

The Museum of Military Medicine



Sanitation, Sand & Shells

The War Diary of Alfred M. Cockburn
2nd London Sanitary Company,
Royal Army Medical Corps.

This exhibition marks the culmination of a research project funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and Gateways to the First World War public engagement centre. Working in partnership with the Museum of Military Medicine, historians at Bishop Grosseteste University (Lincoln) engaged volunteers in the process of historical research, exploring the personal journey of a corporal who served in the areas of military hygiene and sanitation during the First World War. The exhibition and project would not have been possible without the discovery of the diary and the willingness of the diarist's grand-daughter to share such a valuable historical document.

The exhibition commemorates the men who served in the R.A.M.C. Sanitary Companies during the First World War.

The exhibition and text of this publication was compiled by Dr Claire M. Hubbard-Hall, Senior Lecturer in History, Bishop Grosseteste University.

The exhibition is based on research conducted by Dr Claire Hubbard-Hall (project lead) and Dr William Hunt (project assistant), along with the following project volunteers: Janet Taylor, Jackie Booker, Rachel Maxey & Friends of the Museum of Military Medicine. With contributions from: Lisa Tomlinson & Samuel Bocock.

Special thanks to the many History and Heritage Studies students at Bishop Grosseteste University who tirelessly scanned and transcribed the diary.



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FOREWORD

When we read about the R.A.M.C. we hear about the formation of field ambulance teams, field dressing stations, the heroism of the stretcher bearers and the medical officers, but very rarely do we hear about the Sanitary Companies: those men who were tasked with the vital role of preventing disease and death.

The diarist, Alfred M. Cockburn, was a corporal who served within the sanitation section of the R.A.M.C. Interestingly, very little is known about their work as their history often becomes absorbed in that of the division which they were attached to. Also, members of a sanitation section could be moved to another section/company to replace existing officers, making it very difficult to track individuals or units. In Alfred's case, once in Egypt, he was assigned with four other men (Chapman, Streeter, Wade and Wall) of the 2nd London Sanitary Company, to join the 21st Section of the 1st London Sanitary Company. It is very likely that they were replacing men lost through dysentery which was particularly rampant there at this time.

Therefore, the diary is unusual, as there are very few personal testimonies as penned by other ranks. The bulk of First World War diaries and memoirs relate to officers. In line with the centenary commemorations, interest in the First World War has increased considerably. This has provided an all-important stimulus for historians to approach the (re-)writing of the war in a fresh light, by recovering those voices that had previously been lost or marginalised such as that of Alfred Cockburn and the men of the R.A.M.C. Sanitary Companies. The diary (1915-1919) provides an excellent opportunity to portray a more personal and relatively unknown aspect of the war, assisting the Museum of Military Medicine in its mission to engage the public with the story of army medicine and healthcare.

The centenary commemorations offer an opportunity to distil and communicate the project findings to a wider audience. The project and accompanying exhibition at the museum will hopefully prove to be a powerful and positive legacy, as not only will we remember the shells but also one man's experience and memory of a relatively unknown aspect of the First World War.

Claire M. Hubbard-Hall (Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln)
& Jason Semmens, Director of Museum of Military Medicine.

Sanitation, Sand & Shells: The War Diary of Alfred M. Cockburn (2nd London Sanitary Company, Royal Army Medical Corps)

This exhibition explores the work of the R.A.M.C Sanitary Companies during the First World War, providing a unique insight into a relatively unknown aspect of the war; military hygiene and sanitation. The personal testimony of Alfred Cockburn, who served in Egypt and France, as a corporal in the 2nd London Sanitary Company, sheds light on those military non-combatants who played a vital role. During the 1930s, Alfred reflected on his wartime experiences and in his own words wrote the following:

'This account of my active service is completed. All that has been written was easily recalled from my notes that I made daily. Some were sent home in green envelopes. The diaries themselves left at home on two occasions of leave from France, so on returning, I started a new one. Twenty years after and strange to say, when I had written of my time in Egypt and my first year in France, the first weekly part of the publication "Twenty Years After" appears and is bought for me by my son Alfred. But, I treasure most, the cards and letters, which unknown to me, were put away by my wife.'

Alfred was an avid collector of 'things' and his diary is full of wartime related ephemera that he collected during his time in service as well as from his visit to France during the late 1930s, when he revisited many of the places and local people he had stayed with.



Image above: Photograph of Alfred Cockburn, November 1915.

Image left: Example of original diary page inserted into rewritten diary penned by Alfred during the 1930s.

Image right: An example of the letters Alfred sent his wife during the war. The postcard is dated 19 February 1916 and was written aboard the hospital ship *Dongola* as Alfred waited to disembark at Alexandria, Egypt.

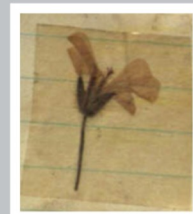
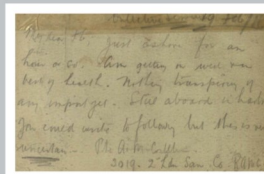
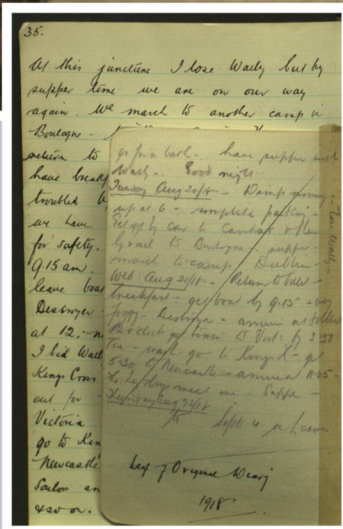


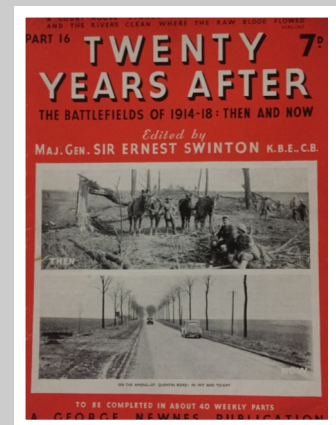
Image left: A flower picked by Alfred May 1916, six miles east of El Ferdan, Egypt. This is an example of the many plant specimens collected by Alfred and preserved within his diary.

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Image above: The diary of Alfred Cockburn—all four volumes, 1916-1919.

Image right: *Twenty Years After. The Battlefields of 1914-18: Then and now* magazine. Part 16. (Bishop Grosseteste University Collections, Lincoln).



Twenty Years After was a weekly magazine published during the period 1936-1937. Ex-servicemen like Alfred were able to purchase the sixty issues and compare battlefield photographs taken during the war with those of the exact same scene, twenty years later. Inspired by copies bought for him by his son, Alfred rewrote his diary reflecting on his wartime experiences.

'My medals were taken from the drawer, taken out of their box and pinned up in the china cabinet, the cabinet locked, the key hidden—the work of my son Alfred when he was nine or ten years old, as he thought they would be safer there than in the drawer if burglars "got in" when we were on holiday. When my friends see them they generally say "You're proud of your medals then?" "Well", I say, "I'm not ashamed of them", but I like to see them there as they recall to my mind, my boys childish thoughtfulness and concern, which I do like.'



Image left: Alfred was awarded the Allied Victory Medal (L) and the British War Medal 1914-18 (R). His service number, rank, name and unit are inscribed on the rim of the medal. Between 5-6 million medals were issued for each award, demonstrating the sheer scale of the First World War. At the end of his diary, Alfred wrote the following:

1st & 2nd (City of London) Sanitary Companies



Above: Illustration of Sanitary officer 'writing the report' contained within *The Yellow Band* dated August-October 1916, p.8 [Museum of Military Medicine Archive].

This edition noted that Private Brightwell provided many of the illustrations.

Top right image: Photograph of 95th Sanitary Section, 1st London Sanitary Company [Museum of Military Medicine Archive].

Alfred notes in his diary that in 1916, men of the Sanitary Companies were issued with chevrons which were worn on their sleeve, just above the cuff. If a soldier had been on active service since 1914, he was issued with a red service chevron. Thereafter, a blue chevron was issued for every year of service.

During the First World War, the Royal Army Medical Corps Sanitary Companies played a key role in preventing disease and maintaining a healthy fighting army. The Boer War (1899-1902) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904) provided valuable lessons in the area of field sanitation and hygiene, which, as a consequence saw all soldiers receive rigorous training delivered by leading experts. During the First World War, training continued alongside the practice of vaccination, disinfection and personal hygiene. All can be attributed to the decline in soldier deaths from disease.

The 1st London Sanitary Company was formed in 1908, and the 2nd London Sanitary Company was formed just before the outbreak of war. Together, both Sanitary Companies consisted of over a hundred Sanitary Sections. Each Section consisted of one officer, two sergeants and 23 men. From water purification to the construction of latrines and burying the dead, Alfred's sanitary work covered a wide range of different jobs, leaving some feeling overworked, as captured in the accompanying illustration. *The Yellow Band* was a magazine published by the 1st London Sanitary Company and it took its name from the yellow band that only the men of the 1st wore. This caused a certain level of animosity between the two companies, as both undertook the same sanitary duties.

On 13 July 1916, whilst serving in northern France, Alfred wrote:

'In France, men of the section were detailed to separate villages in the area occupied by the Division they were attached to. At times, we had two villages to look after, some kilometres apart. We had to see to inspection of billets, water, pollution of wells, latrine areas, disinfecting, cook-house conditions, baths duty. If the Divisional area was of large extent, then we had large areas to report on.'

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The Yellow Band had a circulation of 1000 and relied on donations as well as a small charge per copy. Very few copies have survived. This edition, dated August-October 1916, is extremely rare.

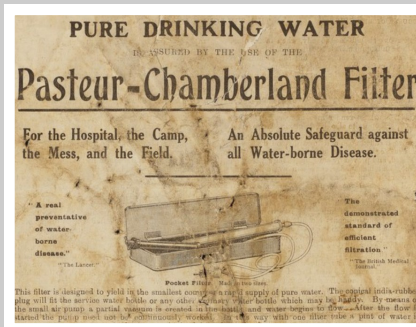
The magazine contained contributions from men serving in the various Sections of the 1st London Sanitary Company. Contributions ranged from notes on various duties such as baths and laundries to the best type of brickwork for building incinerators and advertisements for devices and ointments to prevent disease. Other contributions took a more comical form such as 'Nursery Rhymes Sanitised' (p.9). Examples included the following:

S.O.S

*Sing a song of sanitary,
Twenty men or more,
Mostly N.C.O's (unpaid)
Going forth to war;
When the war is over
And all the flies are slain,
Twenty little N.C.O's
May doff their stripes again.*

Images left: Advertisement for Pasteur-Chamberland Filter, back page of *The Yellow Band* (August-October 1916). Museum of Military Medicine.

The Pasteur-Chamberland filter was invented in 1884, by Charles Chamberland, an assistant to Louis Pasteur in Paris. The unglazed filter absorbed bacteria, isolating water borne diseases such as Typhoid.



Training

Duke of York's Headquarters, Chelsea



Above: Photograph of Alfred (right) and Wally (left) 'somewhere in France' dated 30 October 1916.

On 26 October 1915, Alfred joined the 2nd London Sanitary Company at the Duke of York's Headquarters, Chelsea. He joined up in the same Sanitary Section as his soon to be best friend Walter Chapman ("Wally"). Alfred and Wally became known as the 'inseparables', as they did everything together. They underwent medical inspection, received their uniforms and all important identity discs, ate meals together, undertook military drill and received sanitary training.



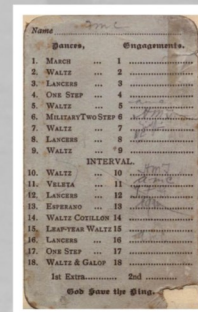
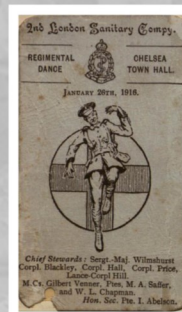
Above: Identity discs like the above were made of compressed fibre which meant they were light and comfortable to wear in hot climates. Service number, surname, initials and religion were indicated for burial purposes. [Private collection of Charles Simpson].

Educated and skilled men were the favoured recruits. As a teacher, Alfred was well suited. He wrote: *'The command at Chelsea was very anxious that we were instructed in sanitation so we were taken to the Sanitary Institute—there we saw all the lovely baths, and amused ourselves (when the officer wasn't watching) by testing the taps and pulling the chains of the most up-to-date W.C.'*

Training continued with: *'Lectures on diseases, flies, sanitation, food, water, disinfecting—one officer, lecturing on flies, with a thin high pitched squeak of a voice, who shrieked, "There are three kinds of flies, flies that bite, flies that sting and flies that suck". We had ambulance drill, bandaging, clarifying water, and examination of water carts.'*

But, before they sailed for Egypt on 4 February 1916, there was also time for fun.

On 26 January 1916, Alfred and his best friend "Wally" attended the 2nd London Sanitary Company regimental dance at Chelsea Town Hall: *'For three weeks, Wally and I were busily engaged on the Dance Committee, doing no drills but spending our time in the Y.M.C.A hut. Then we had our dance in the Chelsea Town Hall. Being of the committee we were of the rosette fraternity. My wife was there and we had a very enjoyable time.'*



Background image: © IWM (Q 54177) RAMC recruits in training, using an incinerator at Chelsea, 1917.

Top right image: © IWM (Q 54351) Medical Inspection of RAMC recruits at Chelsea, 1917.

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Image left: © IWM (Q 53928)

Troops of the 3rd, 4th, 6th and 8th London Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps training at Duke of York's School in Chelsea, 1915.

Alfred, Wally and the other men of the 1st and 2nd London Sanitary Companies underwent rigorous physical training here. Alfred recalls in his diary how, day after day, he patiently waited on the stone steps of the Duke of York's School in Chelsea (seen in the background), to be medically examined.

The R.A.M.C. training manual (1911) contains information on the duties of the Royal Army Medical Corps and how such duties were to be carried out. The manual was reprinted in 1915 and would have been issued to Alfred during his training at Duke of York's headquarters, Chelsea.

Instructions on the disinfection of blankets and soldiers clothing by means of steam, was covered in detail. This was carried out by, what was known as the Thresh (as outlined in the manual). Alfred used this device whilst in Egypt, but in France, a different model was used known as the 'Foden'. The Thresh employed a non-pressure steam derived from water and could reach a boiling temperature of 225 degrees Fahrenheit.

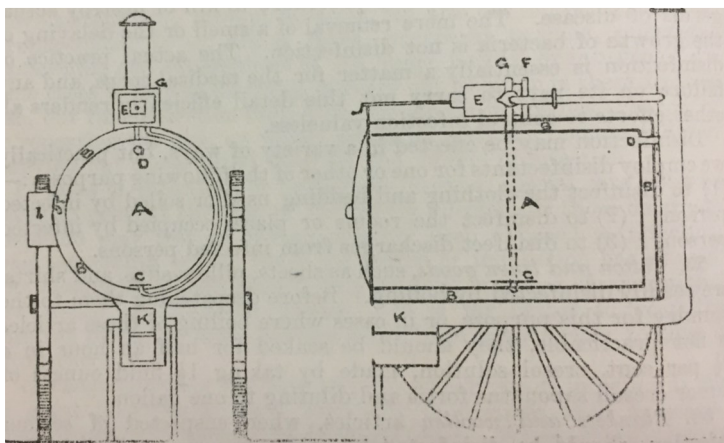


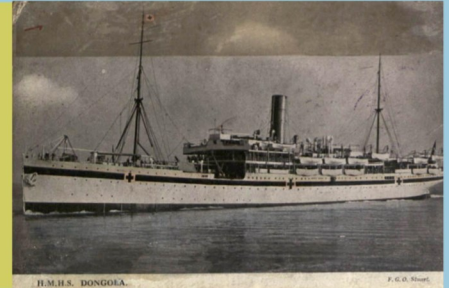
FIG. 1.—PORTABLE STEAM DISINFECTING APPARATUS (THE THRESH'S)

Image above: R.A.M.C. Training Manual (1911), p.30. Illustration of a portable steam disinfecting apparatus known as a 'Thresh'.
(The Museum of Military Medicine).



Image above: © IWM (Q 54119). Medical orderlies of the R.A.M.C. constructing a steam disinfector at the Duke of York's School at Chelsea, 1917. The elevated box (right) contained blankets/clothing for the disinfecting process, with an attached pressure burner (left).

The Journey to Egypt: The Hospital Ship *Dongola*



On 5 February 1916, Alfred, along with Wally, boarded the hospital ship *Dongola* at the port of Southampton. Its destination was Egypt. Training continued on board with a lecture on sanitation, delivered just before the ship reached the coast of Algeria. Soldiers also received vaccinations for Cholera. During the journey, many of the men suffered from sea sickness, including Wally who had to spend several days below deck. On 16 February 1916, the *Dongola* arrived in Alexandria, Egypt.

'Within an hour on board, all were bunked in Ward E in the stern, but when the propellers were out the water, the vibration and noise made one think something dreadful was happening. There was no running away. We were in Ward E and in Ward E we had to stay until we landed in Egypt at Alexandria. You could see the hospital boats easily by their lamps. Floating fairy islands visible for miles.'

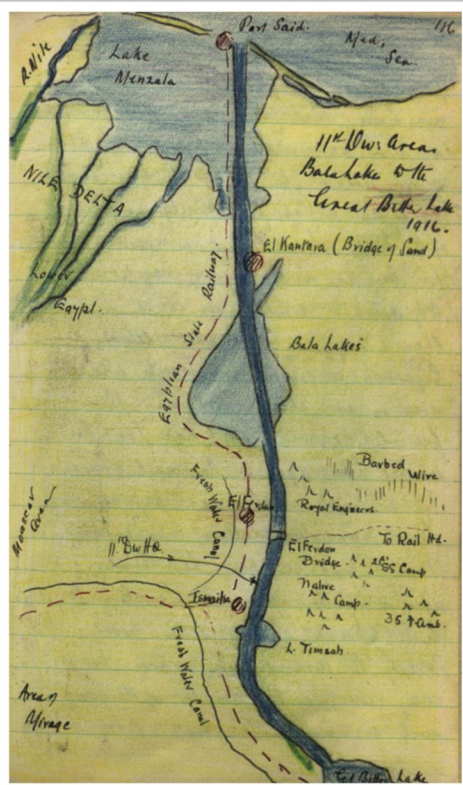
Before passing Cape Finisterre (west coast of Spain), the men were ordered to parade for an early morning feet inspection. Alfred noted:

'I never saw so many black feet in all my life. All dirty feet were paraded for a bath. We had a fire drill. Breakfast was disappointing for the porridge was bitter—simply boiled oatmeal, no sugar, no milk.'



Above image (and top right image): A postcard, sent by Alfred to his wife, on 13 February 1916. Alfred posted it when the *Dongola* docked in Valletta Harbour, Malta.

Latrines & Desert Conditions

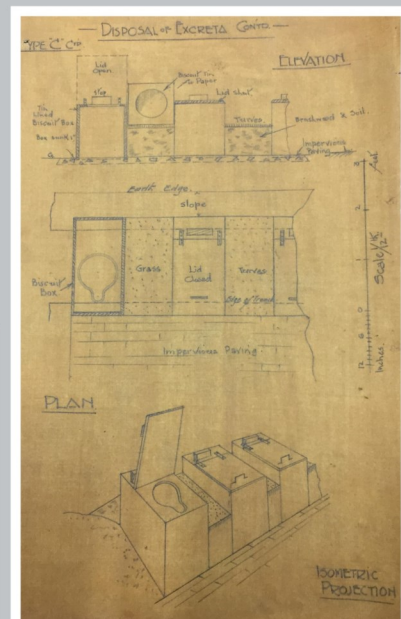


In March 1916, Alfred, Wally and three other men from the 2nd London Sanitary Company joined the 21st Sanitary Section of the 1st London Sanitary Company at El Ferdan. The 21st Sanitary Section was attached to the 11th Division which had been evacuated from Gallipoli to serve in the canal area of Egypt. Alfred moved with the 11th Division, staying in several other camps including Ismailia and El Kantara. However, Alfred and the other reinforcements were not prepared for desert conditions.

'The heat was intense, it was stifling hot and there was a serious lack of water. We were inexperienced in terms of temperature as we were wearing our thick service dress and there was sand everywhere.'

In January 1916, the first Sanitary Instruction Centre was set up at Ismailia. Sanitary Sections attended lectures, received training and viewed camp sanitary structures such as the different types of camp latrine. A large number of drawings were made of such structures, and copies were shared with other Sanitary Sections.

On 31st March 1916, Alfred was put on latrine inspection of troops and natives at El Ferdan camp. He wrote: *'This is a vile daily job but one of the most important. All latrines are canvassed round, for natives as well as troops, the bucket system is in use with accommodation for six men. The wooden seat was a fixture with self closing and tight fitting lids—the lids always resting on the backs of men. The buckets had to be taken away, emptied, cleaned and returned. Each bucket was like a large coal scuttle and was carried by two natives on an iron rod, resting on their shoulder. Twenty to forty natives would carry buckets to the huge excreta pits, a good march across the desert, away from all the camps. This was really a terrible job to see to.'*



Latrine type as described by Alfred in his diary. Drawing contained within War Diary of 10th Sanitary Section, 2nd London Sanitary Company [TNA WO 95 1648/1].

Flies & Lice

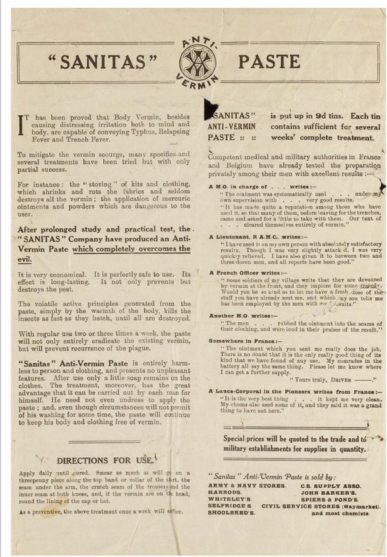


Actual dragonfly wings collected by Alfred from the camp at El Ferdan, Egypt in May 1916.

Sanitary Sections were in charge of preventing disease and this included combating flies and lice. The flies grew in number due to a build up of animal and human waste. Flies carry diseases such as typhoid, so animal and human waste was quickly incinerated. Whilst in Egypt, Alfred wrote constantly about the Section's daily battles with flies and body lice:

'If we ever found our eyes to be itchy, we had to report to the medical officer at once, in case of diseases being transmitted by the flies. The flies were all sizes and colours—from the size of a gnat to that of a dragonfly.'

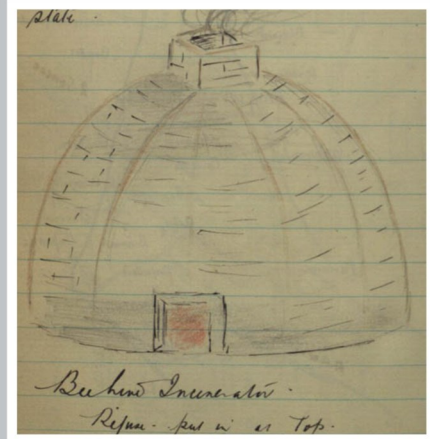
Alfred then wrote about the problem with flies in his tent: *'As darkness drew in, to our horror, the walls and roof of our hut were covered in flies...we couldn't sleep. An old soldier knew what to do and he got a newspaper and made several funnel shapes and gave one to each of us. We set them alight and quickly ran the burning papers up the walls and over the roofing. The flies fell to the sandy floor with the wings burning in thousands—the stench was terrible.'*



Advertisement for Sanitas Paste within the *Yellow Band* magazine dated August-October 1916, p.2 [Museum of Military Medicine Archive].
Above top right image: Image of a fly [Reproduced with kind permission of Museum of Military Medicine]

Soldiers were encouraged to purchase remedies for body lice, including Sanitas paste which could be bought at Army & Navy Stores and even Harrods.

'Although we had bathed daily, we were still verminous. I need vermin-jelly plastering the seams of my vests and pants, for the body lice, slept, lived and bred in the seam. I was troubled with these pests on my arms, two inches above my elbow. These blue bodied lice burrowed under your skin. We could only get rid of them by washing and scrubbing but within half an hour after drying they were visible again, so all we could do was burn the vests and pants. So we dropped them into the incinerator.'



Drawing of a Bee Hive Incinerator as illustrated by Alfred in his diary. Clothes, animal and human waste were dropped through the opening in the top and burnt.

Men of the 21st Sanitary Section, 1st London Sanitary Company



Lieut Young - He Officer - A.S.M.
 Staff Sgt. a Regular, R.A.M.C.
 Serg Lamplugh - a Chemist, Brighton
 Cpl Darby - Bayswater - Prudential -
 Cpl Priestly - Halifax - Builder
 Cpl Newman - Convent End - Surveyor
 Cpl Wilkinson - Preston - Surveyor
 Pte. Baxter - Croydon Hosp. Disinfectin.
 - Brown. Clerk - Maidstone. Edu. Office
 - Coe. Watford. Water Works -
 - Dickenson - Railway Clerk. S.R. Walsley
 - Jolly - Sheldon Durham - Teacher.
 - Cobby - London - R.A.M.C. regular
 - Carter - Yorkshire - R.A.M.C. regular
 - Fitzpatrick - Regular - R.A.M.C.
 - White for Barry - R.A.M.C.
 - Plant - R.A.M.C. Regular
 - Wade - Clerk - ^{York.} Patney
 - Street - Clerk - Mortlake Brewery
 - Wall - Attendance Officer - R.C.C.
 - Paston - Joking - City Clerk.
 - Denham - Warrington - Cloth City - Reading
 - Wally & myself also the Drivers -

In Egypt, Alfred recorded in his diary, a list of all the men serving within the 21st Sanitary Section, 1st London Sanitary Company. This numbered 25 men (full capacity).

Examples from the list include:

Lieutenant and later Captain William Allan Young (1886-1947). University educated in area of public health. In 1913, he was the assistant medical officer of health in Southampton. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for tending to a large number of wounded under fire.

Sergeant Walter Lamplugh (1888-1916). Awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for "exceptionally good work in regard to the sanitary requirements of the Army" in Gallipoli.

Corporal Stanley Charles Darby (1893-1984). Prior to the war he worked as an insurance clerk with Prudential.

Cecil Broughton Paston (1892-1964). Prior to the war he worked as a clerk and served for the entirety of the war.

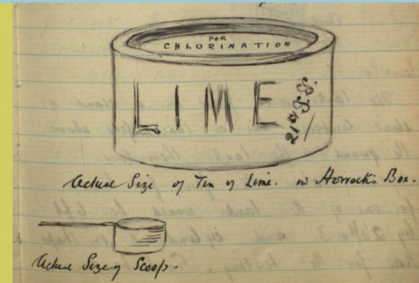


Above: Photograph of Corporal Streeter, somewhere in France, 1916 as contained within Alfred's diary. Prior to the war, he worked as a clerk at a brewery in Mortlake.



Above: Photograph of Walter Louis Chapman (1883-1965) taken somewhere in France, 1916 as contained within Alfred's diary.

Water

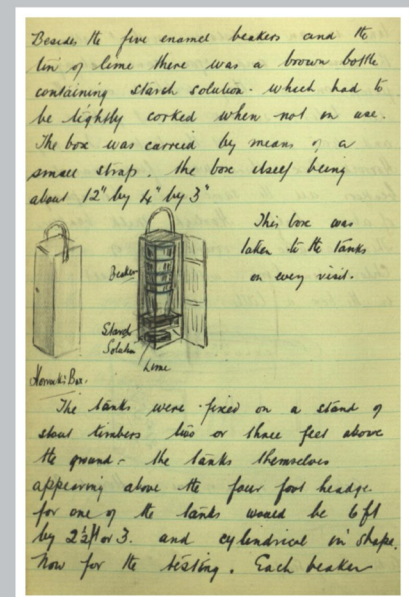


After Alfred arrived in France (July 1916), one of his routine jobs was water inspection. The testing of water carts, water tanks, wells, lakes and ponds was vital to ensure water was safe for drinking. Poison tests were carried out to make sure the enemy had not polluted the area. Sanitary Sections were extremely thorough in their duties, as Alfred was instructed to inspect mobile water testing laboratories, even when chemists were working inside. Sir William Horrocks was responsible for inventing the process of water sterilization for drinking purposes.

Alfred provides a detailed insight into the process of inspecting and testing water tanks in the Thiepval area:

'In my Horrocks Box, there were five enamel beakers—all the same size with the capacity of about half a Horlick's milk beaker. There was also a round box of chlorinating lime with lid inset and a little scoop in the box. There was also a brown bottle containing a starch solution, which had to be lightly corked when not in use. The box was carried by means of a small strap. This box was to be taken to the tanks on every visit.'

Now for testing. Each beaker was filled with water from the tank to be tested. The beakers are placed side by side, no. 1 to no.5. One drop of starch solution is put into the first beaker, two into the 2nd, three drops into the 3rd, and so on. The chemical action of the starch on the water in the beaker turned the water blue. If the water had turned a little blue in the first beaker, then one scoopful of lime had to be put into the tank. If the 4th beaker was the first to turn blue, then four scoops of lime were needed. Of course the capacity of the water tank had to be ascertained. Knowing the number of gallons, say 200 and the chlorination was one scoop to the hundred—a solution of a beaker of water and two scoopfuls of lime was thrown into the tank. Seldom had we to work out the capacities and the chlorination, for such particulars were handed onto different men who were detailed for the job.'



Above: Illustration of Horrocks Box as drawn by Alfred in his diary.

Whilst Alfred was in France, all Sanitary Sections received instructions that they were to be assigned to a specific area, rather than following a particular division, as had been the practice between 1914-1916. This meant, that Sections could have a better impact on an area.

Above top right image: Drawing of tin of lime and scoop as illustrated by Alfred in his diary.

Bathing

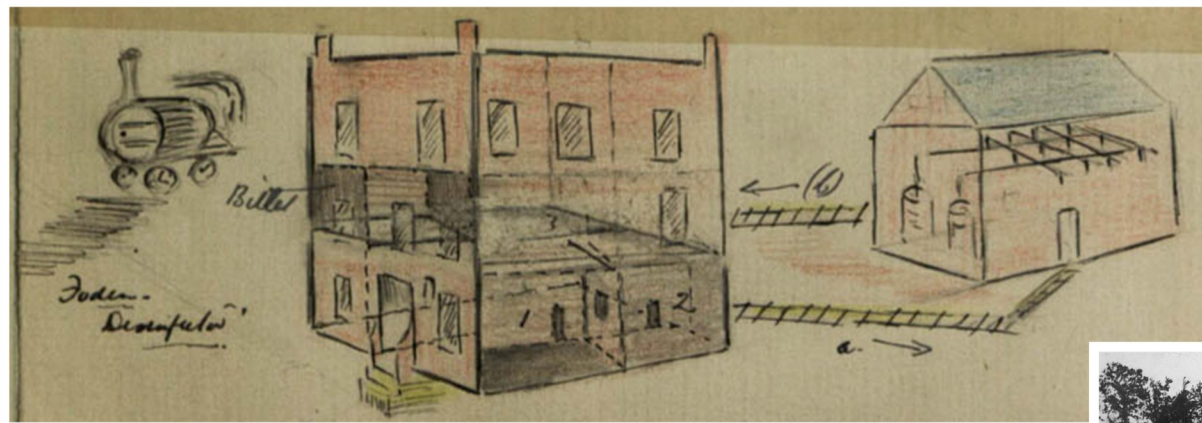


Image above: © IWM (Q 110658) British soldiers washing in makeshift baths possibly near Armentieres, 1915.

Image left: Illustration of 11th Division Baths and Foden Disinfector at Domart-en-Ponthieu, the Somme area of the Western Front (October 1916) as drawn by Alfred in his diary.

Image below: © IWM (Q 78691) British cavalry returning from bathing parade near Demuin, 14 August 1918.



When Alfred and the 21st Sanitary Section arrived at Domart in October 1916, they made the provision of baths one of their first duties. Baths were usually located close to soldiers' billets, so that when a soldier came out of the trenches, they could have a bath, get a change of underclothing and rest. Such an activity was vital for maintaining good morale. Alfred recalls the process of bathing on the Western Front:

'The baths in Domart were situated at the end of the village in a large brick house, standing in its own grounds. In the first room (1), the men stripped, throwing their dirty clothes through a square hole in the wall into room two (2) which was the dirty clothes rooms. They walked along a passage carrying their service dress which was dumped on the left of the corridor. The identity discs were fastened to the service dress. At this point, men of the baths working party carried service dress to the Foden to be disinfected. Having got rid of their service dress, the men walked over duck boarding (a) in their boots and of course in the nude. As in the sketch, there were 12 sprays—each capable of spraying two men with hot water. Two men were always attending to the geysers. Soap and towel for each man was provided.'

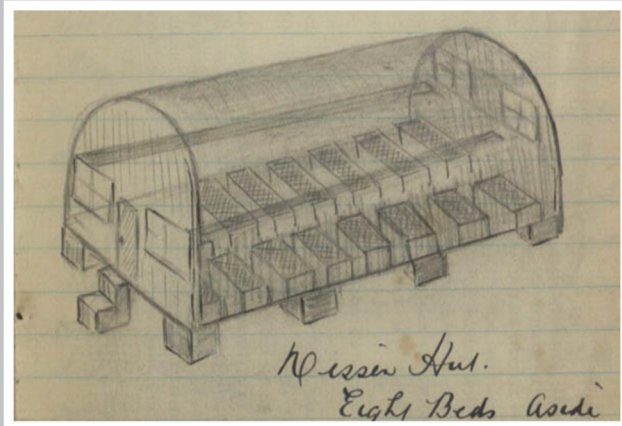
Alfred and Wally worked together from 7am until 6pm each day. About 50 men were able to bathe per hour, with a weekly average of 4,000 men. A working party of 12 men was needed for bath duty, with two men detailed to the Foden. Whilst the men bathed and showered, it took 30 minutes for their clothes to be disinfected in the Foden. Clothes were put in crates for disinfecting and afterwards, the lice were swept out.

Disinfection of Billets



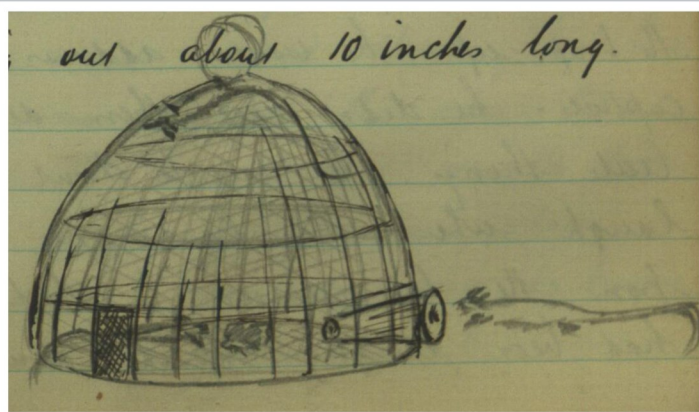
On the Western Front, soldiers slept in a variety of different billets ranging from cellars, stables, sheds, and houses, as well as temporary structures such as Nissen Huts. One of Alfred's main jobs during the last two years of war, was inspecting soldier billets including those of the Lincolnshire Regiment who were stationed near Bachant in November 1918. But, the billets were not to a satisfactory standard:

'One of the billets was a stable with cobbled floor and accommodated 50 to 60 men sleeping on the floor. The place was warm, very warm. The floor was covered with new hay and was clean. All the beds were rolled up and very tidy. I kicked up the hay where we were standing and discovered a foot and a half of manure below, steaming hot. The men had simply covered up the layer of manure with new hay. I instructed the colonel that a fatigue party was needed to clear the billet of all the manure, sweep out, put down new hay or straw and then the place would be fit to sleep in. If such was not done, all the men would probably come down with flu.'



Above: One of the many types of billets that soldiers stayed in.
A Nissen Hut as drawn by Alfred in his diary, July 1917.

Before billets were occupied they were sprayed with a disinfecting spray known as the 'Mackenzie spray' which consisted of cresol and water. However, soldiers shared their billets with unwanted guests: rats.



'Within a few minutes of sleeping in the chateau cellar, the rats by the dozen, were running over me, springing off and spraying onto the blanket—you could feel them and hear them. They rested on my box mattress, gnawed the tie covering, pulled out the flocks, ran away and came back. This went on all night and you wished it was time to get up. At 5am, I kicked up the blanket and a few rats—the cellar was over-run.'

Illustration left: Device to catch rats as drawn by Alfred in his diary, April 1917.
Image top right above: Postcard of Bienvillers-aux-Bois bought by Alfred in August 1917.

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Alfred records the various soldier leisure activities that took place within the billets. These ranged from playing the game 'Crown and Anchor', to smoking and reading the many things sent to him in the post such as his beloved 'Lloyds' (Sunday newspaper), and all important letters from his wife and family.

Image right: Lloyds Weekly News.

(Bishop Grosseteste University Collections, Lincoln). Alfred records in his diary that he received many *Lloyds*, all sent to him by his wife.

Lloyds was a popular Sunday newspaper launched by Edward Lloyd in 1842, for those who only had time to read at the weekend. During the First World War, it reached a circulation of 1.5 million.

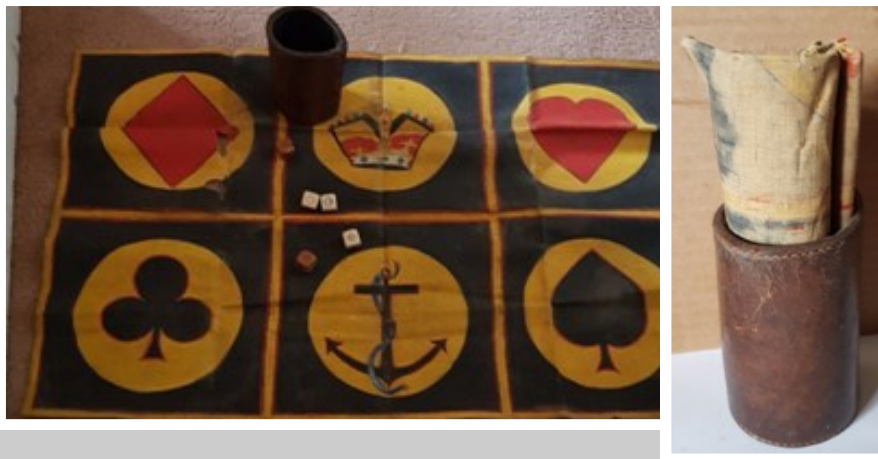


Image above: The Crown & Anchor game dates to the early 18th century, where it was popular amongst sailors (hence the symbols crown and anchor). The dice gambling game consists of three six-sided dice adorned with symbols (crown, anchor, spade, heart, diamond and club) and a board or cloth containing those same symbols. A cloth board was much more suited to life on the Western Front, as it could be easily rolled up and stored in a leather pouch. During the First World War, it was very popular amongst the ranks, but at the same time, it was frowned upon by the authorities. Alfred writes in his diary how a member of his section, Private White (from Barry, Wales) always had his Crown & Anchor board at hand to make some money, even when the Military Police were in close proximity. Alfred comments in one diary entry that had White been paid for every rat he caught in France, he would never have run his Crown & Anchor board. Before the war, Private White had worked as a rat-catcher at Cardiff (Barry) Zoo. (Bishop Grosseteste University Collections, Lincoln).



Image above: Player's cigarette card of the 11th Division which the 21st Sanitary Section was attached too in Egypt and France. Each division had its own insignia and the 11th Division's took the form of a cross with a handle—or as Alfred recorded in his diary, a 'key-hole'.

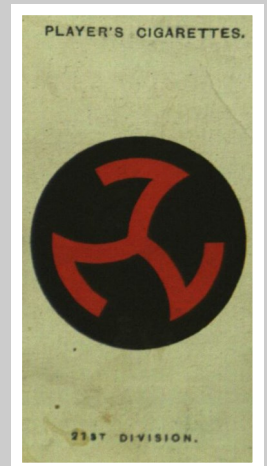


Image above right: Player's cigarette card of the 21st Division. Their insignia was the 'triple seven'. Alfred's best friend Wally was attached to the 21st Division in France during 1918.

Casualty Clearing Stations



Image above: © IWM (Q 8702)
Battle of St. Quentin. British walking wounded leaving a RAMC Casualty Clearing Station near Bapaume which was captured the next day, 23 March 1918.

Casualty Clearing Stations were located behind the front line and served as part of the casualty evacuation chain. Soldiers injured on the Western Front were brought to stations and assessed as to whether they could be treated and returned to fighting duty, or whether they needed longer term care elsewhere. Alfred and other Sanitary Section men found themselves called upon to assist during periods of high casualties such as the Battle of the Somme (July–November 1916).



Image above: © IWM Q 78449 The ruins of Aveluy, 3 June 1917.

The Chateau d’Aveluy served as a RAMC Casualty Clearing Station. Field ambulances and stretcher bearers brought in the wounded from the Thiepval area. A year after the Somme Offensive, Aveluy was in ruins. Returning from water duty in September 1916, Alfred took up stretcher work in the chateau grounds and spent a week of duty at the front:

‘The stretcher bearers carried the wounded down to Aveluy—over shell holes, wire, mud and pools, having taken hours to get from the line to the nearest dressing stations. Their plight was terrible—bearers carrying to exhaustion point; they brought in friend and foe—the stretcher bearers as muddy as the wounded.’

‘There was little time to sleep. The hospital ward was in a dugout near the chateau, in the grounds. The doctors worked and worked, with some even working on the wounded for 17 hours without a break. There they were in the stuffy subterranean ward, operating and bandaging in their shirt sleeves, unshaven, sweating and on the verge of collapse. Yet, still the poor wounded fellows are in brought in—when will it stop? Friend and foe side by side—scores of men with abdominal wounds, scores gassed, some raving mad, some blind—at times you felt like crying out in anguish.’



Image above: © IWM (Q 79508)
Shell shocked British soldier during the Battle of the Somme, 1916.

Alfred reflected on 24 men held in a barn in the chateau grounds. All the men suffered from shell shock. He wrote:

‘Their movements were strange, simple, childish and really unnerving—terrible to look at, nothing could be done for them, except take them away from the incessant bombardment.’

Shell Shock



During the Great War, over 80,000 soldiers were recorded as suffering from shell shock and many were invalided from the Army. Thousands more suffered mental trauma but were never diagnosed, let alone treated.

From 1916, there was a determined effort to reduce the burden of such casualties, which were numerous in actions on the Somme. Depletion of the ranks and concerns over pension liabilities led to greater emphasis on forward treatment in Casualty Clearing Stations. But many traumatised men remained at the front, where they were given rest and returned to duties within days.

Their experiences were a far cry from those of patients who received specialised psychiatric treatment in the relatively luxurious surroundings of hospitals in Britain. Some officers were initially sceptical that 'shell shock' cases were genuine and efforts were made to detect those who were shamming. But most men claiming to have shell shock were not treated harshly if their conduct had previously been good.

The notion that shell shock was a form of cowardice declined as it became apparent that most soldiers could succumb to the strains and terrors of combat. Shell shock was initially attributed to damage from explosions but it soon became apparent that there were other causes, most of which were emotional in nature. Although the term was banned in 1917 it lived on in popular memory.



Above: © IWM (Art.IWM ART 2376)

A full length depiction of a soldier, seemingly shell-shocked, standing in front of the edge of a dugout. It seems that his clothes have literally been blown away from his body, for he is naked but for a scrap of blanket across his hips, his boots and helmet. He stands in a classical pose holding the rifle delicately in his fingers and pointed away from his body. The ground is littered with debris, and there are the ruins of a village in the background. (William Orpen, Department of Information Commission, 1917).

Image top right: © IWM (Q 2477) Two stretcher-bearers bringing in a wounded man near Gavrelle, 28 June 1917. (29th Division Royal Field Artillery).

Armistice & Burial of the Dead



'An hour after the Armistice—12 noon, in front of me can be seen two lads lying still in death. They simply looked asleep but they were on their last sleep. Kneeling, I pulled away the straw, opened their great coats and took out from their breast pockets of their tunics, their pay books. Their identity discs being secure, I buttoned their great coats round them. This was my first duty after the Armistice on 11 November 1918. I go to the town mayor and hand over the pay books to him and he arranges a burial party straight away. These two comrades are to be buried in the communal cemetery at Bachant. In the afternoon, between 1.30 & 1.45 a small party of five or six men, could be seen making their way to the cemetery—bearing the two bodies on stretchers. There I stood in solemn silence as these two men of the line are borne to their last resting place. No Armistice Day will ever be like that of 1918.'

Image above: © IWM (Q 23612) British dead waiting to be buried at the Windmill British Cemetery, near Monchy-le-Preux. Photograph probably taken during the German Spring Offensive (March-July 1918).

The two men that Alfred buried were:

- Reginald Thomas Beaufoy, 1st Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment.
- Albert Dann, 7th Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment.

On the 3 March 1919, Alfred, along with his best friend Wally, returned home and to teaching but found it difficult to re-adjust to normal everyday life:

'Sitting at home after tea, a depression came over me every night during the first fortnight. I could see the men standing, waiting for a bus to take them back to the hospital. Men who had been gassed. I could see them clothed, entirely covered with the tiny yellow mustard flakes and powder. I could see them standing in a village, like gilded figures. The bombing came over me, the hushing, crashing, the rats, the lice, the Ancre, the Hindenberg Line. I would forget where I was and cried and sobbed as a child. I used to dread the time after tea.'

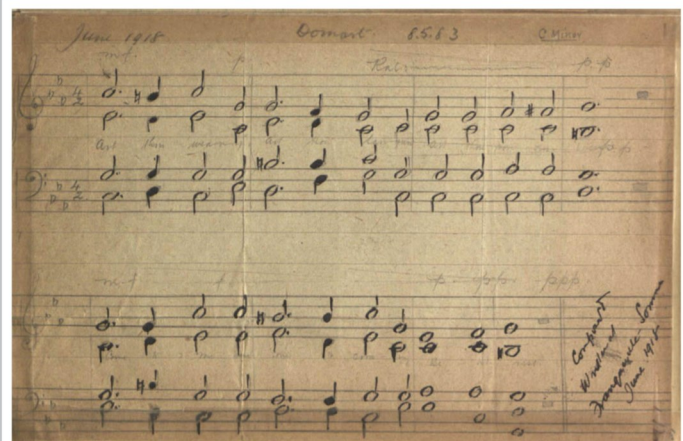
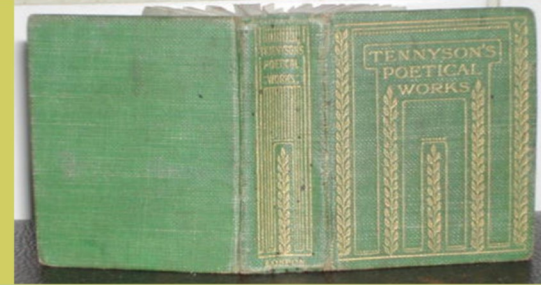


Image above: Music sheet with music composed by Alfred in June 1918. Alfred produced a complex harmonic composition, which is representative of his sombre mood having served three years on the Western Front. Piano music played and recorded by Samuel Bockock.

All those who served with the Sanitary Companies during the First World War did so *'under the stimulus of no glamour of combatant war, and whose duties were faithfully performed beyond the zone of the lime-light and the fringe of the honours list.'* Major P.S. Lelean, Royal Army Medical Corps and Professor of Hygiene at Royal Army Medical College (1920s).

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Poetry



The Ancre.

*So towards the Ancre wends its dreary course,
In North East France, from Artois to the Somme,
A Vale of Sacrifice and of Remorse,
Enshrines this Styx from Albert to Baupaume.*

*Across those Stygian shores, by day by night
Departed souls like shades are borne to rest
Victims of Shambles and of Moloch's might
Their temples strew this valley in the west.*

*This was Gehenna in those years of strife
Where they took on their last sleep all too soon
The Known and the Unknown relinquished life
When surges passed the Rubicon at Noon.*

*Here lies the Portal to the Great Beyond
The Arras Front, or of Elysian Fields.
Mansions lie broken in one common bond
The ghoulish harvest that death's sickle yields.*

*Abandon calls alike to friend and foe
"Destroy yourselves ye pawns of man's decree"
Dearly they sell their life in suff'ring woe
They take on death that others may be free.*

*Some vestiges by tumuli are known
Others unearthed in gruesome guise and form
No rest is meted out while death is sown
In this mêlée and sanguinary storm.*

*The air hangs heavy on this Ancre vale.
The breath of death; of gases and decay
While aural vapours inundate the dale
For thousands pass but once and melt away.*

*The obsequies do honour these at rest
Their winding trail so long is at its close
Alignments move with spectral forms abreast
Without command they pass to repose.*

Alfred was very fond of poetry and he even penned his own poems which are contained within the diary. He wrote the poem 'The Ancre' at the end of the war.

The poem takes its name from the Ancre river which runs through Albert and joins the river Somme. The Ancre river runs by the village of Aveluy which is where Alfred was assigned to the Casualty Clearing Station during the Battle of the Somme. In November 1916, the Battle of the Ancre formed one of the final phases of the Battles of the Somme. The poem is testament to the lasting effect of war on the men who experienced both the totality and futility of modern warfare.



Image above: This miniature hardback edition of *Tennyson's Poetical Works* was the perfect size for Alfred to carry around. It measures 2.25 inches x 1.8 inches x 1 inch. It was published by Eyre and Spottiswoode, London. (Bishop Grosseteste University Collections, Lincoln).

Image below: An exact copy (see above) of this miniature book of poetry sent to Alfred by his wife whilst he was serving in France. Alfred illustrates the book in the diary and records that on 29 September 1917, when he was working in Boiry St. Rictude, his best friend Wally bought it to him.

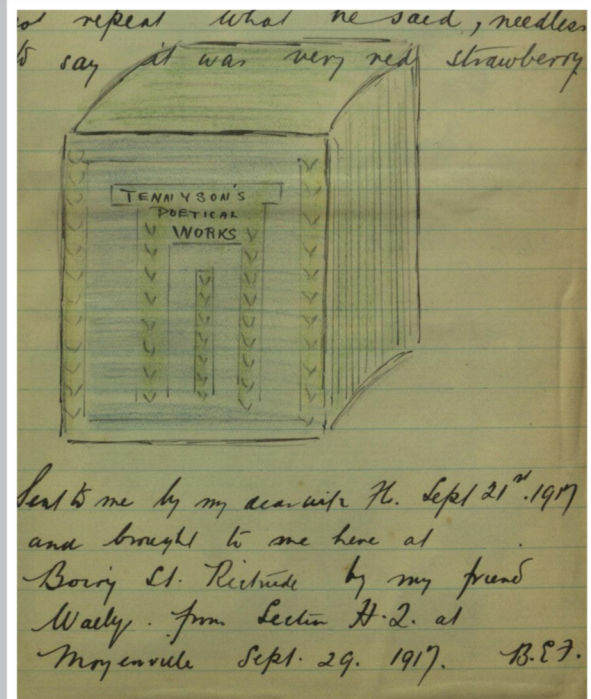


Image left: © IWM (Q 4501) Wounded British soldiers having tea and food at a dressing station near Aveluy Wood during the Battle of the Ancre, 13 November 1916.

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FOR FURTHER READING

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WEBSITES

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