



Chesterfield & District Local History Society

NEWSLETTER November/December 2018



Chesterfield Canal Trust's Last Cuckoo Project

A talk by
Andy Robinson

Tuesday 20th November 7:30pm.
United Reformed Church Rose Hill

Learn about the archaeological dig on the site of the old Bellhouse Basin at Staveley in August 2017 and what it revealed.

December Meeting Short talks and Mince Pies

Tuesday 11th December 7:30pm.
United Reformed Church Rose Hill

Please note that this is the 2nd Tuesday in the month. There is no meeting in January and the first meeting in 2019 will be on February 19th when it will be preceded by a short AGM

During the winter months there is the possibility that meetings may be cancelled due to adverse weather. Please check with the Society's website <http://www.cadlhs.org.uk/> in case it is necessary to cancel a meeting.

Lieutenant Percy Merrick M.C.

Christine Thomason



The 'flaming grenade' – the cap badge of the Lancashire Fusiliers



Military Cross

Thirty-year-old Percy Merrick enlisted into the East Kent Regiment in 1916, leaving behind a wife and young daughter. After training he was commissioned as Second Lieutenant into the 8th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers and entered France in early 1917. He was injured on June 26th 1917 but was able to re-join his regiment in France.

In November 1918 his family received a letter from his commanding officer, which was reported in the *Derbyshire Times* as follows:

A Whittington Officer Second Lieutenant Percy Merrick M.C. of the 18th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, who before joining up was Manager of the Oxford Palace at New Whittington, which is now managed by his wife, has again been wounded this time under circumstances of gallantry, which has gained for him the Military Cross. He was previously wounded in June last year. On October 20th, whilst leading the platoon into action, he was wounded in the thigh by a machine gun bullet. His commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel C.S. Jewels D.S.C. in writing to Mrs Merrick says he is exceptionally gallant and his temporary absence involves a great loss to his battalion. I trust that after a rest at home, he will re-join us. I am sure you will be glad to know that he has been awarded the Military Cross for

gallantry in action. He did extraordinary well and the decoration was, for once, richly deserved. I have not his address and cannot write him direct. Will you please give him my heartiest congratulations.

This cutting was kept by my aunt, Mrs Margaret Orwin, Percy's eldest daughter. It passed to Lawrence Knight on March 15th 1998 and was kept in his archive which was kindly was donated to me by his son John.

The information was confirmed by an announcement in the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* on 26th November 1918:

In a letter to his wife at his home Elmfield House, New Whittington, Chesterfield his commanding officer states that Second Lieutenant Percy Merrick 18th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers has been awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in action. Lieutenant Merrick is wounded and in hospital in Manchester. Previous to the war, he was manager of the Oxford Picture House, New Whittington.

Finally the issue of the *London Gazette* for 29th July 1919 recorded that Second Lieutenant Percy Merrick 8th Battalion attached 18th Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers was awarded the Military Cross:

For conspicuous gallantry and initiative during the attack south east of Ypres on Hill 60 and the Klein Zellebeke Trench on September 28th 1918. He displayed fine leadership rushing two machine guns and completely knocking them out. As a result of his fine work the advance round the north of the Caterpillar was greatly facilitated. Later in the advance he pushed forward and cleared a machine gun and team which was firing heavily on our troops moving to the attack on Zanvoorde, and it was due to his courageous leadership that the right flank of the attack at this point was made secure. Throughout the operation he set a very fine example to his men.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
(M.C.) MERRICK	Lanc Fus	Pte	9/13897
PERCY	Norfolk Cyclists	* 2 Lt	* Lieut
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks
* Lanc Fus	OFF 130	244	R. J. H. E. 1/27/1028
Barrack	do		Recomm J 10/307 4/5.7.23 to 4/3/23
Strat			31.11.1918 by Rec. Com CRV
			439/10 16.9.21 on 5/197/2nd
			NW/3/8344
Theatre of War first served in	France		
Date of entry therein	23/10/17		
		X NW/3/8344	K. 1880

A few days before the report of Percy's M.C. in the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* a short item recorded that 2nd Lieutenant Merrick had been injured on October 20th.

He is unlikely to have returned to active service being transferred instead to the Norfolk Cyclists Battalion in a training or administrative role and with the promotion to Lieutenant.

Percy's Medal Roll (National Archives WO 372/13/214324)

Percy Merrick remained in the army until 1921. For many years he was commanding officer of the ex-serviceman at Remembrance Day parades and other ceremonial occasions.

Blood swept lands and seas of red

We all remember the stunning display of ceramic poppies at the Tower of London – the idea of Paul Cummins of Chesterfield. But how did the poppy become the symbol of remembrance?

The inspiration came from Moina Belle Michael – the Poppy Lady.



She was on duty at Hamilton Hall, Columbia University New York where a conference of the Overseas Y.M.C.A. War Secretaries was being held. A soldier left a copy of the *Ladies' Home Journal* November 1918 on her desk. When she had chance, she looked through it and her attention was caught by the poem *We shall not sleep*, also known as *In Flanders Fields*, by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae. She was particularly moved by the final verse: '*To you from falling lands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high. If ye break faith with us who die we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flander's Fields*'.

She vowed to wear a red poppy like those from Flanders Fields as a sign of keeping faith with those who had died. Three of the delegates to the conference came to the desk to present her with a cheque for 10 dollars as a sign of appreciation of the flower arrangements she had provided for the conference. She spent the money on 25 silk poppies which she then handed out to delegates at the conference, the first time that they were used as a symbol of remembrance.



This memorial stands on the side of Sheffield Road at Stonegravel.