

Private Frederick Matthews 2037

Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars

As part of the commemoration of 100 years since the start of WW1, we will be featuring some of the war stories of Wychwood men. Please send us your family remembrances.

Private Frederick Matthews 2037, Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, later 2nd Lieutenant Royal Flying Corps. Private Matthews of Fifield was aged 17 ½ when he enlisted in the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars (QOOH, also known as the Oxfordshire Yeomanry) for service on September 4th 1914. He claimed to Captain Guy Bonham-Carter that he was 20. He was 5' 11" and used his experience in the Officer Training Corps at Kings School, Worcester to convince the Captain that he was a suitable recruit. The regiment had been mobilised on August 4th and were training at Churn when he joined them.



The Steamer: Bellerophon

Within a couple of weeks he was on his way to France with the British Expeditionary Force. Known as Eric, he was the son of F. W. P. Matthews, owner of the milling business in Shipton-under-Wychwood.

Another prominent Shipton family were the Peppers of Shipton Court and there was clearly an established connection as Eric became the driver to 2nd Lieutenant Wilfred Pepper and together they shared one of the many unusual adventures credited to the QOOH in their unconventional history. To move a

Yeomanry Regiment to France required extraordinary planning with 24 officers, 447 other ranks and 455 horses to load onto the Blue Funnel Line steamer Bellerophon, plus eight three-ton lorries.

Joy-Riding

But alongside these, in the absence of any contradictory orders, went the officers' private motor cars! The cars proved to be useful if unofficial, but on one occasion this led to a close call - a group of Officers were taking a 'joy-ride' to view the front line and on asking some infantrymen where the line was, were told that they were on it. A hasty retreat followed. The cars were withdrawn early in 1915 and by August that year Eric also found himself back in England recovering from enteric fever. He was destined for the QOOH 3rd line who were in training at the Curragh and his record is marked that he would not be allowed to proceed overseas again until his recovery was complete; enteric fever also meant that he should not be employed in the preparation of food or the purification of water. He recovered slowly and he was initially treated at the 3rd London General Hospital in Wandsworth and later at the Addington Park War Hospital. Captain Arthur Dillon, later Lord Dillon, was the QOOH officer

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charged with ensuring that Private Matthews' recovery was managed in line with War Office guidance and he spent just over a year back in the UK including time on home service.

Prisoner of War

His recovery complete, instead of returning to the QOOH in France, he was commissioned into the Royal Flying Corps on September 5th 1916. A good number of QOOH men became officers in the course of the war and the RFC was a popular choice.

But his new flying career was cut short when he was shot down in 1917 and he became a prisoner of war. He was wounded in the shoulder and back and the bullets were evidently removed by another prisoner - presumably one with medical experience. He was held at Augustabad and later at Schweidnitz Prisoner-of-War camps and an album of photographs and memorabilia, plus some original letters he sent home, are still held by his family. He was clearly happier at Schweidnitz and in one letter from there he refers to a photograph of Augustabad and tells his father "...It looked a magnificent place - appearances and descriptions are often deceptive. However

although it was not exactly Arcadia it was a very different sort of place to this."

Scandal Soup

In the same letter he talks of the cold weather and that he is still wearing his flying jacket, adding "...with the fur collar that I put on." Later in this 1918 letter he asks that his father "...get my cricket bats oiled fairly frequently."

As an officer, his POW camp experience was perhaps less hard than many others experienced and there are even photographs of him on his bed, suggesting a relaxed almost comfortable existence with pictures, a clock and even a tennis racket hanging on the wall.

His album contains photos of many of his fellow prisoners together with some cartoons and some copy menus of 'meals' had whilst in captivity - courses at one include 'Scandal Soup', Poisson a la Divorce' and 'Blackmail Beef', possibly reflecting some news from home for one of his fellow prisoners.

Another saved menu, probably one celebrated more than any other, was for the meal served on the SS Huntsend that brought him home on December 31st 1918.

Michael Cross

Centenary Exhibiton

Soldiers of Oxford Museum, Woodstock

'Oxfordshire Remembers 1914-18' is a collection of exciting and engaging exhibitions and outreach programmes, combining SOFO's previously unseen military heritage collections with a unique series of community projects and events. The exhibitions enable visitors to learn about the part played by individual soldiers, their communities and to understand the roles played by local units in the conflict.

Exhibits emphasise personal stories, powerful imagery and a distinctive selection of artefacts. The projects and events enable people from different backgrounds and age groups to participate in, and learn about their local military heritage.

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Michael Cross