



**"SANDBAG"**  
WINCANTON AND DISTRICT  
ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER



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**NEWS FROM THE BRANCH**

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**New Year 2021**  
**Wishing you all a happier New Year**

Branch secretary Steve  
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**Hoping for a better year - 2021**

To say that 2020 was a challenging year is an understatement but positive news is around and we are definitely positive about what we hope to do in 2021. Thankfully we were able to achieve our main objectives in 2020 and did manage to hold several key events - albeit in a scaled back form, indeed we were very happy how things turned out at Remembrance time especially and VJ Day did also go well.

We look forward to 2021 with several key events in mind which I would like to outline to you. During the last few months a new display cabinet has been made for the parish church provided for by a bequest from John Keynes, one of our last Normandy veterans who passed away in April 2019. The new cabinet exactly matches the cabinet in church which holds the Roll of Honour for our War Dead of the Second World War and has been in place since 2008. This was also donated to the church by a bequest from John's wife Ruth. The new cabinet will be used for the Roll of Honour of the First World War.



**Rolls of Honour (new cabinet on right)**

The Rolls of Honour have now been bound as it was found that the Second World War Roll had suffered from damp damage so now both Rolls have been replaced and reprinted on damp proof paper pages and matching covers, the cost being kindly provided by a donation from David Humphries. The final positioning of the cabinets in church has not yet been decided. Once government regulations allow us, we will have the Rolls rededicated and it is hoped that this will coincide with the formal ceremony of the Revd. Alison Way's acceptance of Chaplain to Wincanton Royal British Legion.

This year is also the 100th anniversary of the founding of the British Legion (as it was) and commemorations are intended but cannot go forward until the pandemic crisis is over. We can state though, that we fully intend being involved in all commemorations as Wincanton branch was one of the original branches to be formed 100 years ago.

In 2021 we hope to achieve closer cooperation with youth organisations locally and we are very happy to have made contact with our local Army Cadet Force (ACF) which is located at King Arthur's School and Guiding groups in our area with the intention of affiliating with both organisations. The ACF platoon are the cadet group attached to 1 Regiment Army Air Corps and it will be good to formally have a closer association with both the regular army unit and its cadet unit. We have had a long and close association with Guiding groups and once we are allowed and free of government restrictions we intend to go forward with this. We do hope to have full branch involvement with ceremonies and events associated with this and have the promise of RBL County presence with the formalisation process.



*As many of you realise, Steve Lee runs a first class website "Memorials To Valour" dedicated to those awarded the Victoria Cross. Steve came across this VC holder who was in fact was a Vicar near Castle Cary and lived near Bruton. Here is Steve's story of him.*

**Somerset's VC connections - Baltonsborough, Castle Cary, Batcombe and South Petherton**

**Captain, Temporary Chaplain,  
The Reverend Edward Noel Mellish VC MC  
Army Chaplain's Department attached 4th Royal Fusiliers**

Some years ago I became aware that a VC had retired to Somerset and was active as a vicar (Perpetual Curate), with connections to Baltonsborough, Castle Cary, Batcombe and South Petherton. After a little research I was soon able to track down an old neighbour of the Mellish's and I was soon to learn what a

special man he was. Since writing these articles I've become aware that other Branch members have also spoken first-hand with neighbours and I'm grateful for the information that was provided.

Noel Mellish VC MC was born in Oakleigh Park, Barnet on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1880 and was one of the very few vicars to be awarded the VC. He was awarded the VC for actions between 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> March 1916 at St Eloi, Belgium. His VC citation reads as follows;

*'His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to confer the Victoria Cross on The Reverend Edward Noel Mellish, temporary Chaplain to the Forces: For most conspicuous: bravery. During heavy fighting on three consecutive days he repeatedly went backwards and forwards, under continuous and heavy shell and machine-gun fire, between our original trenches and those captured from the enemy, in order to tend and rescue wounded men. He brought in ten badly wounded men on the first day from ground swept by machine-gun fire, and three were actually killed while he was dressing their wounds. The battalion to which he was attached was relieved on the second day, but he went back and brought in twelve more wounded men. On the night of the third day he took charge of a party of volunteers and once more returned to the trenches to rescue the remaining wounded. This splendid work was quite voluntary on his part and outside the scope of his ordinary duties'.*

Noel and his wife Elizabeth moved to Somerset in 1947, Elizabeth had previously lived with her parents in Somerset and felt drawn back to the county. He was appointed Perpetual Curate in Baltonsborough and you can see his name on the framed list of previous vicars at St. Dunstan's Church there. After six years there he retired and they moved to a farmhouse 'near Castle Cary', (not sure exactly where), following which they purchased a house in Batcombe near Bruton and he continued to take some Services from time to time. In 1959 they moved to Court House, South Petherton. Noel died on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1962, he was cremated at Weymouth Crematorium and his ashes were scattered in the churchyard of St. Mary the Virgin, Great Dunmow, Essex. It was of interest to learn that Tubby Clayton of Toc H fame was a regular visitor to Court House.

Steve



## Son of a one time Rector of Wincanton

When I was researching my book "More Than Just Names" one of the saddest things for me was being unable to find photos of some of the War Dead of our town. I had to close off the research in 2014 as I intended it to be published as part of the centenary commemorations and Poppy Appeal 2014. Since then more has come onto the internet and when Steve provided the VC story on the previous page it reminded me of the Rector's son who went to war and spurred me to check on the possibility of new photos appearing online. To my great pleasure I found that one more "anonymous" person can now have a face for us to be reminded of, that of Harold Grant Dalton MC who was the son of the Rector of Wincanton (from 1888 to 1896), his parents the Rev. Colin Grant-Dalton and Mrs. Amy Ellen Grant-Dalton were the first inhabitants of the then Rectory at Churchfield, Wincanton. The Rectory was recently the offices of South Somerset District Council and the Police Station.

Harold Grant-Dalton was born on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1890 in Churchfield and educated at Durnford School, Langton Matravers.

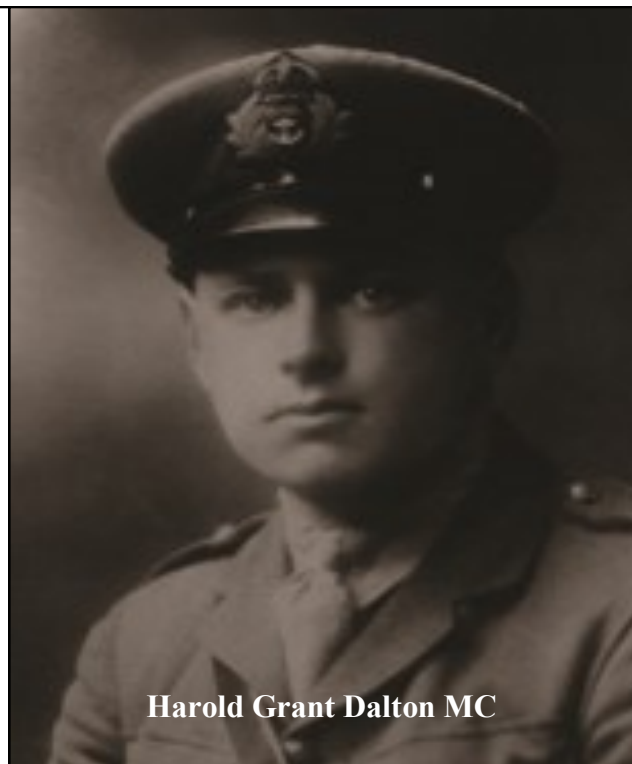
He also had a brother, Leslie, who was a regular soldier and lieutenant when war broke out. Leslie served with his regiment at Mons and Le Cateau and survived the war. Harold's home at the time of his death was The Estate Office, Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire and his mother by then a widow was living at Ellerthwait, Eastbourne.

Harold Grant-Dalton was a member of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and gained a temporary commission as Sub Lieutenant RNVR on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1916 and temporary Lieutenant 31<sup>st</sup> December 1917. He gained his commission after attaining the rank of Petty Officer. Then was drafted into the BEF on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1916 joining the Royal Naval Brigade, Hood Battalion, on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1916 and sent to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Infantry School between 28<sup>th</sup> December 1916 and 4<sup>th</sup> February 1917 when he rejoined Hood Battalion. He was awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous "gallantry and resource". His citation reads "*When all the officers of his company had become casualties he assumed the command and by his bravery and personal example was able successfully to defend an exposed piece of the line. He had on previous occasions done good work*" - London Gazette 18 July 1917 page 7230.

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 1918 he became wounded and missing. This was the third day of the last big German offensive and his battalion were in the Cambrai area of northern France when they took the full force of the attack, they were pushed back to the old Somme battlefields where they stood their ground and repulsed heavy German attacks. He was found by German troops and was taken prisoner of war and admitted to the German War Hospital at Ohrdruf south of Gotha, Germany. He had sustained gunshot wounds to the pelvis and died of

his wounds at 10 p.m. on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1918. He is buried in the Niederzwehren Military Cemetery, Kassel near Frankfurt. Plot IV. H.9., he was 28 years old. A report of his death was in the Western Gazette on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1918 and showed his estate as £24,033 which was a considerable sum in those days.

Up until now I could find no photograph of him but strangely whilst I was researching the book, his personal items appeared in a sale by a specialist militaria auction house and I showed the photo of his possessions on his page in my book (which are shown again in the photo on the left). The compass in the picture is inscribed that it was a prize for seamanship and the Military Cross is his original award. *Tony*



Harold Grant Dalton MC



## An interesting proposition

Several years ago David Mills and I were visiting the largest French military cemetery in the world, the Notre Dame de Lorette near Arras. The cemetery is the resting place of over 40,000 French casualties, almost all of whom died during World War I. (A sobering thought is that these 40,000 soldiers represent only 2.5% of the estimated 1.4 million French dead from that war). There is also an ossuary with 32 coffins containing the remains of 6000 French soldiers and an urn of ashes from Nazi concentration camps. Every day French veterans are in attendance paying respects and acting as guides for the many visitors. We met one of these veterans – Colonel Christian Dumont and he asked us if we had time the next day to visit his town, Neuville St. Remy, where in the cemetery are three British graves – two identified and one unknown all from the Royal Flying Corps and all died during the 1917 Battle of Arras. Also in the town is a memorial to the crew of an RAF Lancaster bomber which was shot down over the town in 1944 which Col. Dumont was instrumental in erecting. He told us that the graves of the two named airmen are those of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Edward Wallis Alleyne Hunt MC and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. George Bell Miller of the Royal Flying Corps. The townspeople hold regular acts of Remembrance at the airmen's graves and the memorial to the Lancaster. After that first meeting David and I have visited there again and with Col. Dumont held a joint ceremony at the graves. What struck both David and I was the great respect shown and the fact that a very large group of French veterans attended.

Colonel Dumont has since retired and has been elected as mayor of the town, and having kept in touch, over the last few months he has asked me if I can help him to make contact with any living relatives of the two airmen of the RFC. He has already undertaken extensive research on the airmen – the pilot, Edward Wallis Alleyne Hunt, Royal Flying Corps and observer/gunner George Bell Miller seconded from the Highland Light Infantry. Records show their date of death as originally 4th May 1917 but the date is somewhat questionable as that is when they were shown as missing on a mission late evening on 30<sup>th</sup> April/1<sup>st</sup> May 1917 and the most likely date they were killed is 1<sup>st</sup> May, which is the date listed on the Commonwealth War Graves information. The Battle of Arras was taking place at the time and their aircraft of No. 18 Squadron RFC was a FS2B type and took off from its base at Bertangles a village north of Amiens on a night bombing mission late on the evening of 30<sup>th</sup> April 1917. Amongst the targets was Eswars, a German occupied airfield near Neuville St. Remy. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May a German patrol found wreckage of an FE2B aircraft and from the serial number has been identified as the aircraft flown by Hunt and Miller. There were no German records claiming an aircraft had been shot down but from British records it must have been between 9.30 pm on 30<sup>th</sup> April and 12.30 am on 1<sup>st</sup> May because of the fuel range of the aircraft. This coincides with the air bombing of Eswars airfield. The wreckage of the aircraft does not appear to have been badly damaged by gunfire and appears to have nose-dived into the ground. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Edward Hunt MC was born in Sidcup in 1893, the son of Edward and Sarah Hunt. Their address at the time of his death was 24 Harold Road, Upper Norwood. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Hunt was posthumously awarded the Military Cross which was announced in the London Gazette on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1918 with little information as to his act of bravery which earned him this. It may be assumed that as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Hunt was involved in an action on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1917 when on a reconnaissance mission of No. 18 Squadron RFC was attacked by six German fighters led by Lt. Adolph Schulte – minor German ace with “8 kills”. Schulte was shot down and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Hunt was partially credited with shooting him down along with two other pilots of No 18 Squadron. This is well documented in records but little on his citation for the Military Cross. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. George Bell Miller was the son of George and Mary Miller of 56 Forfar Road, Maryfield near Dundee and after several years in China working for the Hongkew Wharf Company returned home and enlisted in the Highland Light Infantry later transferring to the Royal Flying Corps and commissioned as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. He was aged 24 years when he was killed. I am in the process of following up on a few clues about the two airmen and once the Covid pandemic is over Colonel Dumont intends to hold a ceremony for them. In 2010 Wincanton RBL received an invite to attend a similar ceremony in the small village of Pernes Lez Boulogne near Boulogne at the graves of two British soldiers buried in their cemetery, one of whom was Humbert Cox, the father of our member Jean Pipe. Then a dozen members of the branch attended and it is hoped we can do something similar in Neuville St. Remy. We would like to attend with standards and Colonel Dumont has a piper and bugler lined up. It will be a memorable experience but very dependent on the progress of the Covid pandemic. *Tony*