely bad tempered. How much of his character was influenced by his personality and how much by his experiences is now impossible to judge. He remained in the uniform of his first choice – that of the Salvation Army - and spent many years as Bandmaster of the Ashton-under-Lyne Salvation Army Band. He also served in the Second World War as an Air Raid Warden, attached to his employment at the National Gas Engine Company and the surrounding area.

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Adrian Brown – August 2014