



DEATH AND SERVICE NEWSLETTER

It may only have been four weeks since the last newsletter, but so much has been packed in to those weeks that it seems a lot longer than it actually was!

Drayton Street Fair was a great event and, from my perspective, a really successful one. Thank you to everyone who came along and said hello, and for those of you who have been in touch since. It was really inspiring to be surrounded by like-minded people, and the response to what I am doing with Death and Service was very much appreciated, and reassuring.

Confirmation also came through about the next event I will be attending (and one I have kept a bit of a lid on up till now). The Burnham Book Festival takes place every year in the seaside town and has a host of authors giving talks and running workshops on their craft. And this year, I have been invited along too! Details later in this issue.

On top of this, I have made a definite start on the next book, which focuses specifically on the German air raid on Chatham in September 1917. It's something that is close to my heart, and which seems to have faded from memory, with much less information available about it, compared to some other episodes from the First World War.

In this issue, we visit the last of the four points of the compass, heading east to Kent. There are also some recent news WW1-related articles from the last few weeks, and news of a second certification!

Until next time.

Richard

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Keep in touch:

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<https://deathandservice.co.uk/>

Facebook: [@deathandservice](#)

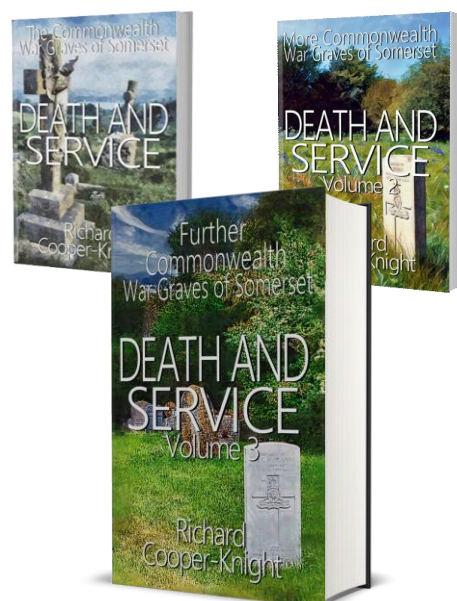
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Death and Service:
Volumes 1-3 are available in
paperback and eBook.



HARD AT WORK

Plans have been afoot for a while, but this month I have taken the plunge, and I have started work on the next *Death and Service* book. While the *Commonwealth War Graves of Somerset* series cover a range of locations and people, in this standalone book, I follow a different path.

On the 3rd September 1917, German bombers carried out an audacious night time air raid on the United Kingdom. By the time they returned their Belgian airfield, there was a trail of devastation and death across the Kent town of Chatham.

The new book looks at the lead up to the raid, and the events of that destructive night. As you would expect, I have also researched the men who were killed, and they will be commemorated in the same way as the Somerset burials have.

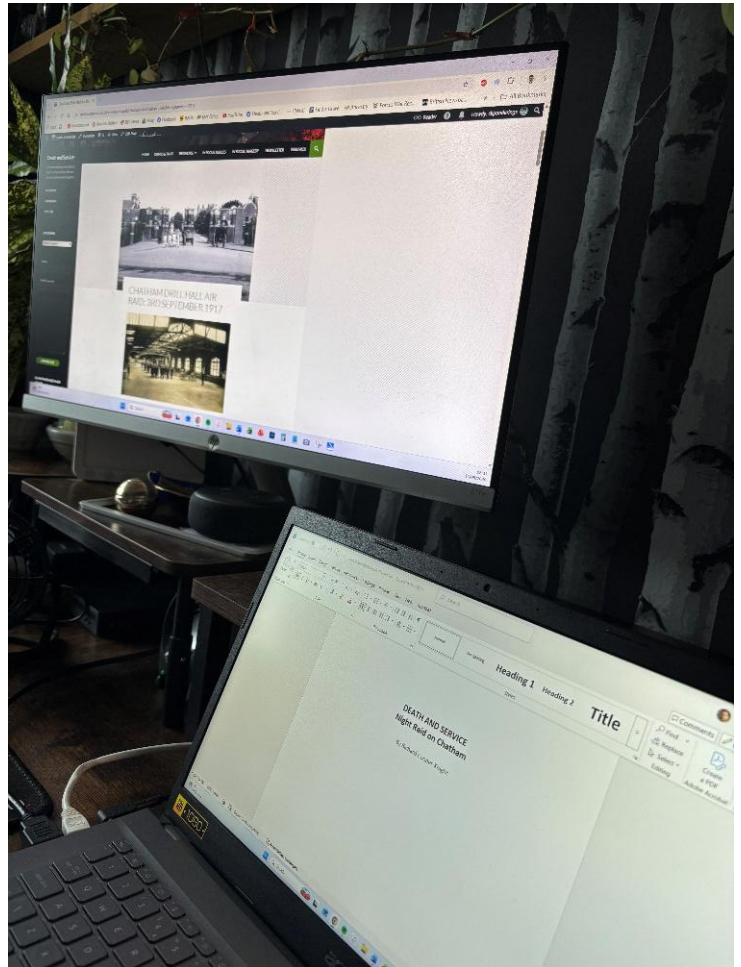
It is fair to say that writing the book has taken me in a different direction that the ones that have come before. Where the Somerset books have included little beyond the grave research itself, writing about the event has led to a lot more research, and for the first time I have found myself referencing other authors, albeit that there is little formally documented about the event.

The addition aspect of collating the citations in the form of endnotes is something I have not had to do before, so the overall process is pushing me in ways that previous writing has not.

This is in no way a negative thing, I hasten to add. I find the writing process rewarding, although the last time I had to work in this way was at university. Ironically, back then, the formal process of reading, researching and citing was the part of my studies I found least enjoyable. I think my passion for the subject this time around makes the whole process feel more engaging, and so seems easier.

There is a long way to go, it has to be said. The content is based on the grave research I have already done, and a talk I have given to the Somerset Western Front Association (and will be giving again to the Wessex WFA and the Medway Archives in the new year). I have found, however, that writing crib notes for a talk and writing half-a-book are two very different things. Time is (currently) on my side, however, as I am not planning its release until spring 2027, ahead of the 110th anniversary next September.

I am sure updates will follow in the coming months, so stay tuned!



GRAVE OF THE MONTH



Grave Location:
Faversham Cemetery
Love Lane
Faversham
Kent
ME13 8BJ

Name: Millgate, Ernest

Rank: Gunner

Regiment: Royal Garrison Artillery

Date of death: 15th September 1914

Age at time of death: 21

Cause of death: Accidental shooting

Ernest Millgate was born in late 1893, the fifth of six children to Henry and Agnes. Henry was a brewer's drayman from Boughton, Kent, but it was in nearby Faversham that he and Agnes raised their family.

Ernest found work as a labourer in the town's Cotton Powder Works, but when war was declared, he was one of the first to enlist. He joined the Royal Garrison Artillery as a Gunner on 5th September 1914, and was billeted nearby on the Isle of Sheppey. His service records show that he stood 5ft 9ins (1.75m) tall, had fair hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion.

Gunner Millgate's military service was to be tragically short, as a contemporary local newspaper was to report:

A terrible tragedy occurred at Minster, Sheppey, on Tuesday morning last, Ernest Millgate... who joined the Kent Heavy Battery barely a fortnight ago, being accidentally shot by a comrade, George Walter Cornelius... a gunner of three years' service in the same Battery.

Gunner Cornelius, it appears, was handling a rifle preparatory to going on sentry duty shortly after eleven o'clock on Tuesday morning. On examining the rifle he had found that the magazine was charged but that there was no charge in the bore. Apparently the cut-off was in operation, for he pulled the trigger and there was no discharge. He examined the breech a second time and, afterwards pulled the trigger again. To his dismay there was this time a discharge and Millgate, who was standing near, fell dead, having been shot through the head. The theory is that Cornelius' great coat, which he was wearing, caught in and released the cut-off, thereby bringing the magazine into operation.

[Faversham Times and Mercury and North-East Kent Journal: Saturday 19th September 1914]

An inquest was held, and it was a verdict of accidental death was given.

Gunner Ernest Millgate was just 21 years old, and had been in the service of the army for just eleven days. His body was

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brought back to Faversham, and he lies at rest in the town's Borough Cemetery, just a few minutes' walk from the home he had left just a fortnight before.

The same newspaper also ran a report on Ernest's older brother, Henry.

Private Millgate was a volunteer for the Northumberland Fusiliers, and was called into active service a couple of weeks before his brother. He had been caught up in the fighting at Mons, le Cateau and the Marne, and was, according to the newspaper, injured.

Medically evacuated to England for treatment, at the time of his brother's funeral he was in a hospital in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Henry survived the war; he and his wife, Elizabeth, had two children, and he lived until 1939, passing away at the age of 52 years old.

Did you know?

Zeppelins carried out a total of 51 bombing raids on Britain during the First World War. 557 people were killed and more than 1300 injured during their attacks.

The airships were slow and large targets, however, and British air defences learned to strike back. Of the 84 German airships that took part in raids, 30 were downed or lost in accidents.



DRAYTON STREET FAIR

A Somerset village went back to the Second World War earlier in the month, when the Drayton Street Fair took on a 1940s theme for its biannual event.

The History Marquee was full of stalls from the likes of the History Hut, the Western Front Association and English Heritage. I was fortunate enough to be invited to attend as well, and it was a real pleasure.

The weather was kind – no rain, and not too warm – and it was a busy event. While my focus is on the First World War, I didn't feel out of place with the 1940s theme, and it was lovely to be able to talk to like-minded enthusiasts.

Thank you to everyone who came along and said hello. 😊



IN THE NEWS

Discovered during a house clearance in Grimsby, a painting of a passenger steamship that was chased across the English Channel by a German submarine came up for auction this month.

The SS Wrexham was used by the Great Central Railway at the turn of the century, to ferry passengers from the Humber Estuary and back. On 2nd March 1915, the enemy vessel intercepted Wrexham, but the British ship's captain, James Fryatt, refused to stop when he was ordered. He then raced the ferry across the North Sea, arriving at Rotterdam less than a quarter of a mile ahead of the U-boat.

The speedy voyage damaged the ship's funnel, and Wrexham spent time being repaired. Fryatt was given command of another ferry – the SS Brussels – but in the summer of 1915 she was tracked and trapped by a number of German torpedo boats, and the captain was put on trial, condemned to death and shot the same day.



The artwork, which was painted by Dutch artist Alfred Jansen, went under the hammer with another attributed to him of the ferry SS Dewsbury (seen above in the John Taylors' auction catalogue). The pieces reached £350 at the auction.



There was come shocking news this month, as a Somerset war memorial has been defaced by vandals.

The Grade II-listed monument on Ham Hill, near Stoke-sub-Hamdon, stand tall and proud above the surrounding countryside. On the night of the 8th/9th August, miscreants etched a series of obscene language into the stone obelisk.

The local parish clerk remarked that the fact that the graffiti was etched into the stone, rather than scrawled on in paint or ink, showed that the vandals had taken time and effort to cause the damage.

The culprits are being sought, but it is likely that the cost for the monument's repair will fall to the parish council.



Doubly certified!

Following on from last month's confirmation of a diploma in World War One studies, I have now also competed a similar exam in Genealogy.

I've been researching family history for more than 20 years, and the Death and Service project has been running since 2020. Once again, this diploma helps me recognise that I do know what I'm talking about!

If you're interested in discovering more about your ancestors' experiences during the First World War, and would like some support with your research, please feel free to get in touch. I'd be very happy to help.



The annual Burnham Book Festival takes place on **Saturday 17th October**.

This year's line-up includes a wide range of workshops and talks, including Helen Pugh looking at the Unsung Women in Somerset, Thomas Rutter exploring gardening in harmony with nature, and Stephen Moss paying tribute to the late, great Bill Oddie.

I've also been fortunate enough to be asked to talk at the event about the WW1 war graves in the county.

For full details – including booking tickets – visit the Burnham Book Festival link [here](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS (CLICK ON THE POSTER TO LEARN MORE)

RICHARD COOPER-KNIGHT



Death and Service

burnhambookfest.co.uk

Sat 17th Oct 2026 at 5:00 pm

DEATH AND SERVICE: THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES OF SOMERSET

TICKETS >

Thursday 22nd October 2026 7:30pm

Death and Service:



The Commonwealth War Graves of Somerset

There are more than 800 First World War graves in over 240 cemeteries and churchyards across Somerset.

Each of the names on those gravestones has a story connected to it, a story of family and of tragedy, a story of life on the battlefield and of love on the home front.

The *Death and Service* series of books aim to shed light on the servicemen and women behind the names on these headstones, to bring the long-forgotten names to life again, more than a century after they were lost.

Wellington Museum & Local History Society,
Wellington Prep School TA21 8NT

Monday 2nd November 2026 7:30pm

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Pensford Local History Group
Pensford Memorial Hall BS39 4HW

Tuesday 3rd November 2026 7:30pm

Death and Service:



The Commonwealth War Graves of Somerset

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Radstock Museum, Chilcompton Village Hall BA3 4EX