

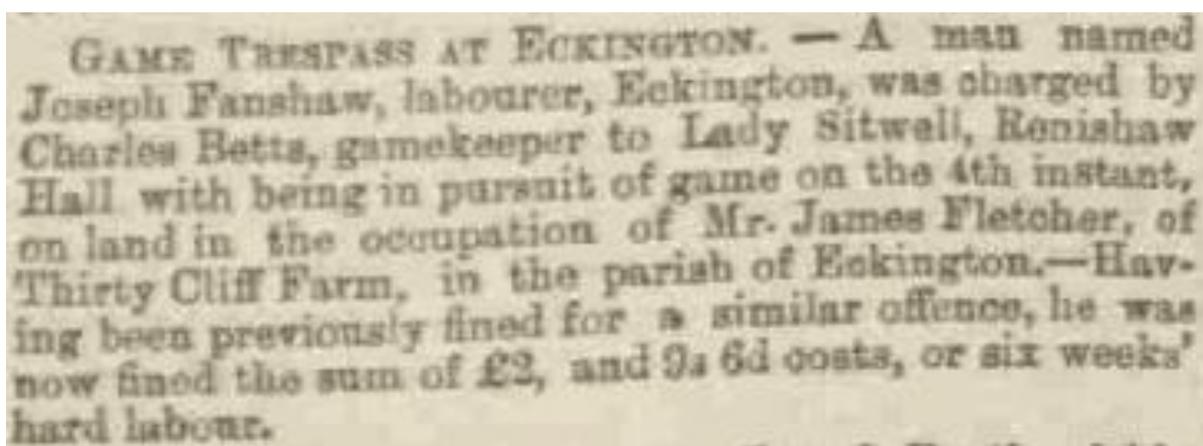
## Rifleman Sydney Currie Betts

Prelude. The Battle of Arras was a British offensive on the Western Front during World War I. From 9<sup>th</sup> April to 16<sup>th</sup> May 1917, British troops attacked German defences near the French city of Arras on the Western Front. The British achieved the longest advance since trench warfare began, surpassing the record set by the French Sixth Army on 1 July 1916. The battle eventually became a costly stalemate for both sides and by the end of the battle the British Third and First armies had suffered about 160,000 casualties and the German 6th Army 125,000 casualties.<sup>i</sup>

Sydney's great-grandparents, Thomas and Elizabeth Betts, lived in Carlton, Bedfordshire.<sup>ii</sup> The 1851 census describes Thomas as a 'destroyer of vermin and a sweep' and Elizabeth as a 'lace maker'. Their four sons, John (b 1831), Thomas (b 1836), Charles (b 1838) and Henry (b 1840) are described as 'sweeps' and the two daughters Fanny (b 1842) and Mary Anne (born 1845) as lace makers like their mother.

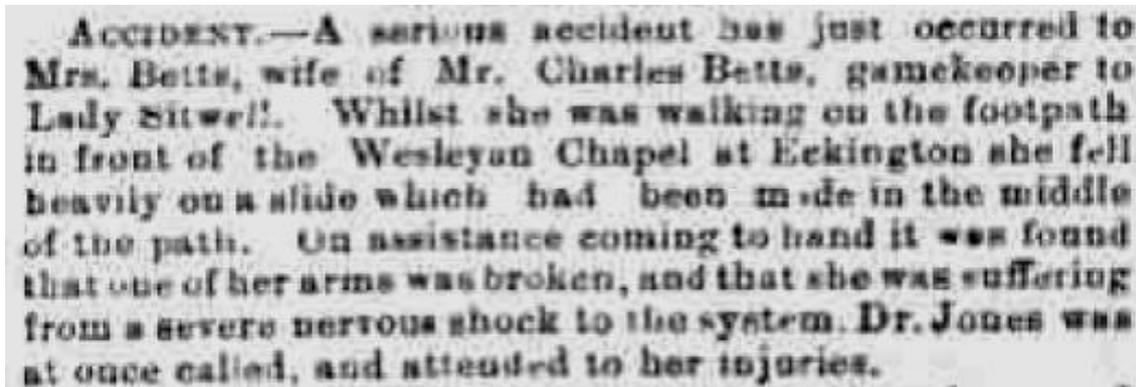
By the time the 1861 census was taken on 7<sup>th</sup> April, the second eldest son, Charles, had become a gamekeeper. Exactly two months later, on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1861, he married Mary Ann Hall, daughter of Mark Hall, in Carlton.<sup>iii</sup>

Charles and Mary left Carlton around 1865 to take up residence in Eckington, Derbyshire where Charles had secured a position as gamekeeper to Lady Sitwell of Renishaw Hall.<sup>iv</sup> D. H. Lawrence is said to have used the local village of Eckington and Renishaw Hall as inspiration for his novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.<sup>v</sup> The characters, Mr and Mrs Betts, appear in his book.<sup>vi</sup> The 1980 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* used footage shot at Renishaw Hall.



**Figure 1: Newspaper cutting naming Charles Betts as gamekeeper to Lady Sitwell of Renishaw Hall**

In 1871, Charles and Mary were living at Harbour Lands Woods, Eckington with their five children, Charles Hall (born 1863), Ernest (born 1864), Albert Edwin (born 1865), Georgina Isabella (born 1867) and John William (born 1875). Charles was still actively carrying out his duties as a game keeper for the Renishaw Hall estate, taking several poachers to court.<sup>vii</sup>



ACCIDENT.—A serious accident has just occurred to Mrs. Betts, wife of Mr. Charles Betts, gamekeeper to Lady Sitwell. Whilst she was walking on the footpath in front of the Wesleyan Chapel at Eckington she fell heavily on a slide which had been made in the middle of the path. On assistance coming to hand it was found that one of her arms was broken, and that she was suffering from a severe nervous shock to the system. Dr. Jones was at once called, and attended to her injuries.

**Figure 2: Newspaper report of Charles' wife falling and breaking her arm in December 1879**

Charles Hall Betts became a gardener and in the 1891 census, he is recorded as a 'nurseryman' and living as a boarder with the Sharratt family in St Pauls Street West, Burton Extra, Staffordshire. In the autumn of 1892, Charles married Margaret Michison Ainsworth in Chorlton-on-Medock, an inner city area of Manchester. The couple are recorded as living at 24, East Grove in June 1893.<sup>viii</sup> (Margaret, nee Oliver, was the widow of David Stansford Ainsworth. She had married in the autumn of 1887 and gave birth to a son William the following year. Just two years later, in 1889, David died, aged 29 years. He left Margaret £126 15s in his estate about £15,210 in today's money. In the 1891 census, Margaret and son, William, were living with her parents in Moston Lane Harpurhey, Prestwich. Margaret is described as a 'dressmaker'.<sup>ix</sup>)

In 1901, Charles and Margaret with their four children, Charles Oliver (b 1893), Sydney Currie (born 4<sup>th</sup> February 1895)<sup>x</sup>, Aurelius Victor (b 1896) and Estella Eulalia (b 1899), together with Margaret's son, William, and her mother Hannah were living at 51 Northern Grove, Chorlton, Lancashire. Charles was a commercial traveller. By the following year the family had moved to Birmingham where another son, Ulric Ernest, was born in 1902. The family are recorded as living at 68 Oxford Road, Moseley in 1911. Charles was a commercial traveller, in the bronze powder industry. The powder was used in the paint and coating industry to produce an aesthetic and functional finish to metal products. Charles became a man of letters and published several books. They included: *'The Education of the Soul'* and *'The Universal Presence and Spiritual Spheres'*

which were published in 1909 and 1911 respectively. Charles Betts, LL.D, LHD went on to write, 'Living Pleasures: or the Constituents of a Life of Pleasure' in 1912, 'Self Realisation' in 1913, 'The Man on the Road' in 1914, 'The Next War: The British Industries Fair' in 1916 and 'Sacrificial Rites and Practices' in 1917.<sup>xi</sup>

**SELF-REALISATION.** By Charles H. Betts, LL.D. (Clarke.) 2s. 6d. net.

Dr. Betts is a man of wide reading and a reflective habit of mind, who lives amid the choice thoughts of modern thinkers. His book, it must be said, is somewhat jerky in style and amorphous in method. But it is a wholesome vade-mecum affording inspiration to spiritual energy and guidance for spiritual activities. Here is an example of his frankness in speculating on the mystery of the future state. "It is plainly evident that the next state of existence will be a series of progressions. We shall rise from stage to stage, adding perfection to perfection, becoming more divine as the mous of eternity roll by." Dr. Betts is a man of catholic tastes, and gives his hospitable pages to thoughts from authors of very unequal value. Thus we find side by side quotations from Smiles and Mazzini, from Dr. Campbell Morgan and Sir Oliver Lodge. The result is a series of reflections, sometimes profound, sometimes platitudinarian, reminiscent sometimes of "Guesses at Truth," sometimes of "Proverbial Philosophy." Perhaps it is our fault that it is the latter element that abides in our memory after an unbiased perusal of the volume.

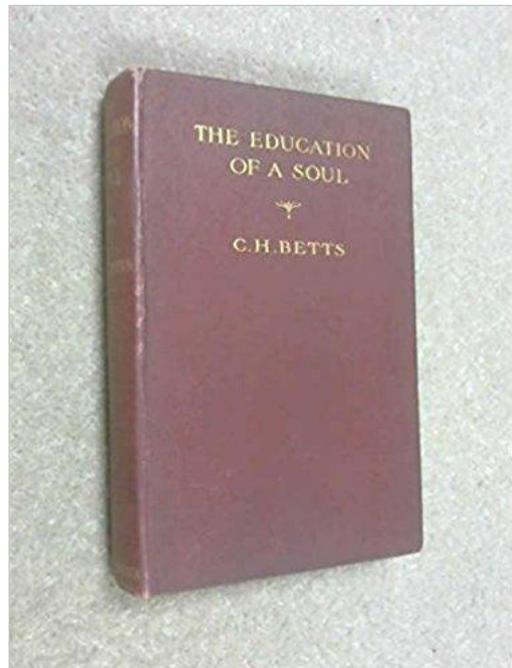


Figure 3; Review of Charles Hall Betts book on Self Realisation in June 1914

Figure 3: A hardback version of one of Charles H Betts books

**BRONZE POWDERS**

PALE GOLD, RICH GOLD, RICH PALE GOLD, LIGHT ORANGE, DARK ORANGE, DEEP GOLD, COPPER AND ANTIQUE

**ALUMINIUM POWDER**  
LINING AND LAC

**"PLATANA" ALUMINIUM PAINT**  
GOLD AND SILVER PAINTS, ENAMELS, VARNISHES, ETC.

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ENQUIRIES INVITED BY  
**Chas. H. BETTS & Co. Ltd.**  
CANADA WORKS, HANOVER STREET,  
BIRMINGHAM. 5  
Phone : CAL 1678  
Grams : Bettsana Birmingham

The 1929 Industrial Fair Guide records Charles H Betts & Co as a listed exhibitor of Arts and Crafts Materials and accessories, shell-flowers, art and lacquering enamels, gold and silver paints, aluminium Paint, leather stains, lustre powders, Bettsana specialities for home and general decoration (Stand No. C.1).<sup>xii</sup> The company was wound up voluntarily on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1960 by Charles Oliver Betts, director, Sydney's eldest brother, who survived the war.

Figure 5: Advertising poster of Charles H Betts & Co Ltd

When war was declared on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, Sydney Betts was working as a photoengraver. Eight months later, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1915, Sydney enlisted at Birmingham in the 15<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Rifle Brigade as a private, No S/9494. At the time of his enlistment Sydney was 20 years and 59 days old, stood 5' 1" tall and weighed 113 lbs. Following a period of training Sydney was posted to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade in France on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1915, most likely to make up the numbers lost in the Battle of Hooze, where the Germans first used *flammenwerfer*, or flamethrower to devastating use.

When Sydney arrived in France he found himself in the Ypres sector. The War Diary for the 7<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade, 14<sup>th</sup> Division for 21<sup>st</sup> December 1915 lists him as being in 'A' Coy.<sup>xiii</sup>

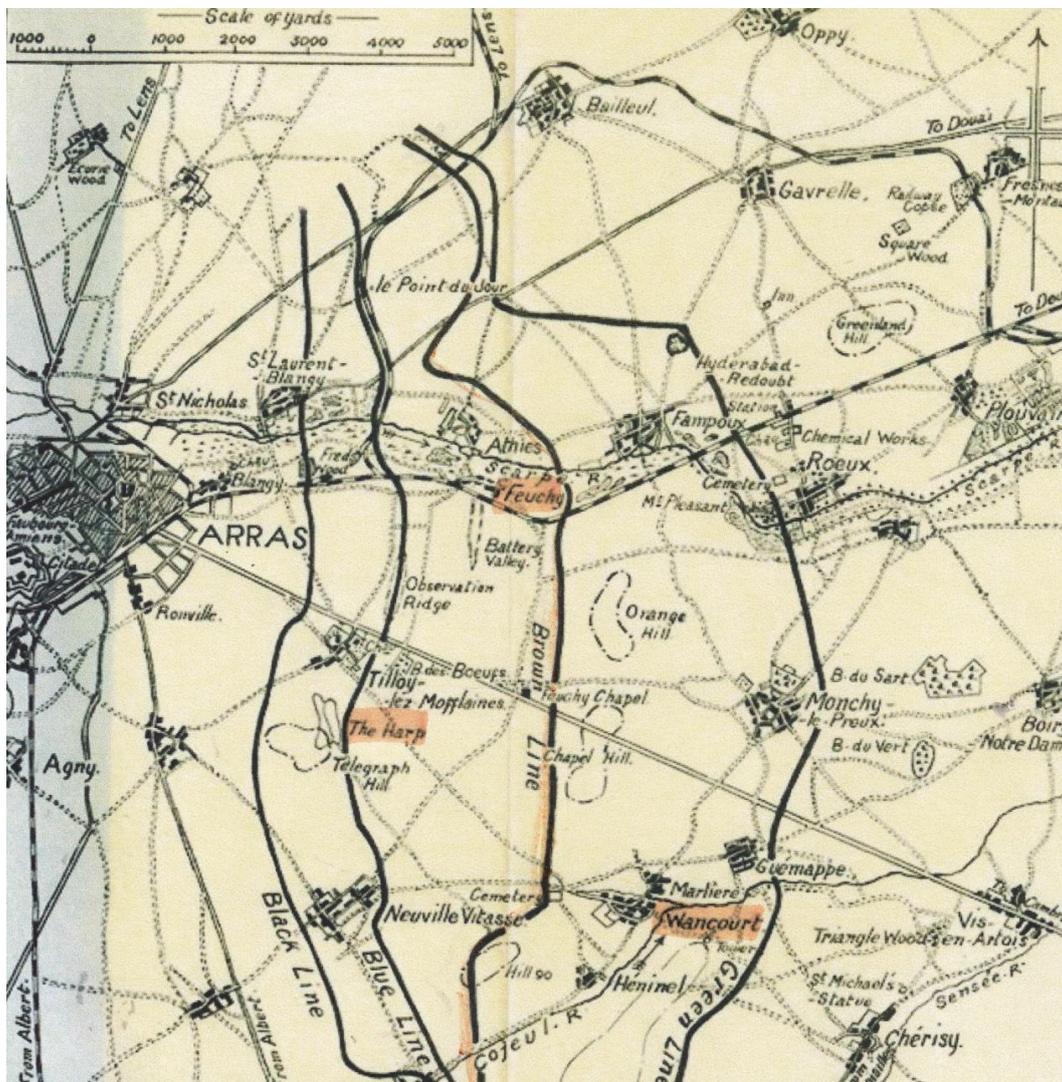
On 28<sup>th</sup> February the 7<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade were marched to Arras where they were in support trenches at Roelincourt during the first month of the Battle of the Somme. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 1916, they took up front line positions in Delville Wood where they sustained in excess of 238 casualties by the 31<sup>st</sup> August. After rest and training, the 7<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade were back fighting at Delville Wood on 15<sup>th</sup> September and on that one day alone suffered 298 casualties. Amazingly Sydney was left unscathed. Over the winter the battalion spent their time training, in reserve or the front-line trenches, waiting for the weather to improve and for the start of the Spring Offensive. The men spent some respite time in the underground Ronville caves in Arras. The Commanding Officer described them in the battalion war diary as:

Caves, in chalk excavations, of considerable antiquity under the suburbs of Arras. The depth varies from 70 to 90 feet. Various exits have been cut out for military requirements. They are lit by electricity throughout. A touch damp. A complete absence of noise from the guns.



**Figure 6: The Ronville caves under Arras**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917, the Battle of Arras commenced. Zero hour was 5.30 am. The first objective was 'The Harp' defences due south of Tilloy, the second objective, the Feuchy line and 800 yards further on the village of Wancourt.



**Figure 7: Map showing the position of 'The Harp' south of Tilloy, the first objective in the Battle of Arras on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917. The brown line is the 'Feuchy' line and behind it Wancourt**

On the following day, 10<sup>th</sup> April, the advance continued at noon. 'A' Coy was in the rear of the 7<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade. After a stop for a meal, the battalion made ready for the final advance with supporting cavalry. A heavy snow storm blew in the face of the enemy and concealed the brigade's movements for a while. As the brigade continued their advance, a considerable artillery barrage opened up together with rifle fire from the enemy, who were entrenched at Wancourt and the ridge behind it, causing some casualties. The cavalry advance was checked by wire in the front of their objective and the advance came to a halt.

At about 3.30 am on 11<sup>th</sup> April, orders were received to attack Wancourt at 6.30 am. The British artillery barrage entirely failed and the advance was checked by heavy rifle fire from the front and enfilade from right and rear. After considerable confusion the companies were reorganised as before and the Lewis guns effectively silenced the enemy rifle and machine gun fire.

On 12<sup>th</sup> April the Germans evacuated Wancourt.<sup>xiv</sup>

There is some confusion as to the date that Sydney was killed. The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1917 reports that:

Lewis-Gunner Sydney C Betts, 7<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade, killed instantly whilst in action on 11<sup>th</sup> April last, aged 21. Two other brothers are serving.

APPENDIX 73(a)

7th Battn. The Rifle Brigade.  
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Casualty Return.  
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No.	Rank and Name	Coy.	Nature of Casualty.
	2nd Lt. H. Anstey		Killed in Action 11/4/17
	Lieut. J.E.B. Gray		Wounded            "    "
	2nd Lt. L.C. Pollard		Wounded            "    "
S/9592	Rfn. Betts, H.	A	Killed in Action
R/1	Cpl. Whitehead, A. F.	"	Wounded            10/4/17

**Figure 8: Entry of casualties for the 7<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade after the Battle of Arras**

The war diary for the 7<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade shows a Betts N., No S/9592 killed in action on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1917. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records show only one 'Betts' killed in April 1917 and that was Sydney. The date they have recorded for his death, though, is 15<sup>th</sup> April. The S/9592 number identifies two other soldiers from different Rifle Brigade Battalions who survived the war, so the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion casualty return for 'Betts N.' must refer to Sydney. The date of the 11<sup>th</sup> April tallies with the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* notice on 24<sup>th</sup> April. This means that the Commonwealth War Graves date for his death is incorrect. His service record notes that he died from a 'gunshot wound to head'.

Sydney's personal property consisting of a: wallet; watch; one pair of scissors; pipe; letters; photo; cigarette case and one piece of metal, were returned home. Sydney's father sent away for and received his war medals, the 1945-15 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal.

Sydney is buried at Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery, Saulty. He is also commemorated at the Hall of Memory, Birmingham and St Mary's Church, Moseley



**Figure 9: (Above) Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery**



**(Right) St Mary's Church, Moseley, WW1 memorial**

The Betts family were friends with the Tallis family. In 1916 Charles Hall Betts, Sydney's father, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Evening Despatch* on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1916 complaining about the treatment of young Arthur Tallis, who had been sent back to the front shortly after recovering from battle injuries. It was the year that conscription was brought in and many young men were seeking ways of opting out of military service. To read the letter see 'Lance Corporal Arthur Dudley Tallis' in the 1916 St Mary's memorial section of the WW1 project of the Moseley Society History Group.

Sydney's brothers survived the war. Charles, a Midland Cricket Club player<sup>xv</sup> for Kings Heath, served in either the RAMC or as a gunner in the RGA. Aurelius started out as a private in the Warwickshire Yeomanry, No 3173, before transferring to the Corps of Hussars, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, No 311037. He gained a commission and was wounded in the Battle of Arras.<sup>xvi</sup> He finished the war as a Captain in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Researched and written by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group**

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### Endnotes

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- i The Battle of Arras  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Arras\\_\(1917\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Arras_(1917))
  - ii 1841 census
  - iii England Marriages 1538-1973
  - iv 1871 census records Ernest Betts as being born in Derbyshire in 1865  
*Derbyshire Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1867
  - v Renishaw Hall  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renishaw\\_Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renishaw_Hall)
  - vi The roll of Mr and Mrs Betts is not clearly defined in the book but there is a reference in Chapter 7 that might indicate that Mrs Betts was the housekeeper: '*Mrs Bolton ate with Mrs Betts in the housekeepers room since they were agreeable*'. In Chapter 11 there is reference to Mr Betts: '*Mr Betts drove her in the trap to her house in the village with the box*.' Chapter 16 refers to Mr Betts again: '*He was determined to send Fields and Betts to the wood...*' The 2015 film version of the book defines their rolls more clearly as housekeeper and head gamekeeper.
  - vii *Derbyshire Courier*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1865  
*Derbyshire Times & Chesterfield Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1869
  - viii Manchester Rate Books 1706-1900
  - ix England & Wales marriages 1837-2005, Prestwich, 3/4, 1887, 8D, 426  
England & Wales deaths, Prestwich, 1889, 2/4, 8D, 332  
Probate England & Wales 1858-1959  
England & Wales births, Prestwich, 1888, 3/4, 8D, 417

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- x Manchester, England, Non-Conformists Births & Baptisms 1758-1912
- xi 1911 census, reference to being an author  
Amazon Books  
[https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp\\_byline\\_sr\\_book\\_1?ie=UTF8&text=Charles+Hall+Betts&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Charles+Hall+Betts&sort=relevancerank](https://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&text=Charles+Hall+Betts&search-alias=books-uk&field-author=Charles+Hall+Betts&sort=relevancerank)
- xii Grace's Guide  
[http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Charles\\_H.\\_Betts\\_and\\_Co](http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Charles_H._Betts_and_Co)
- xiii National Archives 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade war diary, Ref WO 95/1896/1, p 41
- xiv See xiii, pp 170-178
- xv *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1914
- xvi *Birmingham Mail*, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1917
- xvii WW1 Medal Index Cards

## Illustrations

- Figure 1 *Derbyshire Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1867
- Figure 2 *Derbyshire Courier*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1879
- Figure 3 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3.6.1914
- Figure 4 Amazon books  
<https://www.amazon.it/Education-Soul-Charles-Hall-Betts/dp/B00TXQ39UK>
- Figure 5 Advertising poster from Grace's Guide
- Figure 6 The Ronville caves under Arras  
<http://www.tourisme-nordpasdecalais.fr/J-ai-envie-de/Ville/Arras-une-dentelle-de-pierre-et-de-lumiere>
- Figure 7 Map of the Battle of Arras  
<http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/arrasmap06.jpg>
- Figure 8 National Archives 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade war diary, Ref WO 95/1896/1, p 179