

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg
Nicholas Cobbold OBE

A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE

Nov 2013

Those who have taken battlefield tours will know that they are profoundly moving; never more so than first time. This, plus the Armistice Day Commemoration at the Menin Gate in Ypres (Wipers, as the troops knew it!) left me breathless. That they kept their sense of humour and did their duty in rat-infested trenches standing deep in mud with the temperature below zero beggars belief. Such was the British Tommy!

In remembrance of those who did not return, and in the hope that such events will never, ever, be repeated, I feel muted happiness for making the trip; thinking particularly of our own, it is the sort of thing that a family history trust should do.

I travelled with Leger Silver Service (excellent value and organisation throughout) and our tour guide was their head man, Paul Reed, an acknowledged expert WWI historian with five books and a number of TV appearances to his name. His contribution simply could not have been improved upon; it was exemplary. We visited the 'Aristocrats Cemetery' at Zillebeke, the Passchendale Museum, the Hooge Crater, Hill 60, Tyne Cot and Essex farm; the last being the site of the field dressing station where, in May 1915, the Canadian doctor, John McCrae wrote the immortal *In Flanders Fields*.



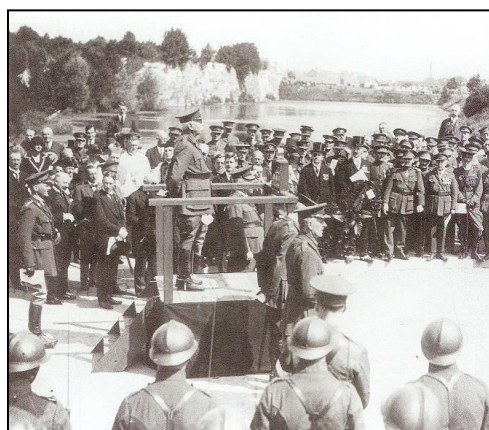
Anthony in the Market Square



The Menin Gate 11th November 2013

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With permission from the Last Post Association (who also organise the daily 8.0pm sounding) I joined the Veterans' Parade and behind a tall and very efficient Wren and in front of a Captain in the Royal Marines, who helpfully kept us in step, marched from the Market Square up to the Menin Gate itself for the 11.00am silence after which we handed over our wreaths. The dedication on the Trust's wreath has already been published so I will not repeat it, but I do have a little tailpiece.



Field Marshal Plumer speaking at the
Dedication Ceremony (CWGC, Maidenhead)

Added to my breathless admiration was a touch of personal pride. It was my cousin, Field Marshal Plumer (arguably one of the better WWI commanders) who dedicated the Menin Gate at 11.00am on 24th July 1927. In an emotional speech (learned by heart) he spoke of the grief of those who had no known grave at which to mourn and expressed the hope that the Menin Gate memorial would lighten their burden; an idea encapsulated in his now famous words "*He is not missing. He is here.*"

Anthony Cobbold
November 2013

Note: I was privileged to wear, by kind permission of his son, Richard, the medals of Lt. Cdr. Alistair Philip Cobbold RNVR (1907-1971) (#472 in the family tree) who was mentioned in despatches for his part in the Madagascar landing in 1942.