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‘A Box of Conflict Memories’;

Materiality, Memory and Princess Mary’s Gift Box 1914-2020

Martin N. Barry
University of Bristol

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology

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Abstract

On 25 December 2014, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II gave her traditional televised Christmas message to the people of the nation and commonwealth. This broadcast carried several references to the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, with specific mention of the Christmas truce as well as events such as the Commonwealth Games, that foster the spirit of peace and reconciliation. On the table next to Her Majesty were a floral display and two framed photographs, one of King George V and the other of Queen Mary. Propped up in front of these two photographs was a small rectangular brass box with an embossed lid. It was a Princess Mary’s Gift Box that was given to all serving military personnel on Christmas Day 1914 as a gesture of comfort and seasonal cheer from friends at home. Why was this specific object on the table? Was it the significance of the date with the original issue being exactly a century ago? Was it the family connection? The Gift was, after all, the idea of the Queen’s aunt. Or was it because the Gift Box has become an iconic and easily recognised material object from the conflict? This research seeks to place the Princess Mary’s Gift Box (PMGB) as a significant example of material culture from the First World War and investigate the role it has played, and is still playing as a focus, conduit or trigger of memory. What has made this object such a cherished and much revered item of remembrance for the families still having the PMGB given to their relatives over all the other souvenirs, examples of trench art, letters, photographs and memorabilia from the First World War?
Acknowledgments

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Many thanks to those museums and institutions that have helped me identify people for interview during the difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

My final thanks go to my partner Maria and my young son Matthew for their patience and continuous support around the whole topic of ‘Dad’s Mary Tins’. 
Friday December 25th, 1914.

‘It was a queer sort of Christmas and as usual depressing, though in one way it was not quite as bad as it generally is because we were not supposed to be so oppressively cheerful as we usually are. It hardly seems Christmas though, with no waits nor decorations, no prospective gaieties and hardly any presents.’


Also, in proud memory of;

Corporal 5965 John Frances Barry M.M.

7th Battalion, The London Regiment

Private 10269 Philip Ferrick

2nd Battalion, East Surrey Regiment

Killed on 14th February 1915 at Ypres, Belgium
Author’s Declaration:

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University’s *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate’s own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ....................................................... DATE: ..................................
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BEF - British Expeditionary Force
BWM - British War Medal
CWGC - Commonwealth (formerly Imperial) War Graves Commission
DCM - Distinguished Conduct Medal
HLF - Heritage Lottery Fund
MID - Mentioned in Despatches
MM - Military Medal
ONS - Office of National Statistics
PMGB - Princess Mary’s Gift Box
SRD - Service Rations Department
VAD - Voluntary Aid Detachment
VC - Victoria Cross
VM - Victory Medal
Chapter 1

Introduction

‘The First World War 1914-1918 altered everything, and everything that came after it somehow bore its mark. The lives we lead today carry many legacies, and those of this war not the least’ (Kavanagh, 1994:2). Significant amongst these legacies is the impression of the war through literature, art, drama and interpretation which has left some late-twentieth century observers’ with perhaps a jaundiced view of the conflict where soldiers spent their lives in front line trenches all the time and being killed needlessly, having been led to war by ‘Donkey’s’ (Clark, 1961).

The recent anniversaries concerning the war, both the 90th and the centenary, had been instrumental in creating momentum and interest amongst people in the United Kingdom and all around the world. The 90th anniversary of the Armistice on 11 November 2008 saw wreaths being laid at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London by Henry Allingham (112 years old), former Royal Navy and Royal Air Force; Harry Patch (110 years old), former Lewis Gunner from the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry, wounded at Passchendaele in 1917; and Bill Stone (108 years old), former Royal Navy Stoker who served on HMS Tiger and HMS Hood. Harry Patch, as the last survivor of war in the trenches, was escorted at the ceremony by Lance Sergeant Johnson Beharry VC of the Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment. Bill Stone died in January 2009 and by the end of July 2009 Henry Allingham and Harry Patch had also died, leaving no one with first-hand experience of serving during the war alive and thus ‘cutting the links between the living and the dead’ (Saunders, 2007:232). This hugely emotional ceremony seemed to act as a catalyst for an outpouring of interest, emotion, remembrance and commemoration. The build up to events to commemorate the centenary of the beginning of the war in 2014 started in earnest after 11 November 20081.

This interdisciplinary study seeks to expand our knowledge in respect of one British object of material culture from the First World War, Princess Mary’s Gift Box (PMGB), an embossed brass box intended to be given as a present from the Nation to British and Commonwealth military personnel only at Christmas 1914. This object
and the lives it touched, then and now, gives us an opportunity to study a multi-
layered, multi-faceted piece of material culture that encompasses the worlds of
military and social history. It links to many areas of ethnographical study (Pink,
2013) as well as the broader topics around material culture. These objects have
touched so many different lives over the last century that they have become a way of
‘thinking through things’ (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell, 2007) and, as the research
interviews will show, also the ‘things we think with’ (Turkle, 2011), not just in respect
of the original recipient of the PMGB.

The research will be a mix of ethnographical and established theoretical
research methods. It will include interviews with current ‘custodians’ who still retain
the PMGB given to long-dead relatives but still cherished as well as analysing
biographies of PMGBs from the authors’ own collection. The anticipated outcome is
the establishment of the Princess Mary’s Gift Box as a discrete object that also
interacts and intersects many of the established topics of Material Culture associated
with the conflict. The materiality element of the title refers to the use of brass as a
construction medium. Brass, an alloy of two metals, copper (Cu) and zinc (Zn), is
significant in this research context as it presents a significant juxtaposition of use
during wartime. Brass was, and still is, a core material for the manufacture of
munitions. Everything from bullets to artillery shells requires brass and it must have
seemed ironic that brass strip was chosen for making the PMGB, but the Executive
Committee of the Gift Fund were adamant that the brass box had a use beyond the
Gift issue, and brass was the most suitable material to use giving it longevity and
relevance to the objects ‘use-value’ (Dant, 2004:17) far beyond the original intention.
The research will also investigate other examples of Conflict Related Metal Boxes
(CRMBs) that were contemporaries of the PMGB to identify where, or if at all, their
biographies intersected.

Memory and memories will be a key part of this research, whether it be
memories driven by how society constructs what we remember (Connerton, 1989,
Lunn, 1997) which will inevitably include death and loss (Saunders and Cornish,
will also have an impact on the material culture and memories associated or created

Military Background to the First World War 1914-1918

The First World War was a global conflict that involved over 30 nations. The protagonists were the Western Alliance and the Central Powers. The Western Alliance included Great Britain, France, Belgium, the United States, Russia and Serbia. The Central Powers included Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire. Hostilities started on 28 July 1914 and ended with the armistice on 11 November 1918. The war officially ended after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919. In total around 65 million people volunteered or were conscripted for war service and an estimated 16 million soldiers and civilians were killed (IWM.org.uk, 2020). The British Army had 8.7 million who served at some time during the war (Baker, 2022, np). This research into the material culture of the conflict is researched from the British and Commonwealth perspective.

The rapid mobilisation of German forces not only threatened Paris but also presented the alarming possibility of reaching the channel coast, thus cutting the British Expeditionary Force’s (BEF) supply lines and escape route. The BEF under the command of General Sir John French began the retreat from the Belgian city of Mons on 23 August 1914 and so started ‘the race to the sea’ which ended on 17 October around the town of Ypres (Ieper). The early expectations of the British Army General Staff, and indeed the British public at large, was that there would be a short series of text-book engagements to ‘see off the Hun’ and the war would be over soon but by mid-December casualties had been shocking and the opposing forces had settled into a ‘self-destructive stalemate’ (Fussell, 1975/2000:3).

Both the British and German armies had started to ‘dig in’ defensive trenches and so started the construction of a virtually continuous line of trenches stretching around 475 miles (765 km) from the channel coast to the Swiss border (Van Emden, 2002:42) which has become one of the lasting images of the First World War. This led to a greater attrition rate, increasingly high casualties and a strong sense that the
fighting would not, after all, be ‘over by Christmas’ (Fussell, 1975/2000:3). The country was faced with the prospect of loved ones being away from home in a hostile, dangerous environment at Christmas time. This now mainly stationary trench warfare created a new sensorial, psychological and haptic world for the soldiers within which material culture objects acquired previously undreamt-of significance – of which an example is the PMGB.

Origins of Princess Mary’s Gift Box (PMGB)

Queen Victoria had given a Christmas gift tin containing chocolate to soldiers who were fighting the South African War in 1900. By Christmas 1914 there were many examples of support for the armed services on active duty from all levels of society from government to individual families. These various gifts have become known collectively as ‘comforts’ and were sent to the frontline troops from the many ‘comfort committees’ (Weekes, 2009:93) that had sprung up from trade organisations, manufacturing companies, social reformers, religious charities and even royalty.

One such royal ‘comfort’ was the idea of Princess Victoria Alexandra Alice Mary, the 17-year-old daughter of King George V. Princess Mary had ‘accepted the charitable role of her royal station by accompanying and assisting her mother, Queen Mary, with a number of charitable activities as soon as war started but had held a personal wish to do something for the troops herself’ (Graham, 1925:69). She wanted to send each serving soldier and sailor a gift from home to show that they were not forgotten at Christmas and wanted to pay for the gifts out of her own monetary allowance. The government thought the idea of such a gift from the nation, as represented by the Princess, was a good idea but disagreed with Princess Mary about her funding the project herself.

The idea was to set up a fund and start collecting money through public and private donations and subscriptions. A General Committee was formed including the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and Winston Churchill and the scheme was given an official title. The inaugural meeting of, ‘Her Royal Highness the Princess Mary’s Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Christmas Fund’ took place on the evening of Wednesday, 14 October 1914 at the Ritz Hotel in London (Devonshire et al,
1925/2005). A direct appeal letter from the Princess to the public was printed in the newspapers on Monday, 16 November 1914. An executive committee was formed from the members of the general committee to undertake the design, management and day-to-day running of the fund.

The contents of Princess Mary’s Gift were decided upon after consultation with various members of the general committee who had relevant military experience, particularly when it came to allocating items suitable for members of the Indian Army, and finally with the approval of the princess herself. The gift would include an embossed brass box (Figure 1.1). Princess Mary’s Gift Box (PMGB) was designed by two noted architects of the time, Professor Stanley Davenport Adshead (1868-1946) and Stanley Churchill Ramsay (1882-1968), and production began to have the Gift ready for distribution on Christmas Day 1914.

![Figure 1.1](image) Princess Mary’s Gift Box (PMGB) (Author ©).

The original issue was for all those ‘fighting on land’ or ‘on the high seas’ on Christmas Day 1914 but in November Princess Mary agreed, after numerous requests from all parts of the British Empire, to extend the scheme to include ‘all those wearing the King’s uniform on Christmas Day’. In total, around 2.6 million PMGBs were issued to those eligible between 1914 and 1919. The Fund finally closed in 1920.
Militarised Victorian/Edwardian Society

During this time Great Britain still had the largest empire on earth. The pageantry, status in the world, and belief in the right and might of the British Army and Navy pervaded all levels of society. It even permeated the imagery used for advertising and selling mundane household goods. Research for this project has shown militarised images on everything from tea caddies to boot polish tins.

Even children became part of this militarisation as shown in a ‘Photogravure’ postcard (Figure 1.2) from 1917 by Raphael Tuck Limited depicting two very young boys dressed as soldiers, one Belgian, the other Scottish, both pointing rifles at an ‘enemy’ and vowing ‘We’ll let ‘em have it!’

Figure 1.2 Tuck postcard, ‘We’ll let ‘em have it!’ (Author ©).

The card is addressed to a child, Master Willie Urquhart, further normalising the notion of militarisation even in the minds of the very young. It is signed ‘With love from May’, perhaps a sibling or cousin to young Master Willie.

First Thoughts: The PMGB as a possible research topic

The idea for this research topic came about because of visitor feedback to a museum display the author curated in 2008 for the Priest’s House Museum and Garden (now the Museum of East Dorset), a well-established community museum housed in a Grade 2* listed building in the market town of Wimborne, Dorset. During 2008 the museum director was preparing a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) capital bid
for the initial phase of the re-development of the Priest’s House and had no time to prepare for the upcoming 90-year anniversary of the Armistice. The display entitled ‘Mementoes and Memories’ ran from November 2008 until March 2009 and told the story of three soldiers. John Barry and Frederick (Fred) Webb, both from the 7th Battalion, The London Regiment and Philip Ferrick from 2nd Battalion, East Surrey Regiment. The three men were linked through their shared experiences of three objects they would all have been familiar with. A Service Rations Department (SRD) stoneware jug used to issue the rum ration to soldiers in the trenches, a hand rattle used to warn of impending poison gas attacks and, as each soldier was in the army during Christmas 1914, a PMGB. John and Fred survived the war, but Philip was killed in February 1915 at Ypres (Ieper). The visitor was then brought to the present day as it was revealed that all three men had a common descendant, Matthew, who was three years old at the time of the display.

Interest in the ‘Great War’ had been gradually building and the 90th anniversary was the first to be commemorated both nationally and globally. The last surviving veterans, many of whom were now centenarians, were telling their stories to film and television audiences. Books on the subject were being published, some re-releases of work published just after the end of the war in the 1920s but, refreshingly, many undiscovered ‘gems’ in the form of soldier’s un-published journals and diaries. Everyone, including historians and academics and the public at large, were now starting to re-evaluate the written history of the war. The unfair and inaccurate bias fuelled over the years by such authors as Alan Clarke with his book The Donkeys (1961) and the more modern satirical comedy of Ben Elton and Richard Curtis with Blackadder Goes Forth (BBC, 1989). Slowly the lives and stories of the ordinary men and women who answered their countries call, either on the frontline or in the factory, were starting to emerge. People from all parts of society who simply wanted to do their duty to protect their country and way of life against a dangerous aggressor.

Part of the museums engagement strategy has been to always provide hosted accompaniment sessions where appropriate, usually in period costume and character, and one such session took place in mid-December 2008. A recurring comment came from visitors concerning the PMGB, many still possessing their father’s, grandfather’s, great-uncle, and in one case, brother’s ‘Mary Tin’. This
recognition and association by so many visitors prompted the author to investigate the history and, with the centenary of the start of the war only a few years away, the personal biographies of the PMGBs and their current family custodians to get a deeper understanding of the legacy of the ‘Great War’ generation.

Further research acquired more PMGBs, some with biographies and some without. Enough information and objects were acquired to design an exhibition about the PMGB, entitled ‘A Christmas Wish’, at the Priest’s House Museum around the anniversary of armistice day in November 2009. The display was duplicated at the same time for St. Barbe’s Museum in Lymington, Hampshire. An important element of the exhibition design was to engage with members of the public still in possession of a relatives PMGB and the two locations offered an opportunity to ascertain any differences between the visitor demographic of the two museums.

Both are market towns with roughly the same sized population but the community engagement with the Priest’s House is more established than St. Barbe’s and this became apparent after an open day to engage with PMGB ‘custodians’ was arranged for both venues. Museum posters and engagement with the local press were similar with both towns but the results of an open day to identify persons having PMGBs produced a stark contrast. The open days were both held on a Saturday in the summer of 2009 and the Priest’s House attracted seventy-four ‘custodians’ but St. Barbe’s only attracted two, although one was the descendant of the lady driver of the then First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Spencer Churchill (1874-1965). The significant difference in response between the two museums in Wimborne and Lymington could have been attributed to other factors such as visitor engagement or even the timing of the open day but some people were more interested in their families' legacy of the First World War than others. There also seemed to be several contradictions and questions emerging associated with the PMGB. Although the PMGB is a well-known ‘object’ from the First World War, there seemed to be very little academic analysis beyond merely superficial mentions or the more headline-grabbing biographies of tins ‘stopping bullets’, except that, at this stage, these were merely anecdotal and not researched.

Many commentaries about the PMGB, particularly during the centenary of the first year of the war, have the object somehow arriving in the trenches on Christmas
Day 1914, containing all manner of comforts such as cigarettes, pipe tobacco, a Christmas card, a pencil made from a rifle cartridge and a photograph of Princess Mary, all inside an embossed brass box. This was not the reality of the issuing of the PMGB. Foremost was the fact that all these items could not be inside the brass box with the lid closed. The PMGB did not have any contents, apart from the bullet pencil, it was the contents and along with the accompanying cigarettes, pipe tobacco, smoking pipes, Christmas card and photograph of Princess Mary, was all packed in a brown cardboard box. This cardboard box was the ‘Gift’.

This research investigates and analyses the complex back story including the biographies that have been created around the PMGB. The aesthetic design, durability, regal connotations, feelings of joy and comfort at Christmastime and the subsequent repurposing of the brass box by the soldiers’ themselves all contributed to an extended life cycle of an object that became the nexus of a world of interconnected relationships and possibilities from the First World War to the present.

Collecting

Collecting the PMGB, its accompaniments and many other artefacts of militaria and memorabilia from the First World War have certainly become very popular over recent years. This research has encountered the phenomenon of ‘collecting’ repeatedly and this needs to be analysed and contextualised before progressing. It is a very important backdrop to the entire thesis. Figure 1.3 shows part of the author’s collection of PMGBs and other artefacts from the war. Literally boxes within boxes.

Figure 1.3 Part of Author’s Collection (Author ©).

One of the consequences that ‘collecting’ has had on this research is that
without it, much of the data and empirical evidence would have not been available. A collector may inadvertently stop, pause or change a biographical chapter of a PMGB, but they have also preserved it, generally from the point at which the previous chapter of its biography finished. This last chapter may well have been with the original recipient or his family. Trying to establish if the PMGB was always part of the collecting scene or if it has only become a desirable item since interest in the war has grown would be again useful in contextualising the object.

A timeline of collecting the PMGB, either as a specific piece of militaria from the First World War or as a CRMB in general, proved challenging. It was assumed that PMGBs were always available to collectors’ but finding the evidence to back this up was challenging. The greatest challenge was in finding a consistent pre-internet source of advertising that communicated directly with the collector. Initial responses to established military antique auction houses around the UK was unsuccessful, with many either not having kept archives or generally misunderstanding the request for information as being contrary to their client-confidentiality. It was decided to acquire several auction catalogues, ironically themselves now considered ‘collectible’, to see when, or even if, the PMGB enters the market in significant numbers. Nine catalogues spanning 1981 to 1992 were obtained but none had even a single PMGB for sale.

To broaden the search further, a weekly publication, used to sell a multitude of items, collectible and retail, since 1868, The Exchange and Mart was investigated. It was a magazine published every Thursday in the UK until 2009 when it went online but for only for motor vehicle related sales. It should perhaps be considered the pre-internet version of eBay. Staggeringly, for this and any other anthropologically motivated material culture or social history related research, no copies, digital or paper, seem to exist. There is not even an archive with the British Library. Again, the only solution available was to acquire a sampling of copies. Six editions from 1931-2, one from 1947, one from 1969 and one from 1993 were acquired, all from eBay.

In the 1930s editions there were no PMGBs for sale but, although only a limited sampling, these magazines were revelatory as they indicate a strong social trend in respect of the trade in war service medals. Many soldiers sold their medals
in times of dire financial need, the British War Medal (BWM) always having a monetary value as it was made from one Troy ounce (31.1g) of Sterling Silver. Many pawnbrokers, mindful of the social stigma attached to this act, would carefully remove the engraved identification details from the edge of the medals (Richardson, 2009:112). Figure 1.4 shows two Mercantile Marine Medals that, along with the BWM, would have been issued to merchant sailors who served on armed merchant ships during the war. The top medal has had the details erased but there is an ‘O’ still visible just above the ‘A’ of ‘Harold’ on the medal below.

![Figure 1.4 Erased Edge Detail from Medals (Author ©).](image)

An advert from *The Exchange and Mart* of Thursday, 3 March (1932:p6, col,3) by Baldwin’s of London offers;

‘Large stock of War Medals. Decorations and medals for replacement at lowest prices.’

A reasonable assumption is that this was a way of enabling those who had sold their medals a way of replacing them discretely and so maintaining social dignity.

The edition from Thursday 18 September 1947, still had no PMGBs for sale, but a request, the box number indicating a collector rather than a dealer, for Second World War militaria;

‘War souvenir collectors! Nazi decorations, badges wanted, collections..."
It appears that the open collecting of War Medals and PMGBs was not as popular as now. Perhaps this generation as the original recipients were still emotionally bound to the items and the qualifying rights of the veteran ‘trumps’ that of a mere collector.

The sample edition from 1969 also had no PMGBs or specific First World War militaria for sale. The emphasis is now very much aimed at the collector of Nazi memorabilia, as the following advert offering a trade suggests;

‘Exchange. 8in. bust Hitler. Luftwaffe insignia at base. Impressive, for anything Nazi, Your letter answered. Box (Herts) XY9101’.


It is relevant to note at this point that despite the apparent lack of evidence from The Exchange and Mart, PMGBs and other First World War militaria was being sold to collectors during this time, the author purchased a Victory Medal (VM) for 50p around this time. This does, unfortunately, highlight the weakness of the source material sampling method used here.

The edition from 8-14 July 1993 still retains the structure of the original but there are subtle changes. Now just titled Exchange & Mart, there are 2 pages dedicated to ‘Collecting’ and ‘Militaria’ has its own entry. There are still no PMGBs being offered or sought, the only specific entry from the First World War being;


An unsettling element to this edition, perhaps indicative of the changes within society in the late twentieth century, is that more than three times the column-inches are given to ‘Miscellaneous-Adult Interest’ than ‘Collecting’.

With this small sampling of the source material, it is difficult to draw any meaningful or useful conclusions, but some observations around the lack of awareness of the PMGB can be made. It would be reasonable to assume that the interest in the First World War has been a more recent phenomena driven by the
availability of knowledge and interest on the internet rather than any mainstream focus of militaria collecting. Those custodians’ who keep the PMGB as a representation or conduit of family memory are aware of the biographical value of the object if not the social and anthropological history surrounding it. This would have been the norm for the PMGB over the decades after the original issue. It became part of an overall story or memory, either of the old soldier/son/brother/father or as a reminder of a conflict that changed the world forever. It is only now, with knowledge literally at our fingertips, that we can delve deeper into the subject matter of the PMGB and other items of material culture from the First World War.

The Royal Connection

Another thread that weaves through this research is that concerning the Royal Family. King George V (1865-1936) was King of the United Kingdom, the British Dominions and Emperor of India from 1910-1936. Arguably he reigned during one of the most turbulent times of British History, including a World War, Irish rebellion, the League of Nations and the rise of Nazism.

The family name was changed in 1916 from the Germanic ‘Saxe-Coburg-Gotha’ to the more British sounding ‘Windsor’ as a direct result of the war. By the end of the conflict Britain, and indeed much of the world, had been altered forever; ‘Bolsheviks had arisen; the ‘flappers’ were on the way in, nannies and parlour-maids [sic] were on the way out.’ (Judd, 1973:122).

The charitable activities of the Royal Family would have placed them favourably with the public and with the re-enforcement of their identities displayed everywhere throughout society by the sharing of images of many Royal figures, including Princess Mary. The faces of the Royal Family were constantly in the newspapers of the time and this medium was affordable to most of society.

Although the social gap between the monarchy and the people was vast, it was not that the Royal Family were completely cut-off from their subjects. An early example of what appears quite a strong relationship was in 1908 when the Daily Telegraph newspaper published ‘Queen Alexandra’s Christmas Gift Book –
Photographs from my Camera. Queen Alexandra, George V’s mother, published this album which was as intensely personal as any family photograph album could be. The difference here was that it was a member of the Royal Family sharing the images with what Alexandra must have considered as her wider ‘family’. This is one of many examples of where the Royal Family have gone out of their way to connect with the people. Obviously this was perhaps expected as part of the role, something that is still at the heart of the Monarchy today, but this intimate sharing goes further.

This relationship between Royal and subject may have been a strong influence on how the PMGB was received, both literally by the soldiers’, and figuratively by society at large as a ‘Gift from a Princess’. The influence these feelings of loyalty had must have pervaded the biography of the PMGB, certainly during the early chapters of its life.

Material Culture


1. Trench Art

The portability of the object and the easily worked brass material of the PMGB would make it a possible candidate for repurposing as trench art. Some accompaniments, such as the bullet pencil, could also be modified in some way to become something else, perhaps a more permanent reminder of the occasion. Trench Art as defined by Saunders (2002a, 2002b, 2003), Doyle (2014) and Waugh (2015) is a broad, diverse and sometimes confusing area of material culture.
2. Death, Wounding and Mortality

The PMGBs were there, along with many other material objects that now bear witness to the conflict (Saunders and Cornish, 2014, Saunders, 2003, 2004, 2007). Sometimes stopping a fatal bullet, sometimes not. They seem to have been used as a form of physical reminder of the trauma suffered by some soldiers when injured (Bourke, 1996). This is evident by their survival. If the soldier suffered such pain and distress as to want nothing to do with the war ever again, why did he (or she) preserve the PMGB? Was it just ‘celebrity’ or a profound sense of relief at having survived?

3. Memory, Commemoration and Remembrance

PMGBs and their associated biographies can be used by families as a memory trigger for these processes and this will be investigated and analysed.

4. Gift-giving and the passing of ‘Ownership’, Status or Meaning

As the PMGB passes down the family line, going from one custodian to the next, the essence of it having ever been a ‘Gift’ changes. Sometimes it is lost forever or stored away and forgotten. But sometimes it is still cherished and revered, passing from one generation to the next with love and pride. Research biographies permitting, the ‘status’ of the PMGB at various stages of its biography and lifecycle will be investigated and analysed.

5. Packaging, Wrapping and Unwrapping

The PMGB did not just materialise in the trenches unpacked and brimming with comforts. Someone had to design packaging that could be easily transported whilst holding all contents safely. The research will look closely at all aspects of the packaging and wrapping processes around the PMGB and accompaniments to analyse the impact they have had on the biography of the object.
6. Value, Buying and Selling

As with most collectible items of material culture, values can rise and fall. This can depend on rarity, desirability, fashion, or other cultural influences (Miller, 2010, Dant, 1999, Belk, 1995). We are currently going through a phase where the material memorabilia associated with the conflict has increased in both popularity and monetary value. As public awareness has grown, the internet has played a significant part in uncovering ‘valuable’ First World War biographies. Digitised, cross-referenced records can be accessed in seconds, whereas before digitisation the process, using paper and microfiche records, was slow and tedious. There have also been significant changes in the law around the buying, selling and transporting of militaria in the UK. If a de-activated firearm, for example, was deactivated before the current 2019 Firearms Regulations, the owner cannot sell or even gift the item to anyone else.

7. Faking

Faking, not only of the objects themselves but also the creating of false biographies around a PMGB to gain financially from selling, is an important issue. However, reconstructing an assemblage using the correct replacement items to substitute for the lost originals must have some validity, not just for purposes of complete militaria collecting but also for substituting lost family heirlooms. These replacement objects do not replace the actual memories associated with those lost, but they do fulfil the important role of markers of memory.

Did other nations give Christmas Gifts to the troops at Christmas 1914?

There are many examples of similar ‘comforts’ being issued, such as Australia but as the cultural differences may impact on how biographies have developed over the century they are not included in this research.

It would also be disparaging, and inaccurate, to state that Germany did nothing for its own serving soldiers at Christmas 1914. One significant difference that has validity as a comparison for the impetus behind the PMGB may lie with the
gifts given to German soldiers, particularly those serving with the Austrian/Hungarian army, in the form of Christmas cap badges. Only intended to be a short-term souvenir, they were designed to be pinned on the soft forage caps worn by soldiers and were given every Christmas of the war except for 1918. The PMGB by contrast being only intended for those in the ‘King’s Uniform on Christmas Day 1914’. Figure 1.5 shows such a badge from 1914. It depicts in relief the head of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria/Hungary (1830-1916).

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 1.5** Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph Cap Badge, 1914 (Author ©).

Case Studies

The PMGBs being researched for this thesis are divided into two Case Study groups (Chapters 4 and 5 respectively). The author intends to explore and better understand the differences between the passive and active phases of a PMGB’s biography presented by these two distinct groups. Once a PMGB has left either the original recipient or their immediate family, the biography may enter a dormant phase or chapter. Even if it has now become part of a collection on constant display to the public it remains fixed and static. Memories created, if any, may now be of the visit to the museum or exhibition containing the PMGB rather than with the PMGB itself. PMGBs still with the family of the original soldier present an opportunity for a more dynamic biography. It may not be as active as before, now being revered and cherished as part of family memory rather than an active repository used by the soldier himself, but still resides in the same environment, surrounded by the same people and things as before, or their direct replacements.
Structure of Thesis

The thesis will endeavour to bring together data, empirical evidence and ethnographic interview findings to better analyse and understand how the biography of the PMGB and other contemporary Conflict Related Metal Boxes developed over time and how people reacted and responded to them. This will include history of the issue, uses and any acquired biographies of the objects from their original recipients and later custodians.

A sample of British CRMBs will be researched as comparators to ascertain if their design and purpose in any way parallels the PMGB or if these similarities are merely coincidences.

Chapter 2. Methodologies, Theoretical Approaches and Literature Review

This chapter details the methods and processes that have been the basis of this research and details a critical review of the existing literature around the subject.

Chapter 3. PMGB; History and Classification Tool

This chapter seeks to redress the inaccuracies and give an accurate history of the PMGB so that case studies, research interviews and future academic investigation can be conducted in the correct context. Also, it includes the creation of a classification tool for all Conflict Related Metal Boxes that can be deployed.

Chapter 4. Case Study 1: PMGBs, Author’s Collection

Biographical investigations of PMGBs that have retained some original contents/accompaniments and further objects placed in them by the soldier or his immediate family. Also, PMGBs that are connected to specific research topics such as trench art and wounding. All have a definite end to their active phase, either represented by a datable piece of evidence from the soldier or his family or by a physical action. Although they now have a life as part of a research collection, their
biographies are more passive than active.

Chapter 5. Case Study 2: PMGBs, Original Recipient’s Family and Other Custodians

Here is presented a series of recorded interviews with individuals who are in possession of PMGBs, including descendants of the original recipient, battlefield guides and militaria collectors. It is anticipated that these PMGBs will still have a very active biography within the custodial families.

Chapter 6. Other Tins: Soldier’s Comforts and Commercial Comforts

This chapter details and analyses some of the other comfort CRMBs that were either given directly to soldiers from benefactors or bought and sent out by the families. The examples, although not exhaustive reflect mostly tins made and sent over Christmas 1914 at the same time as the PMGB.

Chapter 7. Other Tins: Patriotic Tins and Ordinary Tins

These are the patriotic, commercial and commemorative CRMSs that are linked directly or associated with the First World War.

Chapter 8. Findings, Analysis and Conclusions

This chapter will analyse and present the findings of the research and draw conclusions based around the four research questions in Chapter 1.

**Research Objectives**

Of paramount importance amongst many unanswered questions during the research was the issue of the PMGBs conflicting origins, ‘contents’ and distribution. Also, why are so many PMGBs on the open collectors’ market without any associated
biographies or identity linking them to the soldiers they were issued to. When looking at family history, many families still retain photographs from around the early twentieth century, some containing images from the First World War. Regardless of any other physical items also being present (medals, souvenirs or trench art) photographs remain a constant with many families and put a face to the names. They also fix people in time, ‘Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality: One can’t possess reality, one can possess images – one can’t possess the present, but one can possess the past’ (Sontag, 1979:163).

The main objectives for this research are;

1. Investigate the true nature and history around the design, manufacture, distribution and receiving of the PMGB, to better inform the analysis of the research findings.

2. Answering the nuanced and challenging question of why there was such a difference between the PMGBs still with families, being preserved and actively used as part of their commemoration and remembrance process whilst there were countless examples on the open collector’s market that had no identity whatsoever. Also, trying to understand why were some PMGBs revered but many others seemingly abandoned.

3. Create a structured approach to ethnographic data gathering and analysis of these objects. The PMGBs still residing with the relatives of the original recipient that were encountered during the museum open days had given the author an impression of having some very strong biographies attached them, deserving further investigation. Each possible biography was likely to be very different and a methodology had to be designed to allow for the capture and use of this fascinating, poignant and, given the upcoming centenary, relevant information in a way that made sense of the data. Without a structure the data could merely represent a collection of interesting stories with no real academic worth.

4. By using this structured approach to analysing the data it would allow the findings of the research to feed into and inform existing topics such as material culture, trench art military history and conflict anthropology.

5. The author’s pre-doctoral expertise, in particular museum interpretation, will result to a more nuanced understanding when using the proposed
ethnographic interviewing techniques.

Overall, this research seeks to give an understanding and a structure to how we as people of a different generation interact with an object of material culture that was never intended for us but has nevertheless become important to us. Whether it be simply as a valuable trading commodity, a tangible link to a much-loved family member now gone, or an integral part of our society’s commemoration and remembrance process of a great and terrible conflict.

**Research Questions**

This research follows the areas of study outlined above and offers the following specific research questions.

Q1. What is the history of the PMGB?

   Essential in the overall understanding of how a PMGB has arrived at this stage of its biography or life cycle, providing context and analysing anomalies for further interpretation.

Q2. What is the relationship between the PMGB and the other British ‘comforts’ issued, given away freely or sold in portable metal boxes during the First World War?

   Do any of the other Conflict Related Metal Boxes (CRMBs) fulfil the same overall purpose of the PMGB?

Q3. Biography and Entanglement: What are the relationships, both historical and current, between the recipients and subsequent custodians of PMGBs?

   Who became custodians and why? Also, how has their relationship with the PMGB changed over time?

Q4. Is the PMGB a valid exemplar of Material Culture from the First World War?

   Given the supposedly one-off nature of the PMGB as a gift, is it truly representative as an object of material culture from the whole conflict when of the 2.6 million recipients less than 500,000 were in action at Christmas 1914?
Also have the biographies merely been constructed or otherwise surmised by later custodians and/or subsequent historical events?
Chapter 2

Methodologies, Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

The contemporary information around Princess Mary’s Gift is often flawed and incomplete. Still being used by museum curators, academics, collectors and the public alike, this can lead to the biography of a PMGB being erroneous or misleading.

A full investigation of the PMGBs timeline from design, through production and distribution, to receiving and custodianship is crucial if an accurate analysis of the individual PMGB biography is to be understood. This background will allow for anomalous scenarios to be evaluated more fully. By attempting to correct the legacy of inaccuracies and misinformation it is hoped that by applying the theoretical approaches around the central research themes of oral interviewing and object biographies, a greater understanding of how the legacy of the PMGB is still being maintained through the current generation of custodians.

By challenging some attitudes to the PMGB still present with these current custodians and stakeholders it may be possible to correct what has clouded the understanding of the true value of the biography of any PMGB, allowing it to take its place as a discrete object of material culture from that first Christmas of the ‘war to end all wars’.

Methodologies

Introduction

The concern over the influence that flawed assumptions could have on a PMGB’s biography, confirmed through conversations with PMGB custodians during the ‘Christmas Wish’ museum exhibitions in 2009, reinforced the need for an accurate and full history to be researched. Some ‘superimposed’ inaccurate biographies are not necessarily negative as they can add to the rich tapestry of the life of the object as it passes from one custodian to the next, but it is important to know where the
story starts. Was the PMGB gratefully received in a Flanders trench on Christmas Day 1914 or was it posted to the wife of an eligible soldier years later. Did it become a souvenir or trinket in their eyes and only attained a more iconic status recently, perhaps being driven by societies cultural expectation of what the object should now mean in relation to the conflict? Being able to interview current custodians effectively was also key to achieving any meaningful understanding of how the PMGBs biography have evolved.

History of the PMGB

This would be achieved by gathering information from existing archives, including Queen Mary’s (Princess Mary’s mother) ‘Women at Work Collection’, a microfiche archive held by the Imperial War Museum, London. This contains much of the paperwork and reports of the Gift Fund Committee. The internet based British Newspaper Archive was another useful source of contemporary material.

The ‘Women at Work’ archive had been used to research the ‘Christmas Wish’ museum displays’ in 2009 and included copies of documentation from the Gift Fund Executive Committee. One of the most useful documents found was the final report of the committee (Devonshire et al, 1920/2009) which gave an indication that the actual issuing of the PMGB at Christmas 1914 was not a straightforward process.

Central to the object research was to expand the already existing museum-ready collection of PMGBs and accompaniments held by the author. This allows comprehensive physical study without the constraints of having to evaluate the limited examples from printed sources and navigate photographic copyright issues.

An accurate history would provide an ability to contextualise PMGB biographies based upon their accompaniments either placed by the original soldier during the war or later and those placed by his family and descendants.
Research Methods

Object Biographies

Appadurai and Kopytoff in *The Social Life of Things* (1986) believed that a biographical approach to objects could reveal, at least in part, the limits on the established Marxian view of 'commoditisation' where the object is seen only as a product of construction, use or movement. The benefits of 'methodological fetishism' i.e., following the social life or biography of an object, include filling in the otherwise absent non-economic side of Marxian theory by providing greater insight and understanding of the people who constructed, used, traded, gifted or received an object. The entire volume contains papers that explore the concept that by focusing on the forms of object exchange and value it is possible to argue that these objects, like people, have social lives.

This notion of object biographies not being ‘fixed’ was noted by Kopytoff (1986), who felt that things could not be fully understood by examining just one point in time but rather by examining their movements and trajectories and notes that object biographies have been approached anthropologically in various ways stating, ‘one may present an actual biography, or one may construct a typical biographical model from randomly assembled biographical data. A more theoretically aware biographical model is rather more demanding’ (ibid:66). Kopytoff quotes Margaret Mead (1901-78) as remarking ‘one way to understand a culture is to see what sort of biography it regards as embodying a successful social career’ (ibid).

The flaw in the Marxian theory of objects having only exchange or economic values had been revealed decades earlier when Malinowski in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) noted that objects without any apparent use value, here shell jewellery, were being used to facilitate trade, establish social status and extend personal and social relationships.

After *The Social Life of Things* other works appeared creating a timeline that supported this change of view about objects. The eminent historian of the Victorian Age, Asa Briggs, saw ‘Things as Emissaries’ (1988:11-51) where objects, often small or humble everyday items, are placed in an ‘intelligible universe’ by revealing how they were regarded and interpreted and how they changed people’s lives. Building on Strathern (1988) and Weiner (1989), Janet Hoskins tried to define a new
anthropological category of ‘biographical objects’ where an object is endowed with the personal characteristics of their owners. This culminated with her influential *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People’s Lives* (1998). In *Social Being and Time* (1994) Gosden began evaluating the role of objects in understanding social formations over long periods of time. He concludes, in part, and perhaps unsurprisingly, that ‘at the heart of all historical processes is the human ability to involve material things in social relationships and to use combinations of people to shape the world’ (ibid:196).

In their introduction to a volume of the journal *World Archaeology* dedicated to *The Cultural Biography of Objects*, Gosden and Marshall (1999:169) further charted the shift in thinking away from objects regarded ‘as mainly functional items vital to the social process but seldom as informing it’. The process whereby researchers came to realise that objects are not just a ‘stage setting’ (ibid) to human activity but are integral to it occurred during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Their article centres around ‘biographies’ being seen as a metaphor for people and objects ageing, changing and moving over time, with these constant transformations linking them both firmly together.

A decade after the Gosden and Marshall article, the same journal, *World Archaeology*, published *Reinvigorating Object Biography; reproducing the drama of object lives* by Jody Joy (2009a) whose view is that the original 1999 work ‘retains its currency ten years after its publication and the ideas highlighted in it continue to be developed’ (ibid:540). Daniel Miller went on to develop this further from a purely anthropological perspective in *Stuff* (2010). Joy’s work in Iron Age archaeology identifies two distinct approaches; the anthropologically inspired ‘biographical’ approach and the archaeological object ‘life histories’ (ibid:542). He notes one specific context highlighted by Gosden and Marshall (1999:175) where the drama around the performance of ceremonial actions creates meaning to objects. Here, Joy deploys these approaches to bring to life or ‘recreate the drama of prehistoric object lives’ (ibid:543) and in *Lindon Man* (2009b) demonstrates how such an object’s biography, rather than archaeology alone, informs the narrative around the death of 2,000-year-old ‘bog-body’ found in 1984. The individual had a knotted cord made of animal sinew around his neck that would have held an ornament – the
ornament was missing, giving rise to the misapprehension that he had been murdered and robbed, rather than having been ritually sacrificed.

Saunders in his *Trench Art* monograph (2004) and more fully in *Killing Time* (2007) notes that the social life of objects was beginning to mean that found artefacts were no longer simply being defined as ‘a bullet, an artillery shell, a trench or a souvenir’ but that they had other anthropological stories that allows various aspects of the object to ‘begin to unfold’ (ibid:29). The term ‘evocative object’ as used by Turkle (2011) similarly reveals how seemingly ordinary, mundane objects can have a very personal and intimate resonance with individuals. Dunne (2012:9) uses it to great effect in her description of the Bronze Memorial Plaque, the ‘dead man’s penny’, of her great-grandfather which, along with those given to many other grieving families of soldiers killed in the First World War, act ‘as repositories of numerous stories, and as once present heirlooms’ – as this helped to make present those who were now absent. This demonstrates how objects are active life presences that help us navigate grief, loss and emotion across the generations (ibid:11). This often-unpredictable revalorizing of objects demands a theoretically sensitised approach if we want to understand as much as possible about how emotions become infused into things.

Our relationship with objects, whether ancient or modern, changes over time and as David Lowenthal observed, ‘we interpret relics and records to make them more comprehensible, to justify present attitudes and actions, to underscore changes in faith’ (Lowenthal, 1985:325). Over time, objects can play an ambiguous role in the lives of those who interact with them. Tilley (1990) notes that much of Levi-Strauss’s work included rational observation about objects rather than just focusing on how they are ‘sensed’ by people. It can also be analytically useful to admit, as Dant says that ‘there is a tension between personal possession and the place of the object within the systems of objects that varies over time’. Equally useful is Dant’s further view that ‘as mediators between individuals and their society, objects become involved in actions which are at the same time of symbolic and psychological significance’ (Dant, 2005:65). This captures some of the essential responses I encountered in undertaking this research.

Joyce and Gillespie (2015) aimed to refine the ‘object biography’ approach by
offering a view that objects have ‘itineraries’ to explain and inform their movement through time. My critique of this approach is that it is not entirely convincing as the language used throughout implies linear movement, ‘routes’, ‘nodal pathways’, ‘stoppages’, ‘knots’ and ‘junctions’ imply a linear progression and do not consider the multi-chaptered, multi-faceted and subtle intertwined biographies an object can have, often simultaneously, throughout its life.

Museum curators have in recent years increasingly incorporated the biographical approach in their interpretive exhibitions. Indeed, so popular and mainstream did this concept become that the British Museum’s then director Neil MacGregor used the idea of world history encapsulated by a given number of British Museum objects in his A History of the World in 100 Objects (2010), which was a BBC radio programme, website, book and travelling exhibition. In London’s Imperial War Museum, too, the idea of object biographies rather than just traditional descriptions was adopted in preparation for the 2014-18 Centenary of the First World War (N. Saunders pers. Comm. 2015). This shift in policy was somewhat imperfectly captured in print by Hughes-Wilson (2014) A History of the First World War in 100 Objects which presents a widely diverse set of IWM objects, each with a different biography (or biographies) and story (or stories) to tell. Indeed, the ‘......in 100 Objects’ aspect of the object biographies approach may have run its course, being now applied to many historical topics, individuals, and wars in publications which simply use the catchy title but show little understanding of the underlying concept.

Object Biographies and the PMGB

Although in a passive phase of their lifecycle, the PMGBs that form the authors’ research collection still have stories to tell. These stories may no longer involve the family of the original recipient or have any linked identity at all, but they are still relevant to our understanding of how the PMGB ‘fits’ into our world and also allowing for reflection about the role it played or is still playing. As an artefact, a personal Gift from a Princess or a tangible memory of a much-loved older relative who served his country, the PMGB retains and represents many personal and intimate memories and feelings. Also, as a Gift from a grateful nation headed by a Princess to over 2.6 million recipients, it has come to represent the nation. Even without an identified
recipient, the PMGB was still a Gift to a ‘Soldier in the King’s Uniform on Christmas Day 1914’.

PMGB biographies can be problematic as the original recipient or custodian is now dead and we are left wondering what the various connections could have been. Kwint et al (1999) examine the way objects speak to us through their associated memories while Henare et al (2007) challenge the concept of putting objects into pre-existing theories and encourages anthropologists to think through things ethnographically and develop new theories. Pink in Doing Sensory Ethnography (2009) and Doing Visual Ethnography (2013) emphasises the importance of embracing modern digital techniques to ‘understand how they become implicated in the production and dissemination of the ways of knowing that are part of the ethnographic process’ (2013: loc114 of 5849). None of these approaches should be considered mutually exclusive, and for example Saunders’ work on trench art draws on various aspects of all these ways of investigating the social lives and cultural biographies of these objects. Refusing to push objects into pre-defined categories and instead following the ethnographic leads has the potential to take analysis and understanding to different (and sometimes more insightful) levels.

Ethnography

To construct a meaningful anthropological approach to the PMGB it has become necessary to become fully immersed in the whole story, to move beyond creating museum exhibitions and to see the PMGB as a multi-faceted object of memory, commemoration and remembrance. This self-reflective ethnographical approach, as defined by Pink (2013:64) and used extensively by Winterton (2018:49) has introspection at its core. Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) said of introspection that ‘the process provides knowledge that is not possible in any other way’ and ‘it can help people make connections between different experiences and responses’ (Cherry, 2020, np).

Interviews

A Case Study involving ethnographical interviews were to be the most compelling
element of this research. It is imperative to locate and present the feelings and emotions of those who still have a connection with the PMGBs in their possession and this needs to be identified. This relationship could be based on a sense of duty or of sacrifice, the acknowledgement of an individuals’ role in history or a sense of history but the interviews are not about ‘war stories’, they are about the stimuli of memory, feelings and emotions. The feelings may be more visceral, memories of a much-loved grandparent or even memories of friends and acquaintances of the original recipient of the PMGB.

This less structured oral method was based on a revelatory trial interview held in 2015 that identified the possible existence of hidden, very powerful and emotionally charged alternative or additional chapters and layers to the biography of a PMGB, not even related to the original recipient but have still created meaningful stories and relationships for the current custodians.

The first few minutes of conversation were used to gather details about the military experience, status and ‘life’ of the original recipient. This was a very deliberate strategy. The authors’ extensive pre-doctoral experience and knowledge about the First World War allowed for an ethnographic approach to this data which could immediately be assessed and contextualised without necessarily having to question the interviewee further about it. Name, regiment, rank, serial number and, if known, any service or gallantry medal information were all gathered first. It was anticipated (and as it transpired, correctly) that some interviewee’s would believe that the PMGB was given to men only in the trenches on Christmas Day 1914 and so the example in their possession could not have belonged to their relative as they ‘did not go to France until later’ or ‘never served in a trench’. The aforementioned ‘war stories’ were not ignored and if they were relevant to the construction of a PMGB’s individual biography they would be investigated. Again, the authors’ prior knowledge would act as a filter for this data.

By shifting the paradigm from history to emotions it was anticipated that the resultant breadth of data concerning the emotions around custodianship would give an opportunity for a broader conceptual discussion away from the pure object biographies of the PMGBs encountered.

Once the basic military and wartime data had been gathered, a series of
questions, again structured similarly across most interviews, were used to sketch out the life after military service of the original PMGB recipient. A key question was whether the interviewee had known the soldier personally and, if not, how the relationship and how the relationship was characterised. If the soldier had died before the interviewee was born then details about the relationship with other members of the family who were known were noted. As well as revealing details of the nature of the family relationship this data also helped to inform the timeline of events as to how the PMGB came into the possession of the current custodian/interviewee had been ascertained, the next two-thirds would hope to garner a more sensorial aspect of the relationship - how did they feel about the object? Did it make them remember anyone else? It was at this point interviewees were allowed a moment for reflection, for the first time perhaps regarding the PMGB as part of their own life as well. It was also anticipated that some would be too young to have had any first-hand memories of the original recipient, even in old age. Their 'second hand' memories are still vital in creating the additional chapters of a PMGB’s biography.

Interviewees’ were identified from the results of various public appeal between 2015 and 2019 around museum exhibitions relating to the First World War. This face-to-face process was financially costly and logistically difficult10. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a different approach for conducting interviews. Over 130 different museums, heritage sites, historical societies and local government offices were sent emails about the research project. This gave a significant advantage over face-to-face interviewees’ as a much wider geographic demographic could be reached. If enough responses were received it may have been possible to investigate any regional variation in the data. Representations were also made to several organisations serving the Indian and Pakistani communities to try and identify descendants of soldiers from the Indian Army who received the PMGB. Sadly, no responses were received. Of the institutions contacted, seven refused, mostly citing mis-interpreted General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) restrictions, 108 did not reply at all but fifteen were glad to help, placing advertisements on their own websites and social media feeds.

50 individuals expressed interest, 2111 of whom agreed to be interviewed.
The results are presented in Chapter 5 with the extra data presented in Appendix 3.

The ethics element of the interviews followed University of Bristol guidelines\textsuperscript{12}.

Some of the PMGBs being investigated are part of the author’s collection and this has raised some ethical concerns. Contacting the families of the named individuals to confirm certain biographical data could create problems. Some may object to their relative’s possessions having been sold out of the family in the first place.

\textit{The Internet}

The immediacy from internet-based research cannot be under-estimated. Digital archives such as Ancestry, Commonwealth War Graves Commission and D C Thompson’s ‘FindMyPast’ have enabled the task of finding, retrieving, cross-referencing and confirming elements of First World War soldiers’ biographies without having to rely on family oral history or memories.

Even the non-digitised archives that rely on optical character recognition software, such as the British Newspaper Archive and The London Gazette have yielded invaluable results and insights. Regular visits to the internet auction site eBay over the past decade have revealed elements of the history and nature of the PMGB hitherto not found in any literature, archive research or interviews.

\textit{Text gathering from Literature, Archives and Newspapers}

As already acknowledged, little specific data on the PMGB was found in the available literature. Rather than simply extracting work that seemingly ‘fits’ the research, a strategy was developed to follow the academic analysis of topics that shared some of the characteristics around how the soldier and his family would have experienced and responded to other elements of material culture. The anthropology of gift-giving, absence from loved ones, death and wounding and memory are all issues associated with the PMGB. Philanthropy too plays a part; many of the ‘comforts’ that reached the soldiers’, in and out of the trenches, share common ground with the giving and receiving of the PMGB.
Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Different research and academic disciplines have been drawn upon to create a theoretical framework for this research. Object biographies and ethnographic interviewing remain the core elements but being able to fully understand and contextualise data are vital in capturing the essence of where that data fits into the overall story of the PMGB. Even where biographies are fragmented or missing altogether, by using these disciplines it should be possible to make credible ethnographical assessments and conclusions that will drive the research forward.

Object or Artefact?

An object is a natural, physical structure having height, depth and width whereas an artefact is a manmade object.

Layering

The many layers that make up a PMGBs biography are often represented as being time based or linear, with one event following another but this can be a restrictive position. one chapter ends and the next begins. Not to be confused with biographical chapters, layering is important when telling the whole story of an object as it does not necessarily have these time-based constraints.

A PMGB will always be a ‘Gift from a Princess’ regardless of it having an ‘identity’ with a family or merely a space on a collector’s shelf. Gell (1992:151) when reviewing the temporally categorising of events devised by John McTaggart (1886-1925), the ‘A-series’ and ‘B-series’, notes the distinctions;

‘These two series, the A-series (past/present/future) and the B-series (before/after) are the two kinds of time. McTaggart goes on to say that the A-series is essential to the idea of change, since it is hard to see how change can be accommodated by the B-series, which is just a row of events strung together, like the beads on a necklace. The A-series incorporates the idea of transition or ‘passage’ – things being arranged in one way and then becoming
arranged in some other way’.

This does create a paradox as the B-series seemingly can never accommodate change. Gell addresses this by introducing the concept of the ‘event’. He states that ‘events are changes in things’ (ibid:161) and can be either ‘real, where something happens, or pseudo, which does not have any causal preconditions or consequences’ (ibid:161). With a PMGB, a ‘real’ event would be the original recipient dying and it being discarded, a ‘pseudo’ event could be society deciding that PMGBs were now valuable reminders of the war and should be preserved.

Agency

One of the central cores of understanding this research is to try and establish how people feel about the PMGB. This person could have been the original recipient, his feelings articulated to his descendants during his lifetime and passed on, or it could be the feelings of the current custodian, motivated by memory, commemoration or remembrance. The notion of a mere object being able to act as a conduit of feelings may seem trivial, but this was the whole argument by Gell (1998:17) where;

’Social agency can be exercised relative to ‘things’ and social agency can be exercised by ‘things’.

Gell (1999[2006]:29) analyses the work of Marilyn Strathern with the object as metaphor. The PMGB can be viewed as a metaphor for many different things, but all are dependant of at least some of the biography being known. The soldier in a trench could see it as a metaphor for home, love, gratitude or comfort. A grieving widow or mother; a physical reminder of her dead husband/son, even her own portable cenotaph. A PMGB with ‘battle’ damage, either physically to itself with a bullet hole or in the contents, shrapnel or bullets retrieved from wounds; metaphor for survival, pain, death or even victory over adversity.

Museums

For most people, the greatest interaction they will have with First World War objects is in a museum. Even those PMGB custodians, unless they are a serious collector,
will likely count most of their understanding of the overall subject as having been acquired from museums. Museums can interpret the artefact rather than a biography which may lead to dry facts rather than tangible personal connections. Many museums were ‘built or extended in commemoration of the war dead’ (Kavanagh, 1994:155) as a response to many a local communities search for a functioning form of war memorial.

There are exceptions; the war-damaged jacket of Harold Cope, wounded on the Somme in 1916, has been the centre of several displays at the Imperial War Museum and has been ‘known to elicit direct emotional responses’ (Cornish, 2017:25). This move towards greater visitor engagement and creation of ‘Dream Spaces’ (Kavanagh, 2000:174) ‘could lead museums to work in ways that are both more responsive and responsible.’

Ownership, Value and Authenticity

Like many items of ‘militaria’, the PMGB must contend with being, by less scrupulous ‘collectors’ at least, seen only as a commodity with no biographical value unless that biography can increase its monetary worth. But what are the memories and to whom do they belong? Saunders also notes the rise of collecting and the commercialisation of trench art, and the war in general, that has led to the worrying proliferation of ‘genuine reproductions’ (2003:225) that can cloud a biography.

In *The Empire of Things* (2001:5), Myers states that material culture studies, particularly in America, ‘received little sustained theoretical attention’. He also notes that ‘exchange theory’, as presented in the work of the likes of Durkheim, Mauss, Malinowski and Levi-Strauss ‘maintained a vital trajectory throughout the twentieth century (ibid:5). Miller (1987:19) when looking at objectification also includes Hegel’s ‘phenomenology of spirit’. He had previously stated that ‘the notion of exchange and gifts gave way, especially in the West, to capitalist economies where value as produced in organisations of difference and value as a measure of relative price in transaction may underlie significant dynamics within structures of social actions’ (ibid:6). The growth of monetary value of objects associated with the PMGB as collectibles confirms this view.
The value of seemingly mundane, throw-away objects is thoroughly investigated by Thompson in *Rubbish Theory* (1979/2017:88-110), *A dynamic theory of rubbish* where ‘the general form of the argument can now be given quite precise expression’ (ibid:88). Thompson’s theory of objects going through phases, ‘Transient (value decreasing) → Rubbish (no value) → Durable (value increasing)’ (ibid:27), influences the PMGB and its accompaniments that is in a way both figurative, with the change of biography and status from custodian to custodian, and literal with the increase in monetary value as the various elements become scarcer. The cardboard boxes, paper envelopes and other ‘packaging’ are more valuable than an actual PMGB. He also notes how that is possible for more formal public collecting to stall the dynamics of the theory;

The complete transfer of a class of items to museums and public collections is consonant with a general belief that, if only these items were in circulation, they would be increasing in value. In other words, they are so durable they are priceless. (ibid:112).

Authenticity is also linked to value whether it is a museum display’s ‘staged authenticity’ (Belk, 1995:125) to the shift from ‘clean’ to ‘authentic’ souvenirs for sale (Saunders, 2007:182). Authenticity also speaks as ‘witnesses to the past’ (Berger, 2009:114) and, more relevant to the recent increase of ‘authentic’ reproductions of PMGB ‘contents’, there may be some benefit to having these ‘artefacts’ that transcends their physical inaccuracies. As Miller (1987:215) points out;

The authenticity of artefacts as culture derives, not from their relationship to some historical style or manufacturing process – in other words, there is no truth or falsity immanent in them – but rather from their active participation in a process of social self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of our understanding of ourselves and others.

The ‘authenticity of objects’ (Saunders, 2004:14) from the war not merely as ‘sacred objects’ (Cornish, 2004:46) or ‘icons of remembrance’ (ibid:47) but realising that they can have ‘social lives’ as in the diary that allowed John Schofield to ‘know my grandfather better than before’ (2009:218). The PMGB, in common with perhaps all objects, has, for at least some part of their lives, value. The ‘value’ may be as an item of memory linking a person to a loved one, or it could be aesthetic value where
an object has a pleasing appearance beyond the original purpose of that object.

**Memory and Forgetting**

The PMGB and its contents are associated with memory. This could be the memory of the current custodian about the soldier or that of his descendants, with each ‘generation’ of memories having the potential to subtly change the PMGBs biography. These memories can be vague, sometimes just snippets about a grandfather who always had sweets in his pockets for his grandson rather than a battle-hardened soldier who experienced true horrors in his youth. Trying to make sense of these fragments, often from our own youth, and re-order them in such a way as to remember the whole person and not just isolated memories is challenging. The poet Victoria Chang in *Dear Memory* (2021) attempts to expand her knowledge about memories of her own past by writing letters to those relatives, now gone, to understand their stories and how difficult it is to contextualise these memories without the full facts. Chang acknowledges these vague memories in the letter to her grandfather about his death;

> I remember meeting you only once – You were a landscape filled with general trees, general grass, general sky. I heard that you died when you fell in the bathroom, when you broke a hip – next to a general toilet, in a general bathroom. (2021:18)

It is anticipated that some of the interviews for this research will also be subjected to similar fragmented memories, but as with Chang, it is hoped that the fragments can be expanded into fuller biographies.

Connerton (1989:1) tells us that ‘we generally think of memory as an individual faculty’ but goes on the introduce the concept of ‘social memory’ (ibid, p6-40). He also notes that ‘what the shape of the twentieth century looks like will depend crucially upon what social group we happen to belong to. For most people, but especially for Europeans, the narrative of this century is unthinkable without the memory of the Great War’ (ibid:20). Sometimes memory can be evoked by silence, as with the two-minute silence at 11.00 on Remembrance Sunday, and Connerton notes that ‘silences often play a crucial role in heightening the pragmatics of
beginnings and endings’ (2011:54). When examining the role of Sir Edwin Lutyens’s (1869-1944) Cenotaph in Whitehall, Forty and Küchler (1999:161) note that ‘the significance of The Great Silence in this respect, as the central form of expression of homage to the dead, can hardly be missed’.

Collective memory gives us a feel of how society behaves or is expected to behave regarding memory, in their introduction to Collective Remembering (1990:7) Middleton and Edwards remind us of the significance of such memories, and give the example ‘when people reminisce about family photographs, or recount shared experiences of times of happiness and trauma at weddings and funerals, what is recalled and commemorated extends beyond the sum of the participants’ individual perspectives; it becomes the basis of future reminiscence’. Jones (2007:47) asks ‘in what way are artefacts used as mnemonic devices to represent and measure temporal spans’.

Society also forgets, sometimes through changes in socio-economic practices or even by changes in taste. Death and memory are very personal and, with the use of war memorials, Moriarty (1997:135) notes that ‘private grief was acknowledged but not dwelt upon’.

One intriguing element associated with memory and the PMGB is with the phenomenon of the 1914 Christmas Truce. Eksteins (1989:96) notes that the ‘expressions of fascination, astonishment, and excitement surface in virtually every account of the fraternisation that Christmas’. Did this break from hostilities influence how the soldiers created their own stories about the PMGB and whether this affected its subsequent biography?

Sensory Anthropology

The senses also play an important part in understanding the complex biographies created by and around the PMGB. Haptic technologies, also known as kinaesthetic communication or 3D-touch, are crucial in understanding the ‘feel’ of the PMGB and what can be found inside it. Serematakas (1994), Howes (2003) and Classen (2005) examine the role of the senses in understanding haptics and material culture. Classen (2005:277) notes also that in early museums the objects could be touched
by the visiting public because ‘it also provided the thrill of coming into vicarious
contact with their original creators and users’. The same is true for touching the
PMGB and its associated artefacts, although perhaps to connect more to family
rather than even ‘exotic strangers’ (ibid). Even a jagged piece of shell fragment or a
bullet kept as a souvenir can communicate much about pain, suffering, loss and grief
and this is made relevant to the First World War by Bourke (1996:31-74) and Cornish

_Trench Art_

In his earlier work on Trench Art Saunders (2001c) when investigating ‘the social
worlds of trench art’ (ibid:109) describes the ‘landscapes of metal’ (ibid:111) that
were transformed and transported, either as souvenirs, keepsakes or curios into
ordinary household objects, sometimes with a sense of having a ‘still little
understood role in the working out of personal emotions for their owners’ (ibid:126).
As the original owners died and the objects passed to their descendants, these
emotions became lost or further misunderstood. The construction of frames for
photographs by using ‘trench art’ materials allow them to both literally and
symbolically act as ‘memory triggers’ (Saunders, 2003:81) and this could also be
possible for other items ‘found’ with a PMGB.

Reviewing the theoretical approaches used to interpret Trench Art is relevant
when attempting to understand and place the PMGB as Material Culture. The
classification of the accompaniments found with any PMGB will help to lay out and
define its biography (Chapter 4). The PMGB classification mirrors that of trench art
as presented by Saunders (2003:35-51).

Saunders (2003:3) further ties trench art more broadly to material culture by
regarding such objects as being a prime example of what Gell (1998:62) calls, ‘the
visible knot which ties together an invisible skein of relations, fanning out into social
space and social time’. Waugh (2015:loc 191) describes trench art as being ‘art in
the face of trauma’ and it is relevant to remember that all trench art has an origin in
conflict. Even the objects made by French and Belgian artisans and sold to
battlefield pilgrims just after the war, became for the purchasers ‘trench art as heart-
rending souvenirs in acts of remembrance of their loved ones’ (Saunders, 2002a:5).
Personal Access Statement on Literature Review

Due to visual impairment the author has used e-books, in particular Kindle®, which do not follow the usual bibliographical conventions. These publications have location numbers rather than page numbers as their ‘page’ sizes are not fixed and can be enlarged or reduced as needed by the reader.

Literature Review

The PMGB does not occupy many substantive pages in the literature of the First World War, Conflict Archaeology, Conflict Anthropology or Material Culture. As an individual object it is well-known and often mentioned, but rarely beyond the superficial notion of it being a ‘Gift’ for soldier’s in the trenches at Christmas 1914. The overall impression is that the PMGB was only ever issued to soldiers in the trenches, and only on Christmas Day 1914. The literature concerning the PMGBs accompanying items is also scant and refers to them as ‘contents’ which further confuses the associated biographies and history around packaging, production and distribution of the whole ‘Gift from a Princess’.

Military service records from the First World War are challenging to research as there are no more than 40% remaining (Fowler 2003:48). The records were held in five regional centres until being centralised into one archive in Arnside Street, London during the 1930’s. On 8 September 1940, during the height of the Blitz, the building was hit by German bombs and around 60% of the records lost. The remaining records are divided into two groups, WO 363, also known as the ‘burnt’ records (Fowler 2008:48) and WO 364, the ‘unburnt’ records. WO 363 is for soldiers attested for short service for the duration of the war while WO 364 is generally for regular army personnel who served in the British Army before 1914. Those records from WO 363 that still exist are often fire or water damaged and sometimes fragmented. Leonard (2012:55) notes the irony of this German attack ‘was that the same nation which had failed to take the lives of these soldiers in the Great War succeeded in stealing their memory and their wartime identity some 20 years later’.
The most accessible source of military service records is the Internet, in particular websites such as Ancestry.co.uk and fold3. Fabiansson (2004:176) concludes that the ‘Internets materiality indirectly creates new transitional relations, with distinguishing social structures that enables Great War research to become more international and multi-dimensional than ever before’.

Modern-day researchers have come to rely heavily on the Medal Index Cards that were created by the Army Medal Office based in Droitwich, Worcestershire, towards the end of the war (Ancestry, 2002/2022:np). These cards have names, army numbers, regiments and when the soldier entered actual combat. Because these record cards were not kept with the formal service records, they have remained intact. It is ironic that these records, designed only to provide accurate indicative information for the engraver preparing the soldier’s service medals for issue, are now used for researching his service.

Princess Mary and PMGB Specific.

To date there have been three biographies of Princess Mary. Two were written in the first decade after the end of the war, Princess Mary; A Biography, (1922) by Mabel Colebrook Carey and Princess Mary, Viscountess Lascelles (1925) by Evelyn Graham. The third, is a modern biography, Princess Mary: The First Modern Princess (2021) by Elizabeth Basford. Although the earlier works cover Princess Mary’s life from her birth to her marriage to Henry Lascelles, 6th Earl of Harewood (1882-1947) which includes the First World War, information about the ‘Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Christmas Fund’ is mentioned in only two pages in each book. Graham (1925) is so inaccurate and subjective that it cannot be considered a reliable work\textsuperscript{13}, including an error that the PMGB fund was inaugurated in 1915 rather than the correct 1914 (1925:69). Graham also duplicates an account almost word-for-word without referencing Carey about a ‘Private Brabston’ whose life was saved by his PMGB stopping a German bullet (Graham, 1925:72-73, Carey, 1922:73). Princess Mary’s son, George, in a letter dated 6 July 1982\textsuperscript{14}, denied that any biographies of his mother had ever been written.

Two of the biographies written after her marriage give an insight into how highly Princess Mary was regarded by the soldiers and may have played a part in
shaping the biographies of the PMGBs held by these veterans. Returning to Buckingham Palace from Westminster Abbey on her wedding day, 28 February 1922, Princess Mary ordered her car to stop and instructed that her bridal bouquet be laid at the base of the Cenotaph in Whitehall (Graham, 1925:178 and Basford, 2021:13). This became a Royal tradition, the latest occurrence being with the Duchess of Cambridge laying her bridal bouquet on the grave of the unknown warrior in Westminster Abbey in 2011 (Basford, 2021:13). Princess Mary also had a nickname which may surprise people who remember Diana, Princess of Wales (1961-97); Mary was also called the ‘People’s Princess’ (ibid:19).

The subject-specific, *The Christmas Tin* by Terence Evans (2014), is only a 44-page ‘overview’ of the PMGB without any reference to material culture or any potential biographies. Evans acknowledges the use of inferior quality brass composite for some PMGBs and correctly surmises that this was an adaption in response to the scarcity of strip brass during early 1915 (ibid:11) but offers no further analysis or thoughts. He also notes several design alterations between different examples of the PMGB but fails to offer any analysis or conclusions as to why they exist. These differences have been used within the chart of the author’s PMGBs listed in Appendix 1, and the author believes that they may represent different lid dies used to differentiate by at least three distinct metal box manufacturers, a precedent already established with Queen Victoria’s Christmas Box of 1900 (Item 1 S/COM Chapter 6).

The only other significant reference to the PMGB comes from Edith Appleton’s (1915/2014) *Diary of a Nursing Sister on the Western Front* where she describes receiving ‘Princess Mary’s nice brass box’ (ibid: loc1287). This is unique coming from a female writer in a world of male-dominated perspectives.

The recent Doyle (2021) publication *For Every Sailor Afloat, Every Soldier At The Front; Princess Mary’s Christmas Gift, 1914*, has a wealth of photographs about the PMGB, many containing elements rarely seen in public such as the envelopes from the writing case (ibid:204). These photographs are well staged and informative but there is a lack of formal analysis or any deep biographical researching.
Wartime Publications

Pamphlets and Booklets

Several wartime pamphlets and books written specifically for soldiers have been located and assessed. Many offered advice and guidance for the young men, many of whom were away from home for the very first time, and covered topics as diverse as avoiding venereal disease to their spiritual wellbeing. Most were small enough, like the PMGB, to be carried easily in a uniform pocket. Many would have likely been placed inside the protective brass PMGB to keep them safe and dry. The PMGB of Ernest Haslam (PMGB 002, Chapter 4) contained, amongst other ephemera, a copy of *The Holy Gospel According To Saint John – Active Service 1914* (1914) which is based on *Original Sketches made in the Holy Land* by H. A. Harper and J. Clark (1909). It has on the cover an instruction (in bold capitals) for the soldier to;

‘PLEASE CARRY THIS IN YOUR POCKET AND READ IT EVERY DAY’

(The Holy Gospel According To Saint John, 1914)

Measuring 73mm by 114mm, the booklet was one of many different Gospels produced in the same small format by the ‘Religious Tract Society’. Many appear to have used the work of Henry Harper (1835-1900) and James Clark (1858-1943) and were also produced for the spiritual comfort of soldiers during the Second Boer War (1899-1902).

Ernest’s PMGB also contains a copy of *Army Form B.51, Health Memoranda for Soldiers* by Lt. Col. H. K. Allport of the Royal Army Medical Corps (Allport, 1914) which gives basic advice for the soldiers’ physical wellbeing including hygiene, nutrition, tropical diseases and a section warning the soldier about the dangers of not being ‘chaste’ including some of the consequences of contracting venereal diseases. This 109mm by 132mm booklet has been folded to fit into the PMGB. Many of these pamphlets and small booklets, designed to be carried in a pocket, would have been better protected inside a PMGB.

There have also been numerous incidents where the life of a soldier has been saved by books, mainly pocket bibles, stopping bullets. One such case was of Private Leonard Knight from Worcestershire whose life was saved by the bible given
to him in 1915 by his aunt Minnie (Cockroft, 2017, para 1). See Chapter 4, PMGB 005, 010 and 022 for analysis of such events.

Newspapers

Erskine (2012:169) notes that ‘it is in advertising that propaganda is most readily identified. Indeed, propaganda is the primary tool of marketing’. Newspapers of the period did report the progress of the Gift Fund widely which must have aided fundraising. The very earliest reported appeal by Princess Mary to raise the necessary funds for the PMGB was a letter of Friday 16 October 1914 which included the following;

I want you now to help me to send a Christmas present from the whole of the nation to every sailor afloat and every soldier at the front. I am sure that we should all be happier to feel that we had helped to send our little token of love and sympathy on Christmas morning, something that would be useful and of permanent value, and the making of which may be the means of providing employment in trades adversely affected by the war. Could there be anything more likely to hearten them in their struggle than a present received straight from home on Christmas Day?

Please will you help me? Mary. (Daily Mirror, 1914:page 2 col 1).

Newspapers reported on many of these associated activities around production, distribution and supply of the overall gift and its accompaniments, particularly valuable in gaining accurate insight for ‘the history of the PMGB’ in Chapter 3. Specific newspaper articles about the PMGB are studied as examples of material culture in Chapter 8 as in the reporting of ‘Princess Mary’s Gift Saves A Man’s Life’ (Daily Sketch, 1915:page 2, col 4) where the PMGB in the pocket of one ‘Private Metcalfe’ deflected a bullet and saved his life.

Also located was a newspaper article in the Daily Mirror dated Friday 30 October 1914, ten weeks before the issuing of the PMGB to soldiers at the front began, which revealed the photograph taken of Princess Mary by Ernest Brooks (1876-1957) that was to become one of the main accompaniments of the overall gift. The article shows ‘Princess Mary as Christmas Fairy’ (Brooks, 1914:4).
1920s Commemoration

One especially useful post-war publication is The National Role of the Great War 1914-1918 (Anon, 1920), a 14-volume work listing the war service in short paragraphs of around 140,000 people who served in various capacities, both military and civilian, during the conflict. Although divided into geographic regions around major cities these books did not cover the whole country and as the entries had to be paid for, many people either could not afford or did not want to pay for an entry. Nevertheless, they contain entries commemorating individual service by women, controversial during a time of national resistance to women’s suffrage;

CHURCH, D. A. (Miss), Special War Worker.
During the War this lady was engaged on important duties in the Royal Army Clothing Department at the Skating Rink, Holland Park. She carried out her work with care and efficiency and her services were much appreciated.
54, Yeldham Road, Hammersmith, W.6.                     12827C

As well as acknowledging, albeit by her mother paying for the insertion, Dorothy Church’s war service, the entry also shows the use of a peacetime leisure building, the Skating Rink, being converted to wartime usage. This change in the country from peacetime activity to war production will impact the PMGB and its associated biographies in so many ways as ordinary items from tea to chocolate become ‘militarised’. This can be illustrated with Item 9 P/T (Chapter 7), the 1909 Huntley and Palmer’s ‘Sentry Box’ biscuit tin that had the German soldier replaced by a Belgian soldier in 1913 (Corey, 1972:172) as a ‘patriotic gesture from Reading’ (Griffith, 1979:27) and Item 12 P/T (Chapter 7) the Ridgeway’s tea caddy adorned with militaristic images including King George V, Admiral Jellicoe, Sir John French and a uniformed nurse.

Diaries and Journals

The last two decades have seen a surge in the publication of diaries and journals written during or just after the First World War. Unlike the works by the ‘war poets’,
such as Rupert Brookes (1887-1915) and intellectuals like Edmund Blunden (1896-1974), whose writing focussed on the horror and futility of conflict, ‘Death soon arrived there, among the group at the clumsy entrance’ (Blunden, 1928[2010]: loc 2006 of 4721), these newly discovered works shine a light of normality, of duty and service, rather than loss and anger, on the subject of the ‘Great War’. The war poets have influenced more than three generations since the end of the conflict and, although their work is powerful and relevant, it can perhaps overstate the negative and overlook the ordinary, relatively lower educated but still eloquent soldiers who kept diaries and journals about what was the most momentous adventure of their lives. Fussell (1975/2009) gives a candid appraisal of these ‘rather artificial structures, that points to Sassoon’s exaggerated antithesis, Grave’s farcical dramaturgy [and] Blunden’s unremitting literary pastoralism’ (ibid:390).

These newly published books have provided an opportunity to explore some of the soldiers' feelings and emotions around subjects covered by the research. Of the many publications that have ‘surfaced’ recently, three are included in this review as they represent the scope and breadth of ordinary people now telling their stories. This ‘small but expanding canon of Great War diaries’ (Leonard, 2012:55) have assisted this research as they give substance to the everyday, hum-drum lives of the participants. In The Last Fighting Tommy (2007) Richard Van Emden tells the whole life story of Harry Patch, one of the three soldiers at the 90th Armistice anniversary held at the Cenotaph in London. After having a large piece of shrapnel removed from near his stomach, Harry was asked by the surgeon if he wanted to keep it as a souvenir, to which he replied that ‘I’ve had the bloody stuff too long already’ (ibid:111), a very different reaction to the cause of a wound from the original owner of PMGB 005 who carefully preserved the German bullet that passed through his PMGB (Chapter 4 and further analysed in ‘Evidence of Trauma’ in Chapter 8).

Frederick (‘Fen’) Noakes’s The Distant Drum (1952/2010) is the memoir of a young man who overcomes childhood asthma to serve in the prestigious Coldstream Guards regiment. This memoir explores the relationship between those of the wartime generation and the generations that followed that had first-hand relationships with the soldiers, particularly useful when analysing the interviews in Chapter 5. In the introduction, Fen’s niece Carole writes;
A picture from the cold winter of 1947 shows a man in a posh suit, he was at a wedding, but with a fairisle sweater to keep him warm. He has ‘Arthur Askey’ glasses and an ‘Arthur Askey’ haircut. This is the Fen I remember. Even though my sister and I had little recollection of our uncle, he was often in our minds after that because my father had a good stock of stories of Fen’s war service and how it affected those still at home. There was an age gap of nearly ten years between them, and Dad was obviously proud of his brother.

(ibid:vi)

*Drawing Fire* (2009) is Leonard Smith’s illustrated diary of his life in the 7th Battalion of the London Regiment and details his life from enlisting in September 1914 to his demobilisation in January 1919. Smith was a successful commercial artist, and the book is richly illustrated throughout. Included in the book is a photograph of Smith’s company during a route march at Crowborough in East Sussex sometime in early October 1914. It is one of a series of souvenir photographs (ibid:16) taken by a commercial photographer who captured each of the regimental companies as they marched past and sold prints to the soldiers. The author’s grandfather also served in the 7th London Regiment, and he may well be present in these photographs.

Cultural and Social History Pertaining to the First World War

By putting a name, sometimes even a face, to artefacts from the First World War, we can look at the PMGBs and their associated artefacts in much greater detail. This research centres on the biographies created around the PMGBs and a clear understanding of the cultural and social forces that shaped the life cycle of the original recipients, their immediate descendants and the current custodians is essential to drive the analysis forward.

Many purely historical works have been produced since the war ended in 1918 but one of the first comprehensive attempts to address the impact of the First World War beyond 1918 was by the Open University with a series of five volumes, with supporting documents, under the overall title of *A318, War, Peace and Social*
Change: Europe 1900-1955. Module A318 was part of the Open University’s Art Foundation Modules and ran between 1990 and 2000. Although no longer available as a taught module, the resources, in print and online, are still available. Book 2, World War 1 and its Consequences (1990) has been quoted in this research.

An early important work that was initially published in 1975 with an illustrated edition in 2009, was Paul Fussell’s The Great War and Modern Memory. Perhaps one of the first of the ‘modern’ books on the war, more anthropological than historical, it delves into the subtleties of memory and starts to question some of the more traditional literary views of the war. It includes a quote from Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) in a letter to Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) where Owen parodies the Field Service Postcard (‘Quick-firers’) of the time (2009:231). ‘Quick-firers’ have been encountered as important objects of memory during this research, important enough for the original sender/recipient to have kept them safe all this time.

Bourne, Liddle and Whitehead (2000a and b) edited a two-volume collection of work investigating every aspect of what was for many nations a continuation of war from 1914 to 1945. The volumes are presented where ‘every aspect of the war is investigated by experts in their particular field, they ‘compare and contrast the experience of war from the frontlines to the factories, from the high command to ordinary people caught up in world-shattering events’ (2000a: rear cover). Produced to address the previous tendency of historians to treat the First and Second World Wars as ‘qualitatively and quantitatively different’ (2000a:9), the first volume seeks to ‘demonstrate the diversity of personal experience in the two world wars’ (ibid:9). Volume 2 (2000b) examines ‘the attitudes of those writers, musicians and artists whose work was shaped by their war experiences’ (2000b:9). Nicholas Saunders and Joanna Bourke were among the collaborators and their individual contributions give a flavour of where their respective fields of study were to lead over the next two decades.

A significant part of this research has also been to reconcile how memories, first created over a century ago, have evolved through time when linked to the PMGB, and to identify and analyse how people have interacted with the object, also to see how they are influencing generations of future custodians relationships with the PMGB. Many individual custodians of PMGBs have a sense of the historical
associations with war, conflict and the wider implications of the war in respect of memorials, commemoration and remembrance. Some of these may be social expectations. Lowenthal (1985:13-21) counsels caution when ‘repossessing the past’. He notes that ‘others conceive of a past stored not in memory but in the material cosmos – though the notion of memory ‘traces’ implies their close affinity’ (ibid:19), clearly placing objects, artefacts and other objects centre stage. Miller, when looking at the philosophy of Hegel (1770-1831) around objectification in *Stuff* (2010:54-68), does raise an interesting, and relevant, point about how theories can be altered over time. ‘We can happily appropriate those ideas that suit our purpose, while ditching others’ (ibid:57). The researcher may have a completely different interpretation of a particular PMGBs’ biography than that of the objects’ custodian.

Jay Winter focuses on the First World War’s impact on society, particularly British and European, during the twentieth century. His work on remembrance and mourning, both private and collective has given structure to many of the research methodologies used throughout this thesis. Significantly for the biographies analysed during this research, the PMGB was only given to regular soldiers or those who had volunteered during 1914 and not the conscripts of 1916 onwards. Not even those registered under the Derby Scheme, the so-called ‘un-starred men’ (1986:39) who would present themselves for service when required, were eligible for it.16

Also relevant to this research is the militarisation of everyday society, as noted with the CRMBs in Chapter 7. Winter notes that ‘the war showed that the culture of assimilation was deeper than the ideology of internationalism’ (1988:165). A particular conference quote was the plea to ‘do no harm’ when interpreting the memory of soldiers from the First World War (Winter, 2018), which resonated with the author, not only when pursuing biographical research but also in the design and construction of museum displays and exhibitions about the war.

Winter also makes an important point about the prevalence of writing about the war, where:

it is that much war literature, which has been read by millions who wanted to find out about what it was really like that was in effect less about the war period than about the difficulty of living with the memory of war long after the Armistice . (1989:300).
In *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1995:98) Winter identifies the seemingly transient nature of war memorials and notes they have ‘a half-life, a trajectory of decomposition, a passage from the active to the inert’. This has a resonance for this research, the author has encountered biographies of PMGBs that are incomplete simply because the people who knew the stories are now gone.

Social memory is an important element for analysing and understanding the processes associated with the creation of biographies for the PMGB. Paul Connerton (1989:13) points to the need to ‘distinguish social memory from a more specific practice that is best termed historical reconstruction’. He also notes that it is helpful when analysing social memory in modern social and cultural theory to distinguish between the three distinct classes of memory; personal, cognitive and that of simply having the capacity to reproduce a certain performance (ibid:21-22). This is relevant when interpreting current custodian’s memory signifiers in contrast to those of the original recipient of the PMGB.

Jones (2007:47) asks how ‘do people and societies situate themselves in time?’ This is especially relevant when trying to interpret material objects as markers of memory when left in a PMGB by previous generations. Objects as ‘memory markers’ have been placed into PMGBs by Harold Haigh (PMGB 001) and the family of Donald Manson (PMGB 003) and are analysed in Chapter 4. Jones wanted to ‘retain the notion that times are connected to being human to consider the relationship between memory and history’ (ibid:52) and that ‘material culture presents an objectification of the past, yet it is also experienced subjectively’ (ibid:53).

It is particularly important to identify and understand the memories and markers associated with PMGB biographies that are associated with death, wounding and trauma. These played a key role concerning why certain objects were placed in a PMGB in the first place. Leese (2014:9) gives the number of British soldiers diagnosed with shellshock (neurasthenia) as ‘amounting to 80,000 or 2 per cent of all soldiers injured’. Connerton (2011:84) discusses how these ‘mnemonic devices’, where the overlapping of cultural and social memory can occur, play a part in the physical manifestation of mourning, and how objects can have a role in this mourning or remembrance process. The relevance here is where certain objects
have been placed in PMGBs of soldiers killed in action as both memory and mourning markers. The complex relationship material culture has with death and memory has also been researched by Hallam and Hockey (2001:102) and they acknowledge that ‘Material Disturbance – The materials enmeshed in the everyday lives of persons that survive after their deaths can evoke lost presence and present absence in potentially problematic ways’. They also observe that ‘images, texts and objects might stand as painfully isolated vestiges of those persons with whom they were once surrounded or associated’ (ibid:104).

Photographs are images and Susan Sontag observed (1979:15) that ‘all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt’ but can also fix the person being represented to one split-second of their life which can stall the biography of any objects associated with that person, such as a PMGB. These ‘Visual Ecosystems’ (Edwards and Lien, 2016:4), especially in museums, give a ‘vital set of interconnections, dependencies, benefits and threats’ (ibid). Photographs or early film footage is often prone to misidentification of individuals. The ‘hoping against hope’ of seeing an image of a lost one was powerful in the case of Mrs Wilson from Droylsden, Greater Manchester, who was convinced that a wounded soldier on a stretcher shown in the 1916 film *The Battle of the Somme*, was her dead husband, Jim (Fraser, et al, 2009:128) she leapt to her feet in the cinema and screamed out his name. So passionate and forceful was her belief that a substantial number of other audience members also ‘recognised’ James Wilson. Research has identified the place and date of the footage shot by Geoffrey Malins as being 5 days before Wilson’s death and in an area that his division never entered (ibid:129). Similarly, a lack of accurate identification can sometimes be resolved decades after the original event. The identification of Walter Lydamore as the ‘shirt-sleeved man’, again from *The Battle of the Somme*, only came about when he saw himself on film in 1964, 48 years after the footage was shot (Smither, 2009:185). Edwards (2022:71) argues that photographs; ‘inject a particular form of presence into the historical landscape – those of standpoint and experience’. She also says, with specific reference to war photographs, that;

Photographs too easily become passive receivers of context, endowed by text or caption for instance, rather than generative of it. It is as if context can’t really deal with the messiness of the past presented in photographs, with all
their visceral directness and intimacy’.

(ibid:88).

*Tea, Rum and Fags; Sustaining Tommy 1914-18* (Weekes, 2009), examines how the British army was supplied with food, drink and ‘comforts’ during the war. It is both informative and insightul as Weekes included many diary and journal entries from soldiers experiencing the hardships and privations of the conflict. The positioning of modern research alongside original comments allows for a much deeper understanding of the impact that something as simple as a hot meal or a decent cigarette had on the life and wellbeing of the ‘tommy’ in the front lines. This is particularly relevant as the PMGB, on some level of its identity, was a prime example of a ‘comfort’, and regardless of all the other implications around use, identity, authenticity and materiality, must have made an impression on those who received it on Christmas Day 1914.

**Anthropology and Archaeology**

As an object born of conflict, albeit originally as a comfort designed to give the recipient a momentary break from that conflict, the PMGB straddles the worlds of archaeology and anthropology. Because it was something that the soldier could keep about their person, it would inevitably be associated with the legacy of the war. Everything from being the receptacle of memories and souvenirs from home right through to a witness of trauma and even death, the PMGB biographies encountered during this research benefit greatly from being analysed from an archaeological, as well as a historical and anthropological, perspective.

Saunders (2002b) links the work already established on object trajectories by Appadurai (1986:3-63) and the ‘cultural biographies’ of objects by Kopyttoff (1986:64-91), and how ‘social relations with objects change’ (Dant, 1999:131) by both our response to the object changing over time and how the meaning of the object changes as society changes (ibid:131).

Appadurai (1986:4) looking at the established theoretical discussion by Karl Marx (1818-83) on;
the fetishism of commodities’ goes on to state that ‘even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulations of things. For that we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. (ibid:5).

This is particularly relevant to the PMGB which can have many ‘lives’ and biographies depending on who and when the ‘life’ is being observed. This has given the author a direction of analysis to consider that would indicate that such ‘lives’ and biographies may even be different and overlapping for the same object depending on who was being observed.

Modern Conflict Archaeology and the First World War

Before the latter part of the twentieth century ‘battlefield archaeology’ was largely overlooked as being part of the discipline of mainstream archaeology. It was only in the late 1990’s that scholars, investigating these landscapes of conflict began ‘responding to the challenge of understanding its many layers of meaning’ (Saunders, 2001a:50).

In the introduction to Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War (2004) Saunders, as the only anthropologist among the contributors, notes,

If the range of chapters in this volume is any indication, this complexity demands more than a generalised interdisciplinary response – it requires a coherent, and sensitised approach that would seem to be the natural ground of anthropology. A powerful case can be made that these disciplines, and many others, overlap in a shared common terrain – that of the materiality of war and its aftermath. (ibid:1).

Modern Conflict Archaeology (MCA) is a hybrid of anthropology and archaeology, that presents objects as having ‘a life history, a succession of roles and
meanings and is therefore packed with stories about the past’. MCA focuses on conflicts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and focusses on the experiences of individuals and their relationship with objects rather than the more usual military history focus on wars between nations. Artefacts and evidence found with the remains of a German soldier at an archaeological excavation at Serre, France in 2005 was enough, not only to identify the man by name, but also, because of what was found in his bread bag [haversack], give a greater insight into his character. Brown (2009:274-5) notes that ‘the volume of material in the bag is of interest itself, since it shows a man carrying a small world around on his back’. A PMGB is also capable of carrying a similar ‘small world’ under its brass lid.

The first complete book to bring together topics around memory and material culture specifically in the context of the First World War was Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory and the First World War (Saunders, 2004). The contributions came from;

A multidisciplinary perspective, uniting previously compartmentalised disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, cultural history, museology and art history in their focus on material culture. This innovative, hybrid approach investigates the ‘social life’ of objects in order to understand them as they move through time and space and intersect the lives of all who come into contact with them.

(ibid: rear cover).

In Beyond the Dead Horizon: Studies in in Modern Conflict Archaeology (2012) Saunders presents the volume in two distinct parts, Objects in Conflict and landscapes in Conflict, with objects having two more chapters than landscapes, and there is a clear move towards the anthropological analysis of the material remains of the war rather than the physical remains themselves. There are no ‘papers detailing the opportunistic digging of battlefields, the counting of musket balls, the search for First World War cap badges or altimeters and propellors from crashed Second World War aeroplanes’ (ibid: xi). The author notes the irony concerning this research that most of the objects collected and which are being analysed as part of this thesis are because of ‘opportunistic digging’. In Modern Conflict and the Senses (2017) Saunders examines the way that the industrial nature of the war had 'reconfigured
the boundaries of time, space and distance in the domestic setting of the home front, through the agency of material culture, most often in metal objects’ (ibid:35). This is also relevant when analysing the relationships between family members of the original recipient of a PMGB, when female family members, now taking the place of men in the factories, may have even had a hand in making the brass box and its accompaniments.

Concluding Comments
This research topic presents many complex and intricate issues of materiality, memory, commemoration and remembrance around the biographies and stories contained within the PMGB. This data, both literally, through the objects contained within the PMGBs, and figuratively, with the associated family biographies, requires a multidisciplinary approach using a wide and suitably cross-disciplinary range of literature.

The PMGB dips its figurative toe into many different subject pools, it can be many different things to many different people. The PMGBs still with the families of the original recipient are all used unreservedly as part of the overall remembrance of that person. This also expands to include it as a material example of the remembrance of the whole war. For them perhaps the PMGB could become a portable metal cenotaph, an empty tomb, representing the sacrifice of a whole generation in a conflict that sparks furious debate even now over a century later. It could also represent a missing body, such as where a soldier who was killed during the war had his PMGB given to his next of kin. Or it could be Grandmother’s button box or Dad’s tobacco tin. To capture as much as possible of such feint traces, fugitive memories, and revealing aspects of the PMGB today – more than a century after its creation – is a challenging endeavour, made worthwhile by acknowledging that consciously and unconsciously people invest their lives in objects.
Introduction

It is crucial to address and correct the often-flawed public perception as to how the PMGB was conceived, funded, distributed and managed, especially after the initial issue of December 1914.

The first distribution of around 465,000 PMGBs was to recipients already serving at the front, so eligibility was not an issue. It became problematic during the second issue of 1.8 million PMGBs in spring 1915, when volunteers had joined the army after the qualifying ‘being in the King’s uniform on Christmas Day 1914’ time. Also, time had now elapsed, and the Christmas Card was replaced with a New Year Card. The final issue of around 400,000 PMGBs had to be claimed and verified before issue, eventually ending in 1920. In total around 2.6 million PMGBs were issued. This research has collected a significant amount of data to enable an ‘unpacking’ of various elements of the PMGB and to be able to offer a detailed and nuanced biography of it. Many mistakes, misrepresentations and inaccurate assumptions are relatively modern; ‘Queen Mary Tin with full contents for sale’ being a common occurrence, but some of the errors that have shaped our interpretation and understanding of the PMGB date from 1914.

The PMGB was never the complete Gift, it was part of it. It was the principal object given along with other, more transient consumables, issued by officers to serving personnel on Christmas Day 1914. The British Red Cross issued to wounded soldiers, either in field or base hospitals, on the same day. The navy had their PMGBs sent out with regular re-supply operations. Later issues were controlled by the Fund’s Executive Committee.

A concise classification is required for all the objects likely to be found in a PMGB, including those that were part of the original accompaniments to the overall Gift and those placed inside by the soldier, his family, descendants and future custodians of the PMGB.
1. Design and Manufacture

Once the Executive Committee of the Fund had established the form and nature of the Gift, a competition was held to produce a practical and appropriate design for the box. The competition winners were the architectural partnership of Professor Stanley Davenport Adshead (1868-1946) and Stanley Churchill Ramsay (1882-1968) who worked together between 1911 and 1931.

The principal manufacturer of the PMGB was most likely Hudson Scott and Sons of James Street, Carlisle. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of this within the available literature, even Kevin Rafferty’s *The Story of Hudson Scott, Metal Box, James Street, Carlisle* (1998) hardly mentions the company during the First World War. Also, the day ledgers from the Gift Fund that show the day-to-day purchasing and ordering of items have been lost. There is, however, a compelling clue within Rafferty’s book that would certainly support Hudson Scott’s ability to produce the PMGB in the quantities and with the speed needed. During the Second World War Hudson Scott switched production to war materials just as they had in 1914. Rafferty notes:

> With the conflict in progress, sometimes extraordinary problems were encountered in the production of run-of-the-mill items. After Dunkirk when the troops had almost to be completely re-equipped, one of the things that Metal Box [Hudson Scott] was asked to help with was the supply of mess tins. A minimum of 70,000 were wanted weekly. Unfortunately, the spoilage rate was so high that only a few hundred were being produced each week. Evidently the process being used ended up in most cases with the corners fracturing. Metal Box set about making them quite differently and were so successful that they ended up as the main supplier of mess tins. Stuchbery\(^\text{17}\) writing in 1983, also informs us that mess tins were still being made by the process developed by Metal Box during the days following Dunkirk.


The unturned, raw edge corners of a British Army mess tin are identical to that of the PMGB. Hudson Scott, now Metal Box, would still have artisans, machinery and experience of producing such an item as the PMGB in vast numbers and used this knowledge to turn around the production from just a few hundred a week to the
required 70,000 per week very quickly.

Another example of tangible proof of Hudson Scott’s relationship with the PMGB is found where Griffith writes:

Vast numbers of military commemorative tins were also given away and sent at Christmas to the troops at the Front during the South African and First World Wars. In some cases, several tin printers and box makers were involved in production, to cope with the large numbers of tins required at speed. Hudson Scott made many of the 1914 Princess Mary tins, receiving on completion of their order, a letter of gratitude on behalf of the Princess. She was also apparently ‘greatly touched’ by Hudson Scott’s gift of a box [PMGB] made in silver gilt from the tools and dies used in the manufacture of ‘brass’ boxes for Her Royal Highness’s Sailors and Soldiers Fund.

(1979:77)

This silver gilt PMGB, engraved with the names of the members of the Funds Executive Committee, is also mentioned in the Final Report of the Fund in 1919.

Griffith (ibid:77) and Reader (1976:35) mention ‘several’ other un-named firms who produced PMGBs. Two who could have made a significant contribution were Barringer, Wallis and Manners of Mansfield and Barclay Fry of London. Both already had experience of producing the tins for Queen Victoria’s Gift to troops during the South African War (see Chapter 7 Item 1 S/COM). The three tins made for Queen Victoria’s Gift have clear differences which can be attributed to each of the three manufacturers, Hudson Scott, Barringer’s and Barclay Fry, but these very visible differences are not present with the PMGB. However, Evans (2014) does note several differences between PMGBs. These differences are not merely due to the quality of base metal and brass strip varying so much during the war or wear-and-tear from handling but are clear design differences in the dies;

1. Three different styles of the Princess’s head, including significant changes to her hair above her face. One head type having nineteen laurel leaves on one side of the wreath surrounding the head and only eighteen on the other. The other two different ‘hair’ types having eighteen leaves each.

2. Three distinctly different ‘CHRISTMAS 1914’ texts. Two different thickness
of font used and the addition, on some, of a full stop.

3. Three distinctly different five leaf flowers in the circles joining the top and bottom halves of the laurel wreath around the head.

(2014:11-15)

One explanation for these three sets of differences is that each manufacturer had a different set of dies for their own production of the PMGB.

The measurements of a typical PMGB (Figure 3.1) are; Base - Length (left-to-right) – 127mm, Width (front-to-back) – 76.2mm, Depth - 25.4mm. Embossed Lid - Length (left-to-right) – 129mm, Width (front-to-back) – 85mm. Weight (empty) – 125g.

Figure 3.1 PMGB 017, Authors Collection (Author ©).

The lid has two parts, the top embossed layer and the lower ridged layer that together, being larger than the base dimensions by 2mm, squeezes into the base to form an effective seal. The rounded ridge inside the lid protrudes by 4mm.

Brass strip was chosen for construction because, although it will corrode and tarnish, it will not rust. The softness and golden shine when polished also gave the object an aesthetic value. Brass was a major ingredient of the munitions industry and the varying quality differences of PMGBs is evidence of the difficulties encountered when trying to obtain brass strip by the Gift committee. This lack of raw material drew the PMGB into another area of historical significance with the ill-fated RMS Lusitania that was sunk by German submarine U-20 on 7 May 1915. The Lusitania was carrying 45 tonnes of strip brass destined to be made into PMGBs (IWM.org, 2018:np). Analysis of the thickness of the brass strip used for
construction is possible and would identify those periods of manufacture where the material varies in quality and thickness as supply becomes difficult, but only if a significant number of PMGBs, each with full provenance including date of issue, were tested. If such an undertaking were even possible it would only identify the already known issue of quality fluctuations during the manufacturing process, interesting on one level but not germane to the material culture of the PMGB.

One design difference not mentioned by Evans (2014) is that there seem to be two distinct bottom edge base patterns. One pattern is smooth and the other stepped (Figure 3.2).

![Figure 3.2 Differences in base edge of PMGB (Author ©).](image)

It is impossible to know if these are simply minor die differences as noted by Evans (2014) and are possibly attributable to individual manufacturers or a design change introduced for later versions. The evidence based on the PMGBs researched would indicate that the stepped version was from the early production and the smooth was later. The stepped version belonged to Harold Haigh (PMGB/001) which includes a 1914 Christmas card indicating an early issue and the smooth is Donald Manson’s (PMGB/003) which has a letter from the issuing officer to his father dated June 1916 making it a later issue. Without any accurate issue dates for the PMGBs encountered, except for the presence of either a 1914 or 1915 card, it is impossible to prove beyond reasonable doubt the reasons for this design difference. Another interesting piece of the jigsaw but not necessarily pushing the research any further along.

However, this does raise one question. Did the urgency that existed to get as many tins produced as fast as possible lead to different manufacturers being
involved simultaneously? Could it be that to speed up production the bases were produced separately and then shipped to another manufacturer to have the embossed lid attached?

The only decoration on the PMGB is the lid embossing. Centred around a working of Ernest Brooks’ photograph of Princess Mary within a circular wreath, flanked by two ‘M’ cyphers, the lid is surrounded by panels making up a border band 14mm wide. The border panels are divided into two horizontals (top and bottom) and two verticals (left side and right side). Each panel contains patriotic or militaristic designs. Six cartouches, each bearing the names of an ally, Japan, Russia, Montenegro, France, Belgium and Serbia, are present, two within the vertical side panels and the other four each occupying a corner. A large cartouche in the form of a Grecian urn is in the middle of the top horizontal panel and has the words ‘PAX BRITANNICUM’ in it. There is another long stadium shaped cartouche within the bottom panel that has the words ‘CHRISTMAS 1914’ embossed in it and a space left for the soldier to have his initials engraved.

2. Original Categories of PMGB Issue

This information has been included at this stage because it sets out the hierarchy of issue of the PMGB. The numbers required far outstripped the initial expectation of the Executive Committee and although the soldiers on the front line received their Gift at Christmas, many others had to wait up to eighteen months, regardless even of the rank of the recipient.

This knowledge of exactly when the PMGB was issued to a particular soldier could help to determine how the associated biography, with or without ‘contents’, has developed.

Distribution of PMGBs was prioritised under the Class heading’s as follows;  

A – The Navy and all troops serving at the Front (France).
B – All British, Colonial and Indian troops serving outside the British Isles but not at the Front.
C – All troops in the British Isles.  

(Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:3-4).
The seven Categories of Issue were;

- The Navy (including Minesweepers and Dockyard Officials).
- Troops at the Front (France), including Indian Troops.
- Men on leave or wounded.
- Members of the French Mission.
- Nurses at the Front.
- Widows or parents.
- Prisoners of war or interned men.  


Perhaps the most poignant category is Category 6 - Widows or parents. The next of kin of a soldier eligible to receive the PMGB but killed in action, could claim it on his behalf. It appears that the Executive Committee had realised that the PMGB had yet another use ‘beyond issue’, that of a vehicle of commemoration and remembrance. (A full copy of the Classes and Categories is presented in Appendix 2).

3. Distribution of the PMGB

It was expected that the PMGB would be distributed to all those eligible on Christmas Day 1914 but as the qualifying status had changed from ‘soldiers and sailors at the front’ to ‘all those wearing the King’s Uniform on Christmas Day 1914’ the numbers required had more than quadrupled. The combination of increased demand for PMGBs and limited supply of brass strip resulted in the distribution of Class B, soldiers overseas but not at the front, and Class C, soldiers in the British Isles, not receiving their PMGBs until August 1915 and June 1916 respectively (ibid, 1920/2005:4).

This staggered distribution must have had a profound and significant effect on how some soldiers felt about the PMGB. A soldier in a Flanders trench on Christmas Day feeling alone and vulnerable, not knowing if the next shell would kill or wound him, would probably be very appreciative of a token from a real Princess. But what if he had to wait months? Also, would a London Territorial, guarding Staines Reservoir and going home for his tea every evening, feel the same way about a ‘Christmas Gift’ given to him in June 1916?

It is reasonable to speculate that the difference in receiving a ‘Christmas’
present and what was essentially no more than another meaningless piece of kit, may be why so many PMGBs are now for sale without any soldiers’ identities attached.

4. Eligibility for the PMGB

On 4 August 1914, the standing British peacetime army numbered 247,500 men with a further 258,000 in the Territorial Force Reserves and 156,000 in the Army Reserve (Beckett and Simpson 2004:1-35). Add to these figures the estimated 750,000 men who had volunteered for the military in the United Kingdom by the first week of October 1914 (Clouting, 2018, para 4), two very important factors governing the future fundraising effort for the PMGB emerge.

First – extending the qualifying number of military personnel, those ‘in the King’s Uniform on Christmas Day 1914’, was going to need more than the 500,000 anticipated by the Fund Executive Committee in early November 1914.

Second – the requested amount of £100,000 from the public by the Princess and other committee members, such as the Duke of Devonshire in the Newcastle Daily Journal of Friday 27 November 1914 (Findmypast Newspaper Archive, 2019:np) was far short of the total needed.

5. Funding of the PMGB

The funding strategy for the PMGB appears remarkably simple; Princess Mary’s letter of 16 October 1914 was widely published in the press wherein she asks the readers,

I want you all now to help me to send a Christmas present from the whole nation to every sailor afloat and every soldier at the front.

(Daily Mirror, 1914:2)

The editorial concludes with an instruction to send donations directly to the Princess at Buckingham Palace. This unrestricted appeal allowed people from all levels of society, groups and individuals, to contribute in their own way regardless of how much money they intended to give. Fund raising appears to be active well into
1915 with newspaper reports occasionally mentioning ‘supporting Princess Mary’s Soldiers and Sailors Fund’ throughout the year after the initial PMGB issue but Buckingham Palace’s official acknowledgement to public donors appears only to focus between November and December 1914 and no later.

All the public donations sent to the Palace received an acknowledgement, Figure 3.3 shows one of these pre-printed response letters sent to a member of the public, in this case a Mr Harris. This document measures 5” by 8” (127mm by 203.2mm). It is printed on heavy laid paper bearing the watermark of Harrison and Son, London. Harrison’s were also printers, responsible for banknotes, postage stamps and publications such as ‘The London Gazette’ and ‘Burke’s Peerage’, it is therefore likely they also printed the text and facsimile signature. The document is in the form of a letter and leaves gaps for salutation or name, day of month and amount given. These items were filled in by hand. This document is a significant, datable piece of evidence as to the timeline of the fund-raising process. The month, either November, or as in this example, December 1914 is pre-printed. Only the day is blank, being filled in by hand. This indicates that there was no expectation, certainly at this stage, of the fund-raising continuing after December 1914.

![Figure 3.3](image)

**Figure 3.3** Buckingham Palace acknowledgement letter to Martin Harris (Author ©).

The £1 donated by Mr. Harris has an equivalent value today of around £114.00 (ONS, 2019:np). Very little reporting of acknowledgement exists beyond editorials printed in the newspapers thanking people for their generosity and giving running totals of the funds received. It is reasonable to conclude that this document is one of the few pieces of evidence linking individuals giving directly to the funding of the
The *Daily Mirror* newspaper of Friday, 16 October 1914 has half a column on page two devoted to the Princess’s appeal for £100,000 (*Daily Mirror*, 1914:2). As well as giving details of the proposed contents of the overall Gift, the embossed brass box (PMGB), flint and tinder lighter, cigarettes and tobacco, the article lists 18 people, including the principal members of the Royal Family, who have so far contributed to the fund and by how much. The total is £3,822 and 10 shillings (50p) which, using the ONS calculation, is around £436.000 at today’s value (ONS, 2019:np).

No precise records have been found to support a supposition that enough funds were collected well before Christmas 1914 beyond scattered newspaper reports, such as a paragraph in the *Liverpool Daily Post* of Saturday, 14 November 1914 saying that the fund now had ‘the total sum available of £65,400’, and the ‘Scotsman’ of Thursday 26 November 1914 which stated that the fund had reached £98,832 (Findmypast.co.uk, 2019:np). Given that there were nearly six weeks still to go until Christmas, it is quite probable that even with the proposed extension of those eligible for the PMGB the Gift Fund was having no difficulty in raising the money needed.

The ‘Soldiers and Sailors Christmas Fund may have become a victim of its own success. According to the final report of the Executive Committee (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:9), the total amount of money subscribed to the Fund was £162,591 12s 5d21 (around £7.9 million today). There may also have been some fund-raising projects, originally devised for the PMGB Fund, that were altered to divert monies to alternative charities that needed the support.

One such example may have been ‘Princess Mary’s Gift Book22. Published by Hodder and Stoughton of London on 2 November 1914, with profits going, not to the Princess’s Christmas Gift Fund, but to her mother’s, Queen Mary’s, ‘Work for Women Fund’. Newspaper reports from just two publications give an idea as to the popularity of this book. The *Observer* of 15 November 1914 stated that;

Messer’s W. H. Smith and Son have placed a first order for a minimum of 60,000 copies (one of the largest first orders ever given for a book) while Messer’s Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co.’s first order is for a minimum of 25,000 copies. (Barbara @ Blogspot, 2014:np).
The *Liverpool Daily Post* of 14th November 1914 carried a similar story:

Orders are pouring in the Messer’s Hodder and Stoughton. Some of the largest received yesterday were 25,000 for Messer’s Menzies and Co. of Edinburgh and Glasgow; 6,000 for Messer’s Boots of Nottingham and 5,000 for the Liverpool Daily Post. (Barbara @ Blogspot, 2014:np).

The book sold for 2/6 or ‘half a crown’ (12.5p) which by current monetary equivalent would be £14.25 (ONS, 2019:np). Just these five companies first orders alone would be in today’s equivalency be around £1,724,250. The hardbound volume has 140 pages and contained stories, poetry, and prose from some of the leading figures in the world of Edwardian literature including J. M. Barrie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. Artists who contributed coloured plates for the book included, amongst many others, Arthur Rackham. Several different covers exist (Figure 3.4) but these do not represent different editions. They were simply re-prints as Hodder and Stoughton struggled to keep up with demand. Princess Mary’s ‘M’ cypher, used on the cover of the book, would go on to be used on the PMGB and many associated items from the Gift Fund. By Christmas 1914 this symbol had become very well-known across society.

*Figure 3.4* Princess Mary’s Gift Book 1914 (Author ©).

Given the date of publication and the title of the book, it is likely that this was originally intended to be part of the funding for the PMGB but became the other sources of funding were so successful, the book may have pushed the Gift Fund into the embarrassing position of having over-subscribed the project. The funds going
instead to Queen Mary’s ‘Work for Women Fund’ is fitting as that charity intended to support women in need for the duration of the war. The question still arises as to why divert and not simply abandon the book? It may be quite simply that the seventeen-year-old Princess Mary was too good a marketing opportunity to waste.

6. Packaging, Contents and Accompaniments

The overall Gift contents, including the PMGB and its other accompaniments, were originally set out by the Executive Committee with the three issue classes, A, B and C. The intended accompaniments, listed below, were set out by the Executive Committee and split into the seven Categories of Issue also considering non-smokers and nurses.

Accompaniments;

Flint and Tinder Rope Lighter, made by Asprey’s, London
Bullet Pencil
Christmas Card
Photograph of Princess Mary
Cigarettes, Tobacco and Smoking Pipe
Writing Case (for non-smokers)
Acid Tablet (Sweets)
Tin of Spices (for Indian Troops)
Chocolate (for Nurses)

The data, taken from the final report of the Gift Fund Committee (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:3-5), not only sets out the priority of PMGB issue, but also indicates what PMGB accompaniments went where. This information appears to be an inadvertent source of inaccuracy and confusion surrounding the PMGB. The report implies that the Navy was never expected to receive the Asprey Lighter and had the substituted Bullet Pencil listed but the Army were still expecting the Asprey Lighter despite Asprey declining the contract to produce the lighters because of production difficulties. It seems probable that this report has been pieced together with different documents from different stages of the Gift planning and presented as a mere overview.
The outer box (external packaging) is made from thick brown card (Figure 3.5) and measures 135mm by 92mm and 67mm high. The lid is 19mm deep. The simple one-piece construction of box-and-lid has the edges stuck together with 19mm gummed brown tape. A 19mm gummed strip of brown tape also secured the lid to the main body of the outer box. Another card box 135mm by 92mm and 27mm high, including lid, was used to pack just the PMGB for issue to next of kin or later issues that were sent without accompaniments.

The *Newcastle Journal* newspaper of Friday, 27 November 1914 printed a letter from Lord Devonshire, chair of the Fund’s executive committee, which included:

The covers for the packets of cigarettes and tobacco are being printed by a London firm. The orders for the Christmas cards and the cardboard box for packing the present have also been placed in London.

(Findmypast.co.uk, 2019:np)

![Figure 3.5 Card Box containing PMGB and accompaniments (National Army Museum ©).](image)

*Flint and Tinder Rope Lighter by Asprey’s*

One of the principal accompaniments of the Gift was to be a flint-and-tinder rope lighter (Figure 3.6a) made for the Fund by the Royal Jeweller, Asprey’s of Bond Street, London and stamped with the 'M' cypher (Figure 3.6b). Asprey’s were invited
to make 500,000 lighters at 5 1/2d (around 2p) under contract to the Fund but declined as a main component of the lighter’s striking mechanism, ferrocene, was in short supply as the only source was from Austria\textsuperscript{23}.

Some Asprey lighters, using stockpiled ferrocene, were manufactured and by using the payment summary of the Fund Report as a guide it seems that Asprey made around 115,000 lighters (Devonshire et al, 1925/2005:14). It is also possible that the slotted card liner used to hold the bullet pencil (Figure 3.7c) was originally intended for the Asprey lighter. Figure 3.5 with the lighter outside the PMGB was probably staged for clarity.

\textbf{Figure 3.6a} Flint and Tinder Rope Lighter made by Asprey’s, London (Author ©).

\textbf{Figure 3.6b} Enlarged detail of ‘M’ Cypher and markings (Author ©).

The design was based on an existing pattern making manufacture straightforward, the only addition being the ‘M’ cypher and fund date on the barrel.

\textit{Bullet Pencil}

A substitute for the lighter was produced in the form of a silver tipped pencil placed within a spent .303 cartridge case (Figure 3.7a), likewise with the ‘M’ cypher,
stamped on the neck of the cartridge (Figure 3.7b).

Figure 3.7a Bullet pencil made from a .303 rifle cartridge (Author ©).

Figure 3.7b Close-up of ‘M’ cypher on cartridge

These ‘bullet pencils’ were wrapped in a square of white paper (not shown) and held in place in the PMGB by a card liner with two diagonal slots cut in the centre which prevented movement during transit (Figure 3.7c).

Figure 3.7c Bullet Pencil with card liner in PMGB (Author ©).

This choice of object for the basis of this accompaniment, a .303 cartridge case, has significance for any study of the material culture of the First World War. Bullet casings have been a common element in the manufacture of ‘trench art’ (see Chapter 8). The pencil was sourced from companies such as the ‘Eagle’ Pencil Company.
Bullet casings made into ‘trench art’, either by soldiers themselves or by civilians producing for the post-war tourist and pilgrimage markets, have been fashioned as individual, named ‘talismanic’ items (Saunders, 2003:99). The bullet pencil was also named, but with the ‘M’ of Princess Mary.

These bullet casings used for the pencils had not been fired in actual combat. Gathered from United Kingdom firing ranges, they had only been used for target practice. None were used to try to kill or wound anyone and, although still a symbol of war and suffering, their re-purposing has changed them forever. It is perhaps fitting that this object was as innocent of being the cause of actual death or injury as the seventeen-year-old girl whose cypher it bore.

The bullet tip covering the end of the ordinary graphite pencil was either made from Sterling Silver or Nickel Silver\(^2\). This was not an economic necessity but because the Sterling Silver tips were taking too long to produce in the quantities needed as many skilled silversmiths were now doing war-work and a faster alternative tip had to be used. The silver tip is marked (Figure 3.7d) but the Nickel was plain.

![Figure 3.7d](image)

Figure 3.7d Sterling Silver stamp on ‘Bullet’ tip (Author ©).

There were other alternatives to the Asprey Lighter but because there was no time to embellish them with any indication that they belonged to the original Fund design, such as by using the ‘M’ cypher, the identity, provenance or biography of these items in relation to the PMGB is difficult to prove without first-hand testimony. Items, such as the version of the Army Clasp Knife made for the Fund by the Sheffield based steelmaker Ford and Medley, may have become detached from the Gift both figuratively and literally. Figuratively in that not having the distinctive ‘M’ mark it has no visually identifiable relationship with the PMGB and may just be regarded as another of the soldier’s ‘wartime’ possessions, and literally, if the soldier kept the knife separately from his PMBG it would be reasonable to expect the knife to reside in a trouser pocket, with the PMGB in another pocket. Again, the
connection between these objects was only known to the soldier himself and they may have had completely different biographies, especially when they passed out of the soldier’s hands to his descendants. This variety of possible trajectories and meanings is a challenge to a material culture analysis.

Christmas/New Year Card

Other items were placed in the cardboard box before it was sealed. The tobacco pipe, Christmas Card (later the New Year Card) and a photograph of Princess Mary were added at this stage (Figure 3.8).

![Figure 3.8](image)

The ‘1914’ Christmas Card was replaced in early 1915 by the New Year Card. This change was due to the delay in issuing the second tranche of PMGBs until Spring 1915, as mentioned above. Also added were the acknowledgements of support by commercial or institutional sponsorship with the business and compliment cards of those donators to the Fund (see case study of Ernest Haslam PMGB 002 Chapter 5). Some Gift boxes were packed at random by the Royal Family themselves and several hand-written cards from these boxes have survived. Similar notes were packed into shell boxes by female munitions workers, the ‘munitionettes’, to raise the spirits, and sometimes to initiate contact with the soldiers on the front line (Wadsworth, 2013:para 1).
Photograph of Princess Mary

Several photographs of Princess Mary in different poses were taken in Buckingham Palace during October 1914 by the first officially appointed British Military photographer, Ernest Brooks (1878-1957). Two, including the one subsequently chosen for the overall Gift (Figure 3.9), were published in the Daily Mirror newspaper of Friday, 30th October 1914, under the heading ‘Princess Mary as Christmas Fairy: Two New Portraits.’ (Brooks, 1914:4). The half-page article is informative and significant for this research as it shows that even at this late stage of planning, October 1914, the design, box, and accompaniments, were not finalised.

The full text is as follows;

Two charming new portraits of Princess Mary, who is providing boxes of smoking requisites as Christmas presents for the soldiers and sailors. A special photograph of the Princess will be embossed on each box. Subscriptions are still needed and should be sent to Her Royal Highness at Buckingham Palace. (Brooks 1914:4).

This passage shows that, at this stage at least, the provision is for smokers only, no alternatives are mentioned. There is also still an apparent need for continued funding for the project. Significantly, we now have a strong piece of evidence that the embossed image of Princess Mary on the PMGB was copied from another photograph taken by Ernest Brooks. Production of the printed PMGB Photograph was given to the cigarette manufacturer Abdullah of New Bond Street, London, chosen as they were already renowned for their cigarette card production.

Figure 3.9 Photograph of Princess Mary (Author ©).
Cigarettes, Tobacco and Smoking Pipe

Cigarettes and tobacco were very important to the average soldier and much effort was made by the military authorities to ensure a regular supply, in quantity if not necessarily quality, reached the men. Basic ration cigarettes, known as ‘gaspers’ by the soldiers (Weeks 2009:34) were of questionable quality while well-known brands such as Players, Gold Flake and Three Castles, were preferred. These could sometimes be purchased by the soldiers when out of the front line but were generally sent either by relatives or as charitable gifts usually arranged by the individual regiments support networks. Weeks states that ‘Tommy’ relied on cigarettes more than tea or rum as they provided relief and solace for frayed nerves (ibid:29).

The overall Gift, predominantly designed for tobacco smokers, had a packet of 20 cigarettes and an ounce (28.34g) of pipe tobacco, each packed in foil and waxed paper with distinctive yellow paper wrappers bearing the Fund title and the ‘M’ cypher on the back (Figure 3.10). Each individual cigarette had the ‘M’ cypher printed on the paper (Figure 3.11).

The smoking pipes were purchased from existing stocks rather than being made specifically for the Fund and have no distinctive markings. Messer’s Dunhill of Jermyn Street, St. James, London and Harrod’s Department Store of Knightsbridge, London were among the retailers used. PMGB 021 (author’s collection) was acquired with one such pipe inside it (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.10 Cigarette and Pipe Tobacco packets (Author ©).

Figure 3.11 Close-up of ‘M’ cypher on cigarette (Author ©).
Of the printing companies which could produce the photograph of Princess Mary, it seems unusual for the Fund to have chosen Abdullah, a cigarette company. Figure 3.13 may shed light on this choice. Previous evidence, especially the newspaper article by Brooks, indicates that the Gift was originally for smokers and so having a cigarette card manufacturer producing, and possibly packing as well, made sense at that juncture. The photograph would have easily been able to fit into the cigarette pack.

Not everyone in the British army smoked and non-smokers, as well as soldiers under the age of nineteen who were not allowed to serve in combat, were catered for by the Gift Fund Committee. In the British Navy, the combat rank of ‘Midshipman’ could be held by someone as young as 16. There were also non-smokers among the many thousands of Indian troops serving the King and Empire and they had the cigarettes and tobacco substituted with sour lemon flavoured strong acid tablet sweets and a small tin of spices (for Indian troops). Although no empirical or literature-based evidence has been found, a reasonable assumption can
be made that these non-smoker Gifts would have some distinct marking on the outside of the cardboard box the items, along with a PMGB, were packed into. Other items were also packed into the cardboard boxes, such as personal grooming kit such as combs and hairbrushes. Additional sweets, cigarettes and tobacco were sent in bulk alongside the Gift boxes, usually being packed into sandbags, and substituted by the issuing officer directly to the soldiers if needed.

**Writing Case**

The cotton canvas Writing Case, 176mm wide by 126mm high (Figure 3.14), has the Crown and ‘M’ cypher with ‘CHRISTMAS FUND’, ‘1914’ printed in red on the front flap. It contained a plain pad of writing paper, six plain envelopes and an indelible pencil. These items would have accompanied the cardboard boxes and been distributed to either the non-smoking or younger soldiers. Only 20,000 Writing Cases were produced making it one of the rarest elements of the PMGB to survive today. Despite the low numbers produced, there is no evidence that the Writing Case was in any way reserved for officers, merely used sparingly for non-smokers.

![Figure 3.14 Canvas Writing Case (Author ©).](image)

**Acid Tablet (Sweets)**

The manufacturer of the sour lemon flavoured sweets, presented in slab form, has not been identified. These were wrapped in waxed paper with a paper outer wrapper depicting the Fund title and the words ‘ACID TABLETS’. Figure 3.15a shows such a
pack that has at some time been forced into a PMGB. The corners of the pack have become rounded because of this action (Figure 3.15b).

Figures 3.15a/15b Acid Tablet (Sweets) forced into a PMGB (Ben Sandford ©)

This rounding of the edges provides empiric evidence that the slab of sweets was not inside the PMGB but packed with it inside the cardboard box.

Tin of Spices (for Indian Troops)

No examples of this object have been found during this research.

Nurse’s Chocolate.

This element of the PMGB is unclear. However, progress has been made which confirms the existence of the ‘Nurse’s Chocolate’ and describes the original packaging. ‘Bernard’ from ‘DearOldBlighty’, an experienced militaria dealer and auctioneer based in Marlow, Buckinghamshire, recalls a PMGB being offered for sale in 2008 that was attributed to a nurse and had an original pack of chocolate with it. The chocolate was wrapped in waxed paper, once white but now yellow with age, tied with a pink ribbon. The words ‘Her Royal Highness Princess Mary’s Christmas
Fund 1914’ was printed on the packet (Bernard@DearOldBlighty, Pers Com; 2019). Unfortunately, no photographs were taken at the time of sale. Bernard is aware of the distinctive yellow wrappers used for the PMGB accompaniments, so his description of ‘yellowed wax paper’, rather than ‘yellow’ paper is credible and informative. The Fund Committee Report lists an expenditure of only £40 17 shillings and 4 pence for chocolate and, according to the report, was for 1,585 four-ounce (113.3g) packets of chocolate, each wrapped in the distinctive yellow paper (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:7). The same report also states that only 1,500 PMGBs were distributed to nurses (ibid:4).

This indicates that rather than produce a unique yellow wrapper with the fund inscription for only 1,500 packets, plain white waxed paper was printed with the text, the chocolate slabs, probably 2 stacked and separated by paper, were packed inside and the pink ribbon added. It is reasonable to assume that all these processes were carried out by the chocolate manufacturer themselves. Given the low amount supposedly spent on chocolate, £40.00 (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:14), it is also likely that a smaller, more local chocolate manufacturer, perhaps based in London, was commissioned.

Many cardboard Gift boxes were sent back home by the soldier with strict instructions for it to be kept safely because it was, after all, a ‘gift from a princess’. The PMGB, card, photograph, cigarettes, and tobacco were often reverently mounted within a glass fronted display case to be kept and cherished by the soldier and his family. The irony of this is that the PMGB and accompaniments were most likely packed up in the issue Gift box which would have then been discarded. In today’s collector’s world, the cardboard box has a value of around ten times that of an un-attributed PMGB. Because, after all, who keeps the packaging? The PMGB and its packaging represent the ‘whole’ and should not be ignored. To quote Danial Miller (2012:53):

Things, not, mind you, individual things, but the whole system of things, with their internal order, make us the people we are. And they are exemplary in their humility, never really drawing attention to what we owe them. They just
get on with the job. But the lesson of material culture is that the more we fail to notice them, the more powerful and determinant of us they turn out to be.

7. Mistakes and Misdirection; Errors that have shaped the PMGB biography

A key aspect of identification of the PMGB, the contents and accompaniments concern authenticity, and the effects this may have on the objects’ varied trajectories through time and space. Authenticity is not only about the faking of an object or accompaniment but also about the placing of genuine items with a PMGB to adjust that PMGB’s biography either to gain financially by increasing the appeal to a collector or by replacing missing items to give a more rounded feel for a family’s remembrance/commemorative processes. These issues are as follows;

A. The ‘Queen Mary Tin’ (and contents)

A poll taken from the internet auction site eBay^25 where out of 147 items being offered, 56 were original PMGBs, nine being misidentified as ‘Queen Mary’s tin’. Two of the tins had ‘full contents’. Seemingly trivial, this error goes to the heart of misinformation. Queen Mary also gave ‘Gifts’ to the troops during the war but was Princess Mary’s mother and the royal hierarchy between the two women was significant. The esteem in which Princess Mary was held grew enormously because of the PMGB but her mother, Queen Mary, was also revered by the people of Edwardian Great Britain and the Empire.

B. King and Queen’s Christmas Card.

Another example of mistaken attribution is the card from the King and Queen. Measuring 3.5" by 5.5" (88.9mm by 139.7mm) with a picture of Queen Mary and King George V, it was produced for issuing at Christmas 1914. Two versions were produced, one for the army with the King in a Field Marshall’s uniform and the other, for the navy, in the uniform of Admiral of the Fleet (Figure 3.16).
A facsimile message, in the King’s own hand, was printed on the back of the card. Two versions of the message were produced, one specifically worded for wounded soldiers (Figure 3.17). Both bear facsimile signatures of the King and Queen.

Sent in plain white envelopes bearing the Royal crest on the flap, the cards for wounded soldiers had red bands on the two edges of the flap in addition to the Royal crest. It is simply too big to have been packed in the cardboard Gift box or the PMGB. One of the cards in Figure 3.17 has been folded in half, perhaps to fit into a PMGB? This Christmas Card from the King and Queen has become associated with the PMGB because it was issued at around the same time, most probably by the same Officer, Nurse or member of the British Red Cross. Extracts from Nursing Sister Edith Appleton’s diary support this;

Xmas Day; 11.00a.m. – On way up again to Bethune, where we have not
been before .......... Everyone on the train has had a card from the King and Queen in a special envelope with the Royal Arms in red on it. And this is the message (in writing hand (sic)) – With our best wishes for Christmas 1914. May God protect you and bring you home safe, Mary R. George RI. This is something to keep isn’t it?

7.00pm – Loaded up at Merville and now on the way back .......... This lot of patients had Xmas dinner in their Clearing Hospitals today, and the King’s Xmas card and they will get Princess Mary’s present.

Saturday, December 26th – Saw my lambs off the train before breakfast. One man in the Warwicks had twelve years service, a wife and two children, but when Kitchener needed more men he re-joined. .......... We had Princess Mary’s nice brass box this morning. The V.A.D. [Voluntary Aid Detachment] here brought a present to every man on the train this morning, and to the orderlies. They had 25,000 to distribute. (Appleton, 1915/201226:loc 1287)

During this research no PMGBs identified as being from the 1915 or later issues have had the King and Queen’s card among the associated Gift items. This gives further credence to the theory that the card was received, and therefore ‘merged’, at the same time as the PMGB by those recipients who had their Gift at Christmas 1914. Unfortunately, this mis-association has been actively, albeit accidentally, encouraged from as far back as early 1915. A postcard from the period (Figure 3.18) shows the Gift of a PMGB, smoking pipe, cigarettes, tobacco, Christmas card and photograph of the Princess along with the King and Queen’s card. The Gift card and photograph appear to be propped on the cardboard issue box.

Figure 3.18 Postcard from 1915 showing the cardboard box, PMGB and accompaniments (Author ©).
The text appears to have been written from a soldier’s point of view, ‘Our Gift from Princess Mary and the Donors to her fund’ but it is unclear if this is a ‘thank you’ to the people who organised and funded the Gift or merely a commercial venture to make money from the feelings of emotion, gratitude, family or even grief of those involved. The inclusion of the Card does also indicate a lack of accurate first-hand knowledge of the Gift itself, either by the photographer or by whoever commissioned the postcard. This supposed association between the card and the PMGB has even resulted in the scaling down of the King and Queen’s card by modern manufacturers of replica ‘contents’ to have it fit the PMGB. By reducing the scale and making things fit, these objects may fulfil the role where the ‘miniature typifies the structure of memory, of childhood, and ultimately of narrative’s secondary (and at the same time casual) relation to history. It is true that, like all objects, miniature locates a version of the self’ (Stewart, 1993:171).

The practise of the King and Queen issuing a Christmas Card was repeated in 1939 at the start of the Second World War, this time it was King George VI and Queen Elizabeth sending it with almost the same wording (Figure 3.19).

![Figure 3.19](image.png)

**Figure 3.19** 1939 Christmas Card to the Troops (Author ©).

C. Nurse’s Chocolates

The lack of empirical evidence has prompted the manufacture of spurious replica ‘contents’ including a suitably sized chocolate pack like the cigarette and tobacco packs. However, the font used in the ‘chocolate’ wrapper is different to the others (Figure 3.20). It is wider than that on the Tobacco packet. Both the ‘9’ and ‘4’
of 1914 are below the level of the ‘1’ on the replica but only the ‘9’ is in this position on the Tobacco. These errors of design with the replicas from the original accompaniments diminish the credibility of the modern manufacturer. They have done little research, the Chocolate Pack being a mere construct to fill a gap, not even a credible attempt at faking the original.

![Figure 3.20 Detail of replica font compared to original (Author ©).](image)

A more plausible explanation for the over-emphasised presence of chocolate in a nurse’s PMGB lies with the gift by chocolate manufacturer Cadbury given to wounded soldiers and nurses and other medical staff at Christmas 1914 (Item 3 S/COM, Chapter 6). Cadbury gave 69,000 gifts, each containing individually wrapped ‘Neapolitan’ chocolates, of which 19,000 were cardboard boxes and the rest, decorated metal tins. As the metal tins would have been prioritised for wounded soldiers, it is probable that the more fragile cardboard boxes would have been given to nurses. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that they were then transferred over to a more suitably robust container, the PMGB. This, as with the Christmas card from the King and Queen, is more association by coincidence rather than deliberate design. It would be unlikely that any distinctive wrapper was produced. An interesting observation concerns the term ‘Chocolates (plural)’ that is used as opposed to ‘Chocolate (singular)’. Could the ‘Chocolates’ be describing the Cadbury Neapolitans’ rather than the 8-ounce (226g) Chocolate slab alluded to in the Fund Report (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:14)?
D. ‘Mary’ letter

An example of Royal ephemera that has been mistakenly associated with the PMGB is the ‘Mary’ letter. The document has a crown with ‘Buckingham Palace’ underneath and is printed on Small Post Octavo (177.8mm by 225.6mm) sized paper (Figure 3.21). The correct source of this document is proven by the signature. ‘Mary R’ is ‘Mary Regina’ and signifies Queen Mary\(^27\), not Princess Mary.

![Figure 3.21 ‘Mary’ Letter (Author ©).](image)

These items would have been distributed, perhaps as Appleton (1915/2014) records, by members of the Red Cross and Voluntary Aid Detachment. The packages would have contained the printed letter and, as it was ostensibly a personal letter from the Queen, the soldier is more likely to have wanted to keep it as a souvenir. Where better to keep such a precious item than the PMGB he had just been given which was, after all, designed for just such a purpose. The letter would have accompanied ‘comforts’ such as the knitted scarf in Figure 3.22\(^28\), and thus becomes another object of association with the PMGB by coincidence rather than design. Yet another example of how the PMGB by its design use as a portable container can attract a miscellany of otherwise distinct objects into their ‘social orbits’ thereby creating false narratives and meanings.
E. Next of Kin

It was a sad but inescapable fact that some military personnel would be killed in action or die of wounds before they received their PMGB. According to the Fund Committee Report around 5,000 claims were made by next of kin for their relatives PMGB (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:4). Category Six of the overall PMGB issue hierarchy was the category that provides for the issue of a PMGB, without any contents or accompaniments, to the soldier’s next of kin. This would be the person so identified on the soldier’s Short Service Attestation form he filled in on enlistment. This would also be the person who received any gratuities or back pay owed to the soldier after his death. In the case of Donald Manson (PMGB 003) there was a letter to Donald’s father from the Army issuing officer within the Gift box along with other personal items. At this point of the research, it was not clearly known how the army kept a central record of these issues under Category Six. However, in June 2019 when researching biographies on Ancestry.co.uk of 1,225 names on East Dorset’s War Memorials, one such record was found which may indicate how the issue of a PMGB to next of kin was in a soldier’s records.

Private 3/8072 James Henry Budden, 1st Battalion, the Dorsetshire Regiment, who was killed on 16 November 1914, fortunately had a near-complete set of service
records remaining. One of the digitised documents was a badly fire and water damaged receipt card that would have accompanied the PMGB sent to, in this case his widow Eliza, with instructions to return the card. The undamaged section of the card reads;

I hereby acknowledge to have received t……

Her Royal Highness Princess Mary, issued on ........

late No. 8072 Pte. J H Budden

(regiment) DORSET REG.

(signature) Eliza Bu..........

Dated at this 17th day of June 1915

The front of the card had the return address printed;

O H M S

THE OFFICER IN CHARGE

INFANTRY RECORD OFFICE


Many PMGBs found their way into the keeping of family members following the death of a soldier and carried on the role of ‘memory box’ as in the cases of Donald Manson (PMGB 003) and Ernest Haslam (PMGB 002), where items have been added after custodianship changed and include items sent by the soldier to other people. These PMGBs were now used to gather these items back to form a nucleus of ‘memory’, which includes the PMGB, for the surviving relatives. However, several examples have been encountered where the contents indicate this change in direction away from the soldier storing items to items sent from him, and the soldier survived the war. This could just be an example of general ‘gathering’ of memories into one place and the items simply placed into the PMGB for convenience.

The answer to this riddle came about after a chance conversation with Richard Archer, an antique dealer specialising in First World War Militaria (Archer,
Pers. Com. 2013) who stated that he had a PMGB that had been sent, not to a soldier, but the soldier’s next of kin.

The card, sent by the Comforts Committee of the London Regiment\(^{29}\) having been authorised by the Gift Fund, instructed the next of kin to retain the PMGB until the soldier was next on leave and under no circumstances to send it out to him overseas (Figure 3.23). In early 2017 the author obtained a PMGB containing a similar card (PMGB 019), almost identical to the Richard Archer card but with one significant difference (Figure 3.24), there is no longer the instruction to affix a halfpenny stamp to the card and return it.

![Figure 3.23](image1.png) Card in PMGB sent to next of kin (R. Archer, Mons Military Antiques ©).

![Figure 3.24](image2.png) Next of Kin card from PMGB 019 (Author ©).

It is difficult to expect these ‘next of kin’ PMGBs to have ever been held in the same high regard as those given out on the front line. There was no sense of occasion, no feeling of gratitude at such a thoughtful gesture from those at home including a Princess. Given that the ordinary British soldier was only likely to get leave once a year (Doyle, 2008:170), he would unlikely consider the PMGB as special.

This does, however, explain the PMGBs that have been encountered with contents sent from the soldier rather than to him and the possible down-grading of the PMGB from precious memento to just another souvenir without any real
meaning. It was not as though the PMGB was about his person during the war and he may have been more inclined to dispose of it after the war. This could lead to other, more biographical items such as medals or photographs, being falsely grouped with the PMGB for financial reasons, again giving rise to concerns about biographical authenticity.

F. Engraving

Two types of engraving are present on some PMGBs, official and un-official. The un-official had a further two types, professional, done by a skilled artisan, and self-engraved, usually scratched with a nail by a soldier.

The Gift Fund Committee intended that every PMGB given to a commissioned officer would be engraved on the inside of the lid with the officers' name, rank and regiment, as with the example issued to General Eaton, Middlesex Regiment PMGB 008 (Figure 3.25). This practise was soon stopped as the demand for competent engravers was too high to be met. Most of the skilled artisans employed in all manner of engineering jobs from jewellery to building railway engines were fully committed to war work. Munitions came before engraving names on boxes. The Gift Fund Committee realised this and ceased engraving officers' names on PMGBs sometime during 1915, certainly after Gen. Eaton received his Gift.

Figure 3.25 Engraved lid to Lt. Col. (Temporary Brigadier General) E O Eaton PMGB 008 (Author ©).
Personalised engraving, either by the recipient of a PMGB himself or at his behest, resulted in a wide variety of ‘quality’ from some quite competent work to merely scratching a name with a knife or nail into the soft brass of the inside lid or base of the Gift.

There is an irony around the subject of sanctioned personalised engraving of the PMGB. The following photograph (Figure 3.26) shows an enlarged view of the ‘CHRISTMAS 1914 stadium shaped lozenge on the Gift lid.

![Figure 3.26 Enlarged view of ‘1914’ lozenge (Author ©).](image)

The lettering is placed below the central horizontal line giving an unbalanced look to the whole cartouche. The design had left this area free for the recipient to have his own initials engraved, a fact that is confirmed within the Final Report of the Fund Committee, but, unfortunately, no-one thought to inform the soldiers.

Classification Tool (for all ‘Conflict Related Metal Boxes’)

PMGB Status, Accompaniments and Contents Classification

A number of the objects encountered inside PMGBs have already been classified elsewhere, usually as trench art (Saunders 2003; Doyle 2008; Doyle and Foster
2014 and Kavanagh 1994). The classification adopted here differs from these as it creates a new structure that places these objects within the context of their relationship with the PMGB as the primary receptacle of memory and biography for the soldier and his family, rather than the broader subject of trench art, but also includes other conflict related metal boxes that have been researched.

Primary Categories of Conflict Related Metal Boxes:

PMGB – Princess Mary’s Gift Box.

S/COM – Soldiers’ Comforts, philanthropic gifts sent only to soldiers.

C/COM – Commercial Comforts, items sold to be sent as gifts.

P/T – Patriotic Tins, tins bearing patriotic iconography.

ORD – Ordinary Tins, everyday household tins connected in some way to conflict.

PMGB only Category 1: Status

This category concerns the presence or absence of the PMGB itself because research has shown that sometimes the accompaniments are present without the PMGB. These objects, however, can still have stories to tell. It is at this stage that the PMGB’s ‘family tree’ begins to emerge. The subcategories are;

1A – Original PMGB present with contents (W), without contents (O).

1B – Original PMGB not present but issue contents or accompaniments present (i), not present (ii). Original PMGB replaced 1B/R.

1C – Current owner is family members (1Ci), private military memorabilia collector (1Cii) or museum collections (1Ciii) and ‘other’ (1Civ).

1D – Damaged. Obvious Combat/Conflict Damage (1Di), General Wear, Age or Oxidation (1Dii).

1E – Engraved, either in the ‘1914’ cartouche (1Ei), elsewhere on the PMGB by the soldier himself (1Eii) or if a PMGB Fund engraved inner lid issued to officers (1Eiii).
1F – Replacement PMGB. If replaced, by whom, original recipient (1Fi) or family (1Fii).

PMGB Category 2: Original Issued Contents and Accompaniments

The only original content of the PMGB was either a pencil made from a .303 bullet casing or the much rarer Asprey tinder lighter. The bullet pencil was held in place within the PMGB by means of a cardboard liner with two diagonal cuts creating a slot. The Asprey lighter could also fit in the slots but this will only be confirmed if an example is encountered where this occurs.


2B – Cardboard lining.

2C – Christmas card. 1914 issue (2Ci), 1915 New Year version (2Cii).

2D – Christmas card envelope. The envelope is given a separate category because, as a disposable wrapping, not intended for any other role, it has nevertheless gained one as a discrete object. It has been used to store items of correspondence and notes for some soldiers.

2E – Photograph of Princess Mary.

2F – Smoking pipe.

2G – Cigarettes – full packet (2GF), partially full packet (2GPF), wrapper only (2GW), cigarettes only (2GC).

2H – Tobacco – full pack (2HFP), partially full pack (2HPF), wrapper only (2HW).

2I – Writing Case – with contents (2IWC), case only, no contents (2INC).

2J – Alternatives such as acid tablet sweets, spice tin, chocolate and sugar sweets.

2K – Original Cardboard Packing Box (or remains of)

2L – Asprey Flint and Tinder Lighter.

2M – Commercial, charitable group or institutional acknowledgement cards included on behalf of some of the larger sponsors of the PMGB fund, present/absent.
2N – Identified substitutes. Items approved by Fund Committee including grooming kits, safety razors and the stag horn handled clasp knife by Ford and Medley of Sheffield. This is a difficult category to define accurately as no full list exists showing the substitute items purchased by the Fund.

PMGB Category 3: Contents added to the PMGB after issue either by the soldier, his immediate family, or his descendants during the war 1914-18

This category and the relevant subcategories are broader in comparison with the above to make them more manageable.

3A – Private correspondence, letters and postcards, received by the soldier.

3B – Private correspondence, letters and postcards, sent by the soldier.

3C – Photographs, of the soldier (S) or of others (O), framed (i) or un-framed (ii).

3D – Official military or civil correspondence, field service postcards and military issue advice booklets.

3E – Advertising ephemera not clearly identified as belonging in sub section 2M.

3F – Trinkets, souvenirs, good luck charms and keepsakes sent from home (H). such as four-leaf clover badges or ‘fumsup\textsuperscript{30}’ charms, items obtained by the soldier overseas (O) or in the UK (U).

3G – Propaganda items or items reflecting national pride or identity, one such example being the British Lusitania medallion.

3H – Religious items. Including field service prayer and scripture books, pamphlets and portable iconography, such as crucifixes or Star of David,

3I – Souvenirs of wounding of the original recipient such as bullets or shrapnel fragments.

3II – Souvenirs collected, such as buttons, bullets, cartridge casings, shrapnel balls and shell fragments in their original state or that bear signs of conflict or souveniring\textsuperscript{31}.

3III – Other objects associated with personal trauma suffered by the original
recipient that have evidence of this trauma, such as field service postcards announcing ‘in hospital, wounded’ or the inclusion of a War Service Badge.32

3J – Everyday objects other than those issued with the Gift.

3K – Other Trench Art either made by the soldier himself or commercially acquired.

PMGB Category 4: Military Memorabilia added by the soldier post-war, 1919 onwards

4A – Service and gallantry medals, medal ribbons, buttons, cap, collar and shoulder badges directly linked to the soldiers service. This category also includes replacement medals and ribbons.33

4B – Old Comrades Association badges. Photographs, correspondence and other objects and ephemera, including trench art items, associated with former comrades in arms and regimental associations.

4C – ‘Sweetheart’ badges (usually given to loved ones rather than the soldier himself).

4D – Other, including non-war related items.

PMGB Category 5: Commemoration and Remembrance 1920’s – now.

This category brings together examples concerning deceased soldiers, where his family have used the PMGB as part of their own grieving and remembrance processes. The soldier has either had no influence over the additions or it has ended for some reason, but the PMGB has been re-purposed and is still in use.

5A – Contents present that have been placed into the PMGB by the original recipient (5Ai), but later additions placed there by his family after his death (5Aii), such as a memorial card or photograph of a grave marker.

5B – Original recipient killed or died whilst on active service and all contents have been placed in the PMGB by family or next of kin.

5C – Historically-correct contents placed in a PMGB by a collector with no direct
connection to any soldier.

Other PMGB Categories

PMGB Category 6: Weight (empty), Category 7: Base Edge Design and Category 8: ‘Christmas 1914’ Font and number of Laurel Leaves framing Princess Mary’s head are presented for an overview in Table 1 (Appendix 1) but not analysed further\textsuperscript{34}. The other differences in the embossed lid as noted by Evans (2014:11-18 are also presented for an overview in Table 1 (Appendix 1) where the wear to the strip brass allows, but as Evans offers no classification for these differences and does not reference them to any specific productions streams for the PMGB they are not analysed.

\textbf{S/COM, C/COM, P/T and ORD only; Classifications and Status}

Sub-Categories

Sub-Category 1: First Date (Year). Frequency of Issue - Single Issue (i), Repeat Issue (ii), On-going Issue (iii). Designed Use – Single Use (a) or Intended Further Use (b).

Sub-Category 2: Materials Used and Decoration

2A – Material; Brass (i), Mild Steel (ii), Cardboard (iii), Tin Plated (iv) and Other (v).

2B – Decoration; Off-set Litho (i), Attached Paper (ii), Plain (iii) or Other (iv).

2C – Lid Design; Hinged (i) or Removable (ii). Embossed (a) or Flat (b).

2D – Subject of Decoration; Royalty (i), Patriotic, including military personalities, (ii), Festive (iii), Pun/Simile (iv) or Company/Product name (v).

Sub-Category 3: Contents

Full Original (FO), Partial Original (PO), No Contents (NC) or Alternative Contents (AC).
Concluding Comments

Several key discoveries and contributions have been made in this chapter:

- The PMGB was distributed, along with the accompaniments, packaged in a cardboard box.
- Production of the base may have been separate from the embossed lids and supplied to the lid manufacturers for final assembly.
- Production difficulties and design of alternative accompaniments were undertaken without any major delays.
- Funding for the overall Gift was efficiently organised and was open to contributions from all levels of Edwardian society. No amount was deemed too small.
- The change of eligibility from ‘those at the Front’ to ‘those wearing the King’s uniform on Christmas Day’ led to a serious delay in distribution. Less than 20% of those eligible received the PMGB at Christmas 1914.
- The post-Christmas 1914 distribution of the bulk of the PMGBs must have affected the ‘worth’ of the PMGB for some soldiers’ and their families.

The rarer, less researched, elements of the PMGB and accompaniments, such as the Nurse’s Chocolate, are starting to reveal their secrets and the rise in social media sites on the internet is playing a significant part. Websites like Pinterest® allow people to post images and information about anything they wish, this allows more of the more obscure facts and images to find a ‘voice’.

Most of the companies involved in the production of the elements of the overall Gift, as well as the PMGB, no longer exist. Those that do have changed and evolved by being absorbed into new companies that the only similarity is the name. Even the Eagle Pencil Company, one of the suppliers for the .303 bullet pencil, the only item to be placed inside the PMGB before it was packed along with the other accompaniments in the cardboard box, became part of the Berol Corporation in 1969, is now Sandford (Gracesguide.co.uk, 2019:np).

The research presented here has attempted to provide a clear, concise and accurate account of the design, funding, manufacture and distribution of the PMGB. Without this accurate structure and a credible classification tool, any contextual
analysis of PMGB biographies going forward would be lost. This crucial step will also help drive the search for empirical evidence in the forthcoming chapters,
Chapter 4

Case Study 1:

PMGBs, Author’s Collection

Introduction

This chapter will analyse and investigate ten examples of the PMGB by identifying and placing in period context the original contents or accompaniments and those added by the recipient and inside the PMGB on acquisition. Four principal examples are linked to named individuals including one that contains two photographic images (figures 4:2 and 4:3) of the original recipient. Another original recipients’ image (figure 4.10) was found entirely by chance online. Of these named soldiers, one survived to old age, two died during the war and the final soldier, although he survived the war, was not officially eligible for the PMGB as his military records state he enlisted in October 1915 and was not ‘in the King’s uniform on Christmas Day 1914’.

The four principal PMGBs were purchased on the open market and there is the possibility that the sellers may have ‘window dressed’ them by adding extra objects for commercial gain. There is also the process of ‘tidying up’ by descendants of the original recipient that may have resulted in items being present in the PMGB that were not present when the soldier was alive. The aim here is to identify and plot changes in the flow of memories. The PMGB was specifically designed to be a safe container for things precious to the soldier, small enough to be carried but large enough to hold letters, keepsakes and other mementoes. This mapping of memories will help to identify if or when the soldier’s own memories cease and become those of his relatives taking possession of the PMGB and making memories about him.

Six further PMGBs from the author’s collection are analysed from those listed in Appendix 1, many of which do not have full associated biographies but rather individual characteristics, or chapters, of their hitherto unknown biographies that align with the themes of material culture being analysed by this research. These characteristics were the motivation for acquiring these examples in the first place.
Subjects included here are ‘Trench Art’, either as a repository or by transformation or repurposing, and three PMGBs bearing direct evidence of trauma.

The empirical data around these PMGBs is limited to this one chapter of their biography but does not signify an absence of a full biography, just one that is lost or hidden to the current custodian at this time.

The PMGB numbers in brackets are the identification numbers used by the author in his collection. They are also used in the comparison chart of all the collection’s PMGBs in Appendix 1.

**Harold Haigh (PMGB 001/1AW/5Ai)**

**Biography**

Private 1927 Harold Haigh M.M. 35th 6th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment later Sgt 24631, Machine Gun Corps (Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1 PMGB 001 Harold Haigh (Author ©).](image)

Harold was born in 1893 in Leeds, Yorkshire, the son of Herbert and Sarah Haigh. The 1911 Census lists him employed as a weaver of worsted cloth. Harold married Winifred Louise Wade in 1917. In 1918 they were living at 50 Woodhead Road, Bradford, Yorkshire. Harold died in March 1975, Winifred in March 1982.
PMGB Status and Contents

Status (001/1AW/1Ci)

1914 Christmas Card from Gift issue (001/2Ci).

Two photographs (Figures 4.2 001/3CS and 4.3 001/3CS).

Figure 4.2 (001/3CS) Harold Haigh at desk (Author ©).

Figure 4.3 (001/3CS) Harold Haigh asleep by sewing machine (Author ©)

Figure 4.2 is larger, measuring 62mm by 72mm and has been cut from a larger photograph. Figure 4.3, measuring 54mm by 63mm, is glued to the back of Figure 4.2. Figure 4.2 shows Harold sat at a desk using a candlestick telephone. The crank box for the telephone is on the desk in front of him to his left. His rank shows that of corporal and his uniform epaulettes appear to have indistinct letters rather than a single emblem. This indicates that Harold has transferred to the machine gun corps who used ‘MGC’ on their shoulder tabs rather than the elongated horse of the West Yorkshire Regimental badge. Harold was awarded the Military Medal (M.M.) in November 1916 and as there is no ribbon present above his left
breast jacket pocket it can be assumed that this photograph dates from before November 1916. Figure 4.3 shows Harold asleep under a blanket whilst leaning against a sewing machine which may have significance given that his pre-war occupation was as a weaver. The part of the room that is visible is domestic with distinctive bold regular patterned Edwardian wallpaper (Cohen, 2006:129 and 141) and a framed print on the wall.

Field Service Postcard (001/3D).

This was a communication method from soldiers serving overseas back to the United Kingdom which did not have to be passed by the rigorous army censoring procedures. Known as ‘Quick firers’ (Fussel, 1975/2009:231), Army Form 19-62, has multiple-choice phrases that allows a soldier to communicate their health and state of wellbeing by simply crossing out the phrases not relevant to the message he is trying to convey36. Harold’s card (Figure 4.4a/4.4b) is dated 10 April 1918 and postmarked 12 April 1918. The text indicates that he is well but in hospital and wounded.

Figure 4.4a Field Service Postcard (001/3D) from Harold to Winifred (Author ©).

Figure 4.4b Rear of Field Service Postcard (001/3D) (Author ©).
German Bullet (001/3Hi) mounted as a tie pin (Figure 4.5).

The Field Service Postcard (001/3D) states Harold was wounded, and it is highly probable that this bullet was the cause of the wound.

![Figure 4.5 German bullet (001/3H) mounted as a tie pin from Harold Haigh’s PMGB (Author ©).](image)

Medal ribbon bar (001/4A).

Measuring 139mm by 11mm, this metal bar, with a long pin on the back, has four sections of ribbon mounted on it; Military Medal, 1914 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal (Figure 4.6).

![Figure 4.6 Harold Haigh’s Medal Ribbon Bar (001/4A) (Author ©).](image)

The West Yorkshire Regiment did not leave for France until April 1915 and so Harold would not have been eligible for the ‘Mons’ clasp which would have been represented by a silver rosette on the 1914 Star ribbon. These extra ribbons would have been issued to Harold with his service medals in the early 1920s. The metal bar would have been purchased privately from a commercial medal mounting company. No makers name is visible on the bar.

Lapel badge (Figure 4.7) for the Old Comrades Association of the 6th West Yorkshire
Regiment (001/4B).

Figure 4.7 Old Comrades Association Badge (001/4B) (Author ©).

Constructed from chromed metal with enamel design, it has the makers name, ‘J R Gaunt – London’ on the rear. The badge would have been available for members of the Old Comrades Association to purchase during the 1920s. Gaunt made lapel badges for many regiments and corps in the British army.

Photocopy of a newspaper article (001/4B).

Taken from the Bradford Telegraph and Argus of Monday, 26 July 1971 entitled ‘Old comrades lay up their colours’ (Figure 4.8). The photograph shows 12 remaining members of the association first formed in the trenches of Belgium in 1917. Harold is standing to the right of the old comrade holding the colour standard.

Figure 4.8 Photocopy (001/4B) of a newspaper article ‘Old Comrades lay up their Colours’ (Author ©).
The thirteenth person in the photograph is the Very Reverend Cooper, the provost of Bradford Cathedral who is receiving the colours on behalf of the Cathedral.

Analysis

The inclusion of the 1914 Christmas Card indicates that Harold either received his PMGB at Christmas 1914 or very soon afterwards. By the time of the second major issue of PMGBs in early 1915, it had been replaced by a 1915 New Year card. Harold’s battalion left for France in early 1915 and his Medal Index Card states his date of entry was 16 April 1915. The box has no obvious damage to the body, but the lid has evidence of wear and a significant dent protruding into the inside of the double skinned lid. The seal around the lid is still tight and the dent corresponds to the likely position of where a thumb was repeatedly used to press the lid closed. No other original accompaniments remain.

All the items, except for the Field Postcard, have either been given to or acquired by Harold and placed into the PMGB by him. The Field Postcard having been sent by Harold, presumably to Winifred, has been re-acquired by Harold and placed in the PMGB. The significance of the Field Postcard may not just be the perceived association with the German bullet tiepin that could be evidence of the actual cause of his wound, but it may also be the first step in his eventual discharge from military service because of the wound and has been retained because of that significance. However, his entry on the British War and Victory Medal index gives his date of demobilisation as 19 March 1919 so this may not be the case. The re-purposing of the German bullet as an everyday object, rather than a talismanic or religious symbol, differs from the bullet-crucifix of Vincent Sabini described by Saunders (2003:133). There are similarities, both Harold Haigh and Vincent Sabini kept the bullets that had wounded them and then re-purposed them as souvenirs after the war. Vincent made his into a crucifix, an object with a great deal of attached power and significance for him but with a limited use. Although usable as a religious talisman, the object was not designed to be worn constantly. Harold, by contrast, either made himself, or had made for him, an everyday object that could have, in theory, been worn every time he wore a necktie. Although powerful and significant enough for Harold to have kept and re-purposed the bullet, using it as a
mundane clothing accessory, perhaps he was consciously reducing its power and impact. He had survived its attempt to kill him and was determined to show that it had not defeated him then and was never going to do so in the future.

Harold’s PMGB had a long biography. Some of the retained objects may merely have been used by Harold as triggers of specific memory but some of the items were in regular use outside of the box. The medal ribbon bar is designed to be worn pinned to a jacket above the left breast pocket and shows significant wear and fading especially where the silk medal ribbons fold around the metal bar. This type of ribbon bar is commonly used on military uniforms or civic uniforms such as police, fire service or doorman. There is no documentary evidence to suggest that Harold followed any of these occupations after his military service ended. One possible explanation for the long-term wear being evident could be his membership of the West Yorkshire Old Comrades Association of which he remained an active member up until the association disbanded in 1971.

The ribbon bar would be worn on an ordinary civilian jacket at regular meetings of such an association to signify both service and status and had become a material marker of the social interaction between members. The ribbons would convey status, experience and service without any spoken explanations being necessary. Harold had the additional status of a gallantry award, his Military Medal, and this would have given him an even higher unspoken respect (Richardson, 2009:109). The actual medals would have only been worn on formal occasions such as Remembrance Sunday parades. The other object linked directly to this long-term membership of the group is the lapel badge of the Old Comrades Association. Both objects were likely to have been regularly removed from the PMGB to be worn by Harold during the Old Comrades activities.

The various associations created for the welfare and comradeship of ex-soldiers were a common part of post-war life. From the national organisations, like the British Legion (in 1971 it became the Royal British Legion), down to more local or regimental associations, such as the 6th West Yorkshire that Harold belonged to. These groups of men who had a common bond of experiences, far beyond that of even their own families, that in some ways allowed them to heal some of the mental wounds outside the understanding of society in general. What today we would call
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These groups would have also helped with ‘the guilt of the survivor’ (Winter, 1956:300)

Harold’s actual service and gallantry medals are not present in his PMGB. This may be most likely due to the four mounted medals being stored in a case or drawer rather than being crammed into a PMGB. It may be likely that Harold’s PMGB was only one element of his personal memory collection, the contents reflecting the more portable elements of his memories that could be easily stored and accessed from the PMGB. Perhaps also the more significant and portable milestones of memory as in the subject matter of the two photographs, the Field Service Postcard and the bullet tiepin. The significance of the two photographs must have been compelling enough for Harold, not only to keep them in his PMGB, but also stick them together back-to-back. Could the image of himself asleep on the sewing machine have been the night before embarkation or the eve of his marriage to Winifred in April 1917? Was the image of him sitting at the desk taken just after he had been promoted to Corporal? Regardless of the background of these two images, they were important enough for Harold to keep in his PMGB.

His ongoing use of the ribbon bar and lapel badge would have brought him into contact with these significant reminders of his early life and his wounding, the photographs and bullet, every time he opened the PMGB to use them. After Harold died, the PMGB and medals would have passed to his descendants, who presumably were the ones responsible for the items being sold on the open market. This is conjecture as no other items were listed as being for sale separately from Harold’s PMGB. Harold’s possessions may have been divided amongst different relatives with the military items being split up, some sold, and perhaps some retained. The medal group itself, 1915 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal and Military Medal if offered for sale in 2008, when the author purchased the PMGB, would have sold for £500.

The last datable object placed in the PMGB was the newspaper article about the Old Comrade’s Association handing their ‘colours’ (the Associations flag) to Bradford Cathedral after the disbanding of the association owing to too few members remaining alive. A fitting final memory milestone object for Harold’s long association with the Old Comrades and the final link to his service during the First World War.
Ernest Haslam (PMGB 002/1AW/5B)

Biography

Private 12363 Ernest Haslam, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment (Sherwood Foresters) (Figure 4.9).

![Figure 4.9 PMGB 002 Ernest Haslam (Author ©).](https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/233049-notts-and-derby-soldier/)

Ernest (figure 4.10) was born in 1889 at Grassmoor in Derbyshire, the son of Robert and Ann Haslam. Robert was a coalminer and Ernest a building labourer. Ernest had an older brother and five older sisters, two of whom, 'Lizzie' and 'Winnie', are identified in his PMGB contents.

![Figure 4.10 Ernest Haslam (Image located at](https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/233049-notts-and-derby-soldier/) )
He also had two younger sisters, one who died in infancy. According to the 1911 census, the family lived at 96 New Street, Hasland, Chesterfield, Derbyshire. By 1914-15 Ernest was living in Rotherham, Yorkshire, as was his sister Alice. Ernest went to France on 28 November 1914 but was hospitalised and back in England by January 1915. He returned to France on 4 May 1915.

He died from accidental drowning on 3 December 1915 and was buried the day after. He lies in the British Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Erquinghem-Lys Churchyard Extension I. G. 12, Nord, France.

PMGB Status and Contents

Status (002/1AW/1Cii).

1914 Christmas Card from Gift issue (002/2Ci). Envelope for the Christmas Card (002/2D).

This object rarely survives as it was often discarded after the card had been removed but Ernest has used the envelope (Figure 4.11) to store two folded pieces of notepaper (002/3I). One has a section of rules from what appears to be a trade association or club written in pencil in Ernest’s handwriting. The other is a torn scrap of paper that has an address for W. G. Wright, Wollongong, Australia. Ernest has written his army number, name and regiment on the front of the envelope.

![Figure 4.11](image)

**Figure 4.11** Envelope and Christmas card (002/2D), scrap of paper (002/3I), club rules (002/3I) (Author ©).

Medical work exemption certificate issued to Ernest on 7 January 1915 by Salford Royal Hospital (002/3D).
The certificate states that Ernest is a patient at the hospital and unable to follow his employment. The document has a stamp stating that ‘This Certificate is not to be used for Begging purposes’, (Figure 4.12). Although civilian unemployment had ‘effectively been eliminated during the war’ (Winter, 1986:238) there was still a legacy of the Victorian era with regards to vagrancy and street begging and wounded and discharged soldiers were discouraged from this.

**Figure 4.12** Medical Work Exemption Certificate (002/3D) (Author ©).

Photograph of Princess Mary (002/2E), original Gift accompaniment.

Two small compliment cards ‘From The Mayoress of Exeter and Committee – Wishing you good luck’ (002/2L),

One of the cards has ‘keep this’ written in pencil on the back and four cigarette cards (002/3E), two of which have messages of ‘good luck’ and ‘safe return’ from commercial sponsors based in London probably of cigarettes given to soldiers as part of their rations (Figure 4.13).

**Figure 4.13** Photograph of Princess Mary (002/2E), Compliment Cards (002/2L) and Cigarette Cards (002/3E) from Ernest’s PMGB (Author ©).

A religious Christmas Card from The Religious Tract Society of St. Pauls


Army Form B51, ‘Health Memorandum for Soldiers’ (002/3D).

These booklets (Figure 4.14) were designed to be carried in the breast pocket of a soldier’s tunic. They provided moral and spiritual support for the soldier and the ‘Health Memorandum’ (002/3D) contained advice on basic healthy living including hygiene, nutrition, tropical diseases and a section warning the soldier about the ramifications of not being ‘chaste’ including some of the consequences of contracting venereal diseases.

**Figure 4.14** Religious Card (002/3H), Active Service Gospel (002/3H) and Army Form B51 (002/3D) from Ernest’s PMGB (Author ©).

‘The Daily Telegraph wishes you A Victorious New Year’ (002/3E).

The card measures 24.7cm by 15.1cm (Figure 4.15) with printing on one side.

**Figure 4.15** *Daily Telegraph* ‘Your Country Thanks You’ Programme (002/3E) (Author ©).
It has two verses and a refrain from a song performed by Ellaline Terris (1871-1971), a popular singer and actress of the Edwardian period, ‘Your Country Thanks You’. The card has been folded into eight to fit into the PMGB.

Letter from Ernest (letterhead extract Figure 4.16 shown without scale) to his sister Alice (002/3B).

This letter is handwritten in pencil on paper supplied free by the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The 20cm by 25.8cm sheet has two inverted triangular YMCA logos with ‘On Active Service with The British Expeditionary Force’ printed between them. The letter is dated 4 May 1915 and states that Ernest has just landed in France from Southampton. He mentions two of his other siblings by name, Lizzie (Mary Elizabeth) and Winnie (Winifred) and asks to be remembered to Arthur and Peter. There is also significant mention of ‘Annie’ who Ernest regards

Figure 4.16 Letterhead with extract from letter (PMGB 002/3B) to Ernest’s sister Alice (Author ©)
very highly. Whenever a person is mentioned by name or he uses the word ‘sister’ within the text, he has placed a row of small x’s above the name or title. Ernest also mentions that all letters must be sent unsealed to be read by the Army censor.

Analysis

Ernest’s PMGB has more than the simple linear biographical profile of Harold’s objects that were added and used over six decades. This PMGB has clear indications showing that the custodianship of the box has changed soon after Ernest received it in 1914. The medical certificate from Salford Royal Hospital is a clue that the PMGB was with Ernest in the United Kingdom in early 1915 and was given for safe keeping to his sister Alice sometime before 4 May that year when he arrived in France. Alice may have placed the letter from Ernest into the PMGB or Ernest could have placed it there himself.

Further evidence of this passing of custodianship lies with the compliment cards from the ‘Mayoress of Exeter and Committee’. Individuals, businesses, and organisations who gave significant amounts of money to the Gift Fund were permitted to have their generosity acknowledged by the inclusion of compliment slips or cards packed with the accompaniments at the time of issue. In the case of some of the national newspapers of the period, the slip would ask the soldier to write directly to the paper telling of his feelings about the PMGB on the understanding that their letter may be published. Lady Jane Kirk Owen (1859-1941) was Mayoress of Exeter during 1914 and one of her fellow committee members was Lady Margaret Harriet Bampfylde (1856-1931), Baroness Poltimore. The Devon and Exeter Gazette of 13 November 1914 reporting about the children of Poltimore and Huxham school;

The children have agreed to forego their Christmas treat this year. Lady P, who is the donor of this treat, has, after asking the children’s opinion, kindly promised to give the money to Princess Mary’s Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Fund. The children will have the satisfaction of knowing that, in their self-denial, they are helping to give pleasure to the brave men who are so loyally fighting the Empire’s battles

(Exeter Memories, 2013:np).
Ernest wrote 'keep this' on the rear of one of the Mayoress’s cards. Although it is unlikely that he would have had any knowledge about the specific workings of the Mayoress’s committee, or even the small sacrifice of the Pottimore and Huxham school children, he could have been aware of the general level of commercial, civic or personal donations to the Gift Fund and that the manifest acknowledgement of this support was the inclusion of a compliment card.

The contents of Ernest’s PMGB share a unique character, in that they are only paper ephemera. None of these could have been expected to be permanent keepsakes, even the Holy Gospel of Saint John ‘Active Service’ pocket prayer book contains mere extracts from the full gospel and is unlike any hard-bound pocket-sized soldier’s prayer books so far encountered. An explanation for the ephemera-only contents may be due to Ernest’s PMGB being part of a much larger collection of memories held by his sister Alice. There may have been more physical objects, photographs and souvenirs, kept safe by other methods such as family photo albums, boxes of letters and even other types of boxes.

Ernest’s service medals were claimed by Alice Wright in 1919. Alice is also shown as his ‘sister and sole beneficiary’ on the UK Army Registers of Soldier’s Effects, 1901-1929 and was paid two gratuities, one of £5.8s.11d. on 23 February 1916 and one of £5 on 22 August 1919 (Ancestry.co.uk. 2002/2019 ii). She would have also been the recipient of the Bronze Memorial Plaque and Scroll, the so-called ‘Dead Man’s Penny’, that was sent on behalf of the King to every listed next of kin of soldiers who had been killed.

Alice was married to Arthur Wright on 28 August 1907. Arthur was born in Bolsover, Derbyshire in 1876 and had a brother Walter George Wright who was born in 1873. Walter and his family emigrated to Australia sometime between 1911 and 1914, it is his address Ernest has written on the PMGB Christmas card envelope.

The YMCA letter from Ernest to Alice mentions three other pieces of correspondence, two letters and a postcard, so it is likely that Alice had a further collection of letters from Ernest as well as this example. It is possible that this letter, being significant as it marks Ernest’s arrival in France, was placed in the PMGB by Alice as a memory ‘milestone’ after she took over the custodianship of the PMGB when Ernest went abroad. Or perhaps the PMGB could not physically accommodate
any further items and the YMCA letter was the last thing to be fitted in. The date of this YMCA letter also marks an end date, beyond which no additional items were added to the box.

In assessing this PMGB’s collection of ephemera it may be possible to identify further memory milestones, almost as if they are individual representations of key parts of his life. The Christmas cards and photograph of Princess Mary all date from the first Christmas of the war, the song sheet may have been retained as Ernest was either a fan of Ellaline Terrris or had seen her performing and the card was a souvenir of that performance.

The medical certificate issued by the Salford Royal Hospital (Figure 4.11) offers a tantalising possibility of proof that Ernest carried the PMGB with him whilst he was receiving treatment in January of 1915 as the box offers safe storage for what is a very flimsy and delicate, but nevertheless important, document that he may be obliged to present to military personnel upon demand. The presence of the medical certificate also indicates that Ernest did not have his PMGB on his person at the time of his death as he was accidentally drowned and even with the brass construction of the box giving a good seal, immersion in water would have destroyed this and the other delicate ephemera.

Perhaps the most likely explanation of the survival of Ernest Haslam’s PMGB was that after it had passed into the care of his sister Alice, it no longer had the function of being a repository of the memories from his life in the army. This may also be why there seems to be a deliberate placing by Alice of significant letters, pamphlets and documents that represent other elements of his life that she wished to mark. It does not have any direct evidence relating to his death and probably formed part of the overall legacy of his life for his sister, family, and friends.

Ernest was buried in France, so his family, like so many others, would have been unable to visit his grave regularly. Perhaps the PMGB along with his service medals and, presumably, memorial plaque, photographs, the letters sent to Alice and other items from his army life, gave the family a focus of memory for Ernest Haslam.
Donald Manson (PMGB 003/1AW/5B)

Biography

Lance Corporal 2998 Donald Manson, 5th Battalion, the Seaforth Highlanders (Figure 4.17).

Figure 4.17 PMGB 003 Donald Manson (Author ©).

Donald was born in 1894 in Dunnet, Caithnessshire, Scotland, the son of John and Barbara Manson and had two sisters. One sister, also named Barbara, was one year older than Donald and the other, Elizabeth, three years younger. Donald’s father was listed as a tanner in the 1901 census. Donald’s father died in 1921 and his mother in 1934. Donald joined the Seaforth Highlanders on 3 September 1914 and travelled to England to start his training. He soon gained promotion to Lance Corporal but unfortunately died of measles in Bedford on 27 January 1915. Donald is buried in the Dunnet New Burial Ground, Caithness-shire, Scotland, one of six graves in the same cemetery that are managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. As his military service was less than six months his family were not entitled to the standard £5 gratuity and only his accrued pay of £3.6s.3d. was authorised to be paid to his father and sisters.

PMGB Status and Contents

Status (003/1AW/1Cii).

All the non-paper items shown in Figure 4.18.
Five large Army General Service Buttons (003/3li/5A). Three are marked ‘Button’s Limited Birmingham’ and have loose wire shanks, one is marked ‘J & B Pearse & Co’, also with a loose wire shank. The fifth button has no makers mark and a fixed wire shank.

Figure 4.18 Non-paper contents of Donald Manson’s PMGB (Author ©).

Five small Army General Service buttons (003/3li/5A). The makers are; one ‘Smith & Wright Ltd B’ham’ [Birmingham], one ‘Regal Button Works Ltd B’ham’, one ‘Firmin & Sons Ltd London’ and two are plain. All have loose wire shanks.

One large and one small Seaforth Highlanders buttons (003/3li/5A). The larger is marked ‘Smith & Wright Birmingham’ and the small ‘Smith & Wright B’ham’. Both have fixed wire shanks.

Two lengths of simple, figure eight brass chain (003/3J/5A). One measures 30cm and the other 7cm.

Single brass butt hinge measuring 2.4cm (003/3J/5A).

Single unidentified piece of male jewellery (003/3J/5A) being an oval design with an eight-pointed star or stylised leaf pattern in Mother of Pearl (nacre). The metal backing has a hinged clip held and released by a spring-loaded push mechanism. It is marked ‘Nowler & Sons’.

Thin leather pouch measuring 97mm by 50mm (003/3J/5A). The surface is tooled with an oak leaf and acorn design and has the legend ‘A ‘Fitting’ help’ printed in gold.
This type of pouch was likely designed to hold tailor’s chalk.

Typed Army Form letter reference number A2/6595 (003/3D/5A), Territorial Force Record Office, Perth, dated 22 May 1916. Addressed to John Manson, it informs him that as next of kin he is entitled to be given the PMGB Donald was entitled to receive (Figure 4.19).

**Figure 4.19** Army letter to Donald’s Father (003/3D/5A) (Author ©).

Newspaper cutting (003/3lii/5A). Taken from an unknown newspaper, this cut column has a list of all the officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks of ‘H Company (Castletown). Donald’s name is underlined in pencil and has the word ‘Eastside’ written next to it (Figure 4.20, shown enlarged with no scale).

**Figure 4.20** Newspaper cutting (003/3lii/5A) (Author ©).
Analysis

The PMGB issued by the Territorial Forces Records Office to John Manson, father of Private Donald Manson on 22 May 1915 does not bear any direct evidence of conflict damage or contain any bullet or shell fragments but is still a ‘Cenotaph’ to his memory.

As he was still in the United Kingdom and in training over Christmas 1914, Donald would not have been among the first soldiers to receive a PMGB. The first issue went either to France and Belgium or Naval vessels at sea. By the time of the next major issue of 1.8 million Gifts, now accompanied by the ‘Victorious New Year’ card rather than the ‘Happy Christmas’ card, Donald had already died.

The letter to Donald’s father reveals several indicators as to the rather anonymous and automated nature of the Army’s attitude to the presentation of his PMGB to the stated next of kin. The typed document has several blank sections which have been filled in by hand. Significantly the year of ‘1916’ has been typed but has space for the day and month to be written, in this case, 22 May. This likely means that the Army has decided to issue those PMGBs in 1916 to the stated next of kin of all those soldiers who have died rather than when families requested them. The officer’s signature is in a different hand to that of the body of the letter. This is to be expected, a clerk would have either handled an application from John Manson or extracted Donald’s name from a list of Seaforth Highlanders who died without receiving a PMGB.

PMGBs given to next of kin were packed into a shallower version of the standard cardboard box with a loose lid held on with gummed tape. They had no contents or accompaniments other than the official letter which also requested acknowledgement of receipt of the PMGB. When received, Donald’s PMGB soon became the repository for commemorative items presumably placed there by his father and immediate family. It is not known if any other items such as photographs or letters accompanied his PMGB. Donald died so soon into his military service that he was not eligible for any medals, service medals being a common focus of duty and service for a family, a ‘tangible symbol of pride in the sacrifice of one who did not return’ (Richardson, 2009:110). The newspaper clipping can be dated to late 1914 as it shows Donald still with the rank of Private rather than Lance Corporal. His
father must have kept this clipping folded up somewhere safe until he was able to place it in the PMGB.

The giving of army uniform buttons was, and still is, a common form of ‘souveniring’, especially to friends and family. The button is an ideal object, plentiful and easy to obtain, portable, and, certainly in the case of regimental buttons, very specific markers of identity, setting the person, giver and receiver, somehow apart. Stewart (1993:139) states that ‘the double function of the souvenir is to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present. The present is too impersonal, too looming, or too alienating compared to the intimate and direct experience of contact which the souvenir has as its referent’. Significantly, the General Service buttons are almost a full set, the 1902 pattern tunic had five large 25mm diameter buttons and six smaller 16mm, so only one of the smaller pocket or epaulette buttons is missing. The presence of General Service as opposed to Regimental buttons may have been due to the rush to equip volunteers quickly. Seaforth Highlander uniform buttons may not have been available at the time of Donald’s enlistment. This need to quickly equip the army is further evident by the buttons being from three different manufacturers. Donald may have given his old General Service set to his family when the Seaforth buttons became available. As with the newspaper clipping, the buttons would have been placed in the PMGB sometime after May 1916 as part of the families grieving or remembrance processes. The tailor’s chalk holder may indicate a possible future occupation for Donald that was never to be. The item of jewellery has the same lack of significance to an observer but, like all the other objects, must have had a profound meaning for the family. This act of placing the items in Donald’s PMGB by his family shows us ‘there is no continuous identity between these objects and their referents. Only the act of memory constitutes their resemblance’ (Stewart, 1993:145).

Because Donald died before going overseas, his body was returned to Dunnett for burial. British and Commonwealth soldiers who died during the First World War were generally buried in battlefield cemeteries, Donald’s family had the rare but dubious advantage of a grave for their loved one that was only a few miles away from their home. Cared for by the Commonwealth (formerly Imperial) War Graves Commission (CWGC) these burials will have;
‘Your grave marked by a headstone rising precisely 813mm from the level of the soil. The grass, if you are buried in a CWGC cemetery, will be maintained at no less than 3.5cm and no more than 6cm in height. In this way, bureaucracy soothes brutality.’

(Ross, 2020:164).

The classification system clearly shows the objects placed in Donald’s PMGB are from his family and are representative of his life as it was and should have been in the future to them, rather than his own life. The PMGB has become part of the family’s memories of him and not part of his own.

**William Cutting (PMGB 004/1AW/5A)**

**Biography**

Driver 136661 William Cutting, Royal Engineers (Figure 4.21).

*Figure 4.21 PMGB 004 William Cutting (Author ©).*

William was born on 22 May 1895 and listed his home address very precisely as ‘5 James Row, Mill Gate, Newark, Nottinghamshire’. His next of kin is listed as his mother, Kezia Eldnet, with the vague address of ‘Ashby, near Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire’. These locations are around 64 miles apart.

In 1893, Kezia Singleton, a domestic servant working for William and Bertha

There is evidence as to why William and his father do not appear to be in England prior to William’s volunteering for Army Service. William’s height was 5 feet 3 ¾ inches (161.93 cm) and his occupation is given as ‘labourer’. The medical officer has noted under the section ‘Distinctive Marks’ that the first and second toes of both feet were separated ‘as if accustomed to wearing sandals’. This observation by the medical officer coupled with extensive records of William Ernest Cutting in the Australian Electoral and Census Records would indicate that William Ernest was either Australian or had at some time emigrated to Australia. He moved his family to Australia shortly after his marriage to Kezia and William and Arthur were born there. Kezia returns to England after the birth of Arthur in 1902 but before her marriage to Jeremiah Eldret in 1904. It is presumed that Kezia and William Ernest divorced. William is likely to have stayed with his father until returning to England to join up.

William’s ‘Short Service Attestation Form’ and his ‘Descriptive Report on Enlistment’ form still exist. This second form also has details of his discharge from the army in 1919. William’s military service number of 136661 matches those found on the service medals which are in the PMGB and so these records can link to this Driver William Cutting. William began his military service on 30 October 1915 in the Royal Engineers and from May 1916 he was posted to Mesopotamia. He was discharged into the Territorial Reserves upon demobilization on 31 March 1920 suffering from malaria, for which he received a small disability pension for one year.

PMGB Status and Contents

All items are shown in Figure 4.22. Pocket watch with winder mechanism rather than a key (004/31). American manufacture marked on the inside of the rear case
‘Keystone Watchcase, USA’ with ‘Guaranteed Silveroid Genuine Imitation’ and a serial number of 206858 underneath. Silveroid was a form of Nickel Silver alloy favoured among American watch manufacturers. The name ‘W Cutt’ is hand cut into the inside of the case above the makers name (Figure 4.23).

Figure 4.22 Contents of William Cutting’s PMGB (004/1A) (Author ©).

Figure 4.23 Name ‘W CUTT’ inside watch (004/3I) (Author ©).

Unmarked brass flint and cord lighter (004/3I)

Travelling inkwell (004/3I)

Made of brass with a leaf spring operated hinged lid, the lid contains an oval of soft leather which seals the glass ink bottle held in the brass case. The case is 4.25cm tall, 3.75cm wide and 1.75cm deep.
Lusitania Medallion (004/3Fii)

This is a British made propaganda version of the bronze medallion designed by Karl Goetz in 1915. Manufactured by Selfridge’s of London and sold in a cardboard box depicting the Lusitania on the cover and an accompanying sheet declaring the ‘Glorious achievement of the German Navy in deliberately destroying an unarmed passenger ship’. The box and leaflet are not present, just the medallion.

Thin curb chain necklace (004/3J)

This chain is made from Electro Plated Nickelled Silver and is 70cm long. The sprung ring clasp is intact.

British War Medal and Victory Medal (004/4A)

Correctly named to ‘136661, Dvr W. Cutting R.E,’ each with short lengths of ribbon. The ribbons are stitched with large crude stitches and appear very worn. A darkening of the ribbon near the suspension ring of the Victory Medal indicates regular polishing of the medal. This is a visual assessment only as chemical analysis of the ribbon would require a sample of the fabric to be removed for testing thus damaging the integrity of the object. The medals are within a small fabric bag which may have originally held the travelling inkwell.

No issued PMGB accompaniments are present.

Analysis

William Cutting was not eligible for the PMGB, but the presence of his service medals clearly indicates that at some point a PMGB may have been in his possession. The medals have been worn as evidenced by the sewing and wear shown on the medal ribbons. Although tarnished and uncleaned, the PMGB does not have any damage at all suggesting it may never have been carried in a soldier’s pocket. The objects, even without the medals that would have been a later addition,
weigh around half a kilo, far too cumbersome for a jacket pocket. Also, two of the objects, the lighter and pocket watch, would have been in constant use so are more likely to have been carried separately for the sake of practical convenience.

The placing of these objects may have occurred after William had left the army as part of his own remembrance process. His possible return from halfway around the world and the inclusion of the Lusitania medallion reflect perhaps a strong sense of patriotic duty. But this does not address the original ownership of the PMGB.

There may be an identity for the original recipient through his stepfather, Jeremiah Eldret. Jeremiah had a younger brother, Ernest. Gunner 909 Ernest Eldret, 33rd Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery was killed in action on Christmas Eve 1916 on the Somme. He is buried in Aveluy Communal Cemetery Extension, location K 10, Somme, France. As a Royal Garrison Artillery Reservist, Ernest Eldret attested on 25 August 1914 and went to France on 12 October 1915. William enlisted in the same month. Ernest Eldret was entitled to the PMGB. William’s younger brother, Arthur, was living with his mother and stepfather. He gives his mother as his next of kin rather than his own father and he now has three half-siblings. William may have had strong ties with the Eldret family. The inclusion of the watch and the excessive wear to the medal ribbons would indicate that the PMGB was used by William to store objects relating to his war service or perhaps the collection was passed to a family member at some stage either in William’s later life or even after his death. The PMGB then became part of that person’s remembrance process for their relationship with William Cutting.

This example is indicative of the problematic identification and analysis of these items and how they often exist in liminal space, defying all attempts to provide them with an accurate biography.

Other probable trajectories for this PMGB may exist;

- Ernest Eldret could have given his PMGB to William Cutting when William was visiting his mother in Scunthorpe.
- The PMGB may have been with Jeremiah’s family after Ernest was killed in action and the items directly attributed to William were given to his mother and added to the PMGB.
• William could have come by the PMGB some other way such as barter, purchase or even theft but this seems unlikely given his long war service, over three years, and the inclusion of the Lusitania medallion which indicates possible outrage at the loss of innocent lives.

• A simple assemblage of items, military and non-military objects from the same era, put together by an unknown person in an available brass container, a PMGB, that includes some items that are attributable to William Cutting, but simply for convenience.

**PMGBs Without an Identity**

The following PMGBs, listed in Appendix 1, have no ‘identity’ and limited biographies but are included as they represent issues around material culture for analysis.

**Unknown (PMGB 020/1AW/1Cii/3K)**

This PMGB (Figure 4.24), a repository of trench art, was acquired containing three handmade items of trench art. The first, an irregular rectangular aluminium plaque (020/3K/1) 10cm by 6cm (average). A greeting, ‘RC WISHING YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM FRONT LINE TRENCHES’ has been incised into the metal. The text is bordered by two zig-zag lines incised into the plaque with what would appear to be a tool used to pattern leather. The aluminium is 1mm thick and has a dark blue coating to the back. The original use of this material is unclear, but it may have been scrap from an aircraft. Aluminium (Al) when in a solid non-ferrous metallic state is relatively easy to work.

![Figure 4.24 PMGB 020 with hand-made Trench Art contents (Author ©).](image-url)
Although the engraving shows a high level of skill, the object overall appears crude and untidy, non-linear edges, sloping edge decoration and cramped text, which may give a clue as to the circumstances of production. Could, as the message suggests, this item have been made in the trenches where the equipment and space required for a more polished creation was not readily to hand? Also, who was ‘RC’? Was it the artist or the intended recipient of the Christmas plaque?

The second (020/3K/2), also aluminium, is a pin-backed brooch fashioned as an aircraft propeller. 8cm long by 1cm wide at the ‘blade’ ends, it is also crudely made. The centre of the propeller, where the original would have attached to the aircraft engines drive shaft, is not a circle. Again, this may indicate trench-made rather than workshop. This object may have been made as a gift to a wife of girlfriend by ‘RC’ but never given, or perhaps it returned to the PMGB at a later stage in its life.

The third item (020/3K/3) is made from steel. It is a miniature set of farrier’s pincers measuring 82mm long. The pincers are skilfully made from two pieces of strong wire, possibly aircraft control wire, hammered flat to make the jaws and pivot sections. A rivet holds the two halves together. This miniature version of a working tool functions in the same manner as the full-size original and may reflect the profession, perhaps a farrier, of ‘RC’. Stewart (1993:137) notes that this ‘transformation of exterior into interior’, where the souvenir ‘reduces the public, the monumental, and the three-dimensional into the miniature, which can be enveloped by the body’ and thus make it into ‘that which can be appropriated within the privileged view of the individual subject’ (ibid:138). This object could be a souvenir of ‘RC’s military service.

Without a full biography for PMGB 020 we can only speculate as to who was responsible for these three objects but there is evidence through the materials used that he had, at the very least, access to aircraft scrap. What remains difficult to understand is the ‘front line trench’ reference if he was a maintenance specialist, as the material suggests, with the Royal Flying Corps, and so nowhere near the front.

These objects all fit into Saunders’s (2003:38) classification of trench art under CATEGORY 1: Soldiers, 1914-1930 Sub-category 1a: Active service, 1914-1918. Two of the items, (PMGB 020/3K/2 and 3K/3, being Miniatures: come under
section v of this category (ibid:40), and the plaque (PMGB 020/3K/1) seems to fit section ix as a *Miscellaneous personal item* although perhaps the greetings element of the engraving would warrant another section by Saunders, maybe *section x: Salutations*.

**Unknown (PMGB 023/1AO/1Cii)**

This PMGB is an example of a transformation or re-purposing of the object into trench art. It is mounted on a black plinth with moulded edges measuring 162mm by 121mm with a maximum plinth depth of 17mm (Figure 4.25). The top section of the plinth measures 142mm by 99mm, weight 364g. The base is covered with faded brown/orange hessian felt. The tin is attached to the plinth with glue and held in place by two screws through the bottom of the PMGB. The original patina was dark brown and had an uneven, sticky feel to it. This turned out to be an old coating of clear varnish.

![Figure 4.25 PMGB 023 Mounted on Black Plinth (Author ©).](image)

What was of concern when investigating this object were the materials used to create the plinth and mount the PMGB. The Bakelite or perhaps ebonized wood base and clear varnish would not have been available to most people, and this presented the possibility that this was an object that had been acquired, made into a presentation piece and then sold, rather than being adapted by the original recipient or his family. This object falls within CATEGORY 3: Commercial Production, 1918-1939, section iv, Mounted but otherwise unmodified objects (Saunders, 2003:50).

This has potentially changed the status of the PMGB from an object remembering or commemorating service into a parallel life or chapter of its biography as a piece of house decoration ‘kitsch’. Figure 2.17 ‘Army and Navy Store Advertisement for the mounting of war trophies’ in Saunders (2001:44 and 2003:49)
provides an answer to the biography of PMGB 023. The advert offers a service to ‘members’, regular customers of the Army and Navy Store (now House of Fraser) located on Victoria Street in the City of London, to mount their ‘war souvenirs’ for them. The plinths used in the advert are identical to that of PMGB 023.

This possible biography shows the soldier, or his immediate family, have taken the PMGB to the shop and had it professionally mounted, polished and coated in clear varnish so that it could now become the centrepiece for a writing desk or the focal point on a mantlepiece, preserved forever and very shiny. The act of varnishing the object although preserving the high shine finish, does remove the feeling of ritual and intimacy experienced when cleaning and polishing brass. A counter argument about cleaning and polishing gradually degrading the soft surface details of the PMGB and using varnish to preserve these details is valid but why has varnish not been applied to war service medals?

Saunders also notes that the very same Army and Navy Stores were acquiring salvaged battlefield scrap and turning these ‘found objects of war into cultural objects’ (2003:49) on a commercial basis. The author decided to remove the layer of clear varnish which has degraded and become discoloured and sticky in places and polish the object by hand thus returning it to its former glory (Figure 4.26). It has now entered a new biographical phase with the authors’ family.
as, ‘A Desecrated 1914 Queen Mary Christmas Tin’, and went on to assert that the box had been converted into a jewellery box during the war.

The flat section in the centre of the lid has been removed, leaving the wreathed Princess’s head intact. A section of what appears to be light amber coloured Bakelite has been glued onto the inside of the PMGB’s lid. This has become detached, warped and discoloured over time (Figure 4.28).

![Figure 4.27 PMGB 025 ‘Desecrated Tin’ (Author ©).](image)

![Figure 4.28 Interior of PMGB 025 showing Bakelite panel (Author ©).](image)

The concept has some merit and is reminiscent of Art Deco, which along with Cubism and Dadaism was influential in trench art design (Saunders, 2003:165), jewellery and dresser boxes popular during the 1930s. This may have been the motivation for this ‘conversion, to make a jewellery box with a transparent lid that gives visual access to the contents whilst still retaining, despite the irregular ‘M’s, the original design integrity (Figure 4.29). This presents an interesting chapter in this PMGB’s biography, rather than the ‘desecrated’ object of the eBay entry, it may have been a credible attempt at producing a very personal gift for a loved one. The
process also serves to feminise the PMGB further by making it into an object used by a woman, here a jewellery or trinket box.

![Figure 4.29 PMGB 025 Light showing through panel (Author ©).](image)

Throughout this research examples have been encountered where some chapters of a PMGBs biography have become feminised either through the passing of the object to another, female custodian or by use as a feminine object, such as the button box of 'LS's grandmother (PMGB of 'Francis S' Chapter 5) but PMGB 027 is the only incidence of the PMGB itself being feminised. This object could be classified using Saunders (2003:40) either as CATEGORY, section ix, or CATEGORY 2: Civilians 1914-1939, section v, Miscellaneous metal objects usually made for the home (ibid:46).

**Unknown (PMGB 010/1Ai/Di/31ii)**

This PMGB (Figure 4.30), although having evidence of actual conflict trauma/damage, has a more challenging biography to fully understand. There are three 'bullet' holes, one being an entry hole and the other two exit holes (Figure 4.31). This is apparent from the direction the raw edges of the holes follow, outwards or inwards. PMGB 010 has been photographed upside down to show the possible trajectory of one entry/exit hole. Contained in the PMGB was a German 7.9mm bullet.
Given that the 7.9mm cartridge was used in several German machine guns of the time, including the MG 08, and that the PMGB has multiple holes, it may have been hit by a burst of machine gun fire, the impacts of which caused the object to spin in the air. This would explain the multiple exit holes. This theory, of course, is pure conjecture and has many flaws, not least the ‘cleanliness’ of the so-called bullet holes. Given the velocities of German bullets at the time there should be more damage to the PMGB. The holes appear head-on as if they were punched through. Could this be as example of ‘faking’? The entire PMGB has a residue from adhesive tape over it, reason unknown. As with many PMGBs without biographies encountered during this research, any assumption about their ‘experiences’ can only be guessed at.

The relationship between the object and the soldier’s body may be key to analysing this chapter of this PMGBs biography. The PMGB may have stopped, or at least slowed down, the bullets that would have otherwise entered the soldier’s body causing wounding or even death. The intended purpose of the PMGB as a
container for memories has been taken away by its effective destruction for that role. It has now been preserved, perhaps being bound up with sticky tape to keep it intact, and now rather than storing memories, has become one itself.

**Unknown (PMGB 005/1Al/Di/31ii)**

This PMGB has clear physical evidence of what happened to it (Figure 4.32). It has been penetrated by a bullet that has left both entry and exit holes (Figure 4.33). More importantly for this biography, the bullet that made the holes has been preserved by rolling it in a length of bandage and kept in the PMGB.

![Figure 4.32 PMGB 005 showing bullet hole and bandage contents (Author ©).](image1)

![Figure 4.33 PMGB 005 showing bullet trajectory through tin (Author ©).](image2)

The bullet (Figure 4.34) is an ogival 7.92mm calibre Mauser S Patrone pointed nose round fired from a German Gewehr 98 bolt action rifle. It has no markings and appears intact. The point of entry is the lid of the PMGB at a trajectory of around 25° (speculative at this point because it is not known as to what the
position of the PMGB was in relation to the shooter).

![Image](image1)

**Figure 4.34** German 7.92mm bullet from PMGB 005 (Author ©).

The point of impact was on the chin of Princess Mary’s face and a groove has been made leading to the main entry point at the back of her head cutting through the surrounding laurel leaf circle (Figure 4.35). The exit point is on the bottom edge of the PMGB obliquely below a point 8mm to the right of the edge of the ‘Imperium Britannicum’ cartouche above the relief of the Princess (Figure 4.36).

![Image](image2)

**Figure 4.35** Entry point of bullet PMGB 005 (Author ©).

![Image](image3)

**Figure 4.36** Exit point of bullet PMGB 005 (Author ©).

The polished surface of the groove is a combination of the effect of a high velocity bullet, typically around 900 m/s, and the shedding of the bullet’s surface coating. This process is called ‘leading’ (*leading*).
As no information is available about how this incident occurred, it is only possible to speculate. There are, however, certain factors present that may support a credible hypothesis concerning where on the soldier’s body the PMGB was located when he was shot. The point of entry is the lid, so it can be assumed that the PMGB was facing lid outwards. Also, for this hypothesis it is assumed that it was in a pocket rather than backpack or the side or ‘small’ pack. The PMGB was designed to fit into a standard 1902 pattern battledress pocket. The face of the Princess will be used as a directional marker as to how the PMGB was positioned in the pocket, up or down, left or right facing. The left breast pocket was where a soldier was expected to keep his pay book and so the addition of a PMGB would have increased the bulk of this pocket. The right breast pocket is the most likely location for a PMGB to be carried. It is near enough and easy enough for the soldier to reach quickly. The right waist pocket may have been used, especially if the soldier was right-handed although the location of the two First Field Dressings in the inner flap of the jacket just below and behind this pocket may have made it rather bulky (Figure 4.37). The left waist pocket would be obstructed by the location of the small pack as well as the 1907 bayonet and entrenching tool handle which would also have been a likely barrier to a bullet. All the jacket pockets could be obstructed when wearing a full set of 1908 or 1914 webbing and so it is possible that the PMGB may have been kept in the small pack. A problem with accepting this as a part of the hypothesis is that at any time a soldier could be ordered to discard their webbing and they are hardly likely to leave the container of what may have been precious mementos from loved ones at home.

Figure 4.37 Inside of British p1902 Jacket showing First Field Dressings pocket (Author ©).

It is concluded here that the most likely location of PMGB 005 was a soldier’s
right breast jacket pocket. If the PMGB were ‘face-down’ the bullet would have entered the soldier’s chest near his heart, reducing his chances of survival. If ‘face-up’ then the bullet would have entered the area around his right shoulder. If in the right waist pocket then a ‘face-down’ would likely have the bullet entering the soldier’s abdomen near to the right hip, thus missing the major organs in the midriff. ‘Face-up’ would have the bullet entering the top of the inner thigh. The left waist pocket and left breast pocket would have reverse wound entry points for the above.

The bullet itself was at the centre of a rolled cotton-crepe bandage, 215cm in length by 5cm wide. The bandage is tied with a short length of string made from three woven plaits of cotton. It is a pink/brown colour, this hue is the result of the bandage being boiled repeatedly in disinfectant rather than evidence of blood. The bullet has been carefully preserved in the rolled-up bandage and placed inside the damaged tin. This could have only been done by the surviving soldier himself. If he had been killed, there would have been no need to retrieve or keep the bullet. If extracted before the soldier had died it would have likely been discarded by the medical staff. The bandage indicates that the soldier was either in a Casualty Clearing Station or Base Hospital as it is a standard cotton-crepe roll type rather than the pad and strap type of First Field Dressing carried by soldiers in the field.

It was common practice for the soldier to be offered the offending bullet, shell fragment or shrapnel ball as a souvenir after it had been surgically removed from their bodies. The German bullet tiepin in the PMGB of Harold Haigh (PMGB 001/3Hi) being such an example. Not all soldiers wanted to be reminded of their trauma however, as already noted from the experience of being offered such a ‘souvenir’ by Harry Patch (Patch in Van Emdem, 2007:111). The inclusion of the bullet in the PMGB may have had another significance. The PMGB, and presumably any contents at the time of the impact, may have so reduced the terminal velocity of the bullet that all it did was lodge in the soldier’s body with no tumbling or serious damage. The PMGB and bullet together have now become a symbol of his survival and must now be carefully preserved to show his good fortune at surviving given that if the Gift had not been in his pocket the wound may have been catastrophic. He is, in fact, now in possession of the ‘bullet with his name on it’.

Unlike the previous ‘bullet in a box’ of PMGB 010, there has been care and
deliberation taken here to preserve and protect the bullet within the box it damaged. As before, the damage has rendered the PMGB unfit for the purpose of being a box to hold day-to-day mementoes and souvenirs.

**Unknown (PMGB 022/1Cii/Di)**

As Saunders and Cornish state objects from the Great War exist (physically and metaphysically) in a ‘seemingly infinite number of cultural and personal worlds simultaneously’ (2009:3). PMGB 022 is a good example of such a multi-faceted object that has gone through many phases of use and decay.

The object itself is very humble in nature, more a relic than anything but it has transcended many levels of meaning, from Gift to battlefield relic, before reaching the current one of research example. It will allow us to further explore ‘the social world of objects’ (Saunders, 2007:31). PMGB 022 is the top section of the embossed brass lid of the Gift (Figure 4.38). It was excavated from the Somme battlefield in Northern France in 2018 by a militaria collector/dealer and offered for sale on eBay.

![Relic PMGB Lid (PMGB 022) found on Somme Battlefield (Author ©).](image)

*Figure 4.38* Relic PMGB Lid (PMGB 022) found on Somme Battlefield (Author ©).

The section is bowed slightly outwards and has some damage to the edge above the embossed head of the Princess, best seen from the rear (Figure 4.39). Apart from this one slight tear, the rest of the folded edge of the lid, although dented and buckled, has no other major damage.
Figure 4.39 Relic PMGB 022, rear view (Author ©).

Little remains of this object, there are no contents, no identification marks, in fact no real physical biography at all apart from existing as a PMGB lid.

However, the manner of its deposition and retrieval, the significance of the landscape within which it was lost and found has a profound and insightful importance on many levels. Total British casualties for the offensive by November 1916 were 300,000 wounded and 125,000 killed. The Thiepval Memorial commemorates the names of 72,317 British and Commonwealth soldiers killed on the Somme who have no known grave. Whilst there are many soldiers who remain unidentified but have graves, tens of thousands of others do not. The ferocity of the German defensive artillery reduced many bodies to mere fragments lost forever in the churned-up mud of the Somme valley.

Metal items found in ‘no-mans-land’ or in trenches are more likely to have been with a soldier when he was killed and, being more resilient, have survived as material remains when he has not. Figure 4.40 is such an example that has biographical evidence to link it to a soldier. The object, excavated in the early 1980s near Ovilles, is a British soldiers issue spoon with the number ‘6616’ engraved into the handle (Figure 4.41). Private 6616 Ernest Charles Farquhar of the 9th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers was killed on 7 July 1916 whilst attacking German fortifications in the village of Ovilles La Boiselle. His body was never recovered, and he is commemorated on Pier and Face 8 C 9 A and 16A of the Thiepval Memorial. As a regiment, the Royal Fusiliers had 330 soldiers killed on that Friday in July ’16, 253 of them have no known grave.
Figure 4.40 Relic British Army issue spoon found at Ovilles (Author ©).

Figure 4.41 Detail of Army number ‘6616’ on Figure 8.21 (Author ©).

PMGB 022 and Charles’s spoon were part of the ‘memorialised landscape’ of the Somme (Saunders, 2007:84-87) and their ‘re-discovery’ has transformed them back into material objects, but their status has changed forever. They are no longer just a PMGB lid and a spoon, but a PMGB lid and a spoon lost and found on the Somme battlefield. This elevated prestige (certainly from a militaria collecting perspective), has taken the objects beyond their original status. This poses an interesting anthropological question, if the objects were retrieved from the Bustard training trenches on Salisbury Plain in 2008 (ibid:235) would they have the same status?

Concluding Comments

The four principal PMGBs examined here show a distinctive pattern of adding objects to the box right up until the death of the original recipient. This may be a relatively short time, as in the cases of Ernest Haslam and Donald Manson, or a
much longer time as with Harold Haigh and possibly, due to the ribbon wear on the medals, William Cutting.

Except for the objects placed in Donald Manson’s PMGB which is likely to be part of the mourning rituals of the Manson family, no other future custodian appears to have added anything to the contents of any of the PMGBs. This may be, as with Donald, that the families now see the PMGB as part of their memory processes of that soldier/brother/husband/father/grandfather now gone.

If it were possible to imbue the static, inanimate PMGBs with an emotional lifecycle, could a sense of physical activity be observed? Despite some of the four principal PMGBs having seemingly random objects associated with them, these assemblages had some meaning and significance at some time to someone, maybe the original recipient or their descendants. Stewart (1999:172), notes ‘from the privatised and domesticated world of the miniature, from its petite sincerity, arises an authentic subject whose transcendence over personal property substitutes for a strongly chronological, and thus radically piecemeal, experience of temporality in everyday life’. Maybe these objects are only ever going to mean something to those who assembled them in the first place and for us to ‘meddle in the space between a biographical object and its owner is always, potentially or really, the act of a voyeur’ (Hoskins, 1998:13).

After the death of the original recipient, the PMGB would now enter a ‘passive’ phase or perhaps take on a new, parallel chapter of its biography, where it would now become part of the other family members memories of the soldier who has died. They would still see it, touch it, open it, in fact doing all the things the soldier would have likely done but now as part of their own ritual for remembering. These parallel chapters have also been observed during interviews carried out for this research. Even when current custodians have no actual memory of the original soldier, usually having died long before they were born, the PMGB still has a vital function for their own processes of memory. In a significant number of interviews, the PMGB had first passed to the parents of the person now currently holding the object and this gives rise to a situation where the PMGB triggers memories of the parent first and of the original recipient second. In some cases, there are no memories of the original recipient at all but memories of those close to him, such as a widowed grandmother.
now grieving for her long dead husband.

The possibility of ‘passive’ and ‘dormant’ phases does exist, but a phase would seem to be too simple, implying a beginning and an end. It may also be postulated that even if a PMGB goes away from the custodianship of the family of the original recipient and is acquired by someone else, it is now making new memories for the latest custodian. Given the history of the original concept of the Christmas Gift, it can never be the case, beyond the simple laws of property ownership, that the PMGB now ‘belongs’ to the new custodian. A counterargument for a ‘dormant’ phase could be that as the PMGB is a recognised object of material culture from the First World War and is therefore always linked to the conflict regardless of any individual ownership issues. A key determinant will be deciding if it is the biography of the PMGB that is driving the narrative or if it is the biographies of those individuals whose lives intersect with the PMGB at some stage.

The four principal PMGBs, after the original recipient died and his family interaction ceased, rapidly became dormant. With their contents intact, they were probably put away and forgotten about, until being put up for sale. Their survival is because of a commercial transaction between a seller, maybe a distant relation who has no interest in his or her own family history, and a collector of interesting anthropological First World War objects. Despite this, any PMGB has a clear identity. It has become one of those objects that are ‘marked for gender and age and as such are instrumental in achieving and sustaining relationships as well as personal identities through the place of objects in everyday activities’ (Dant, 1999:29).
Chapter 5

Case Study 2:
PMGBs, Original Recipient’s Family
and Other Custodians

Introduction

This chapter focuses on object biographies which relate to human feelings, emotions and the processes and use of memory by families of the original recipients, the current PMGB ‘custodians’. Chapter 4 relied heavily on digitised public domain information, particularly Ancestry (UK) and Fold3 websites, but this chapter describes, and analyses family stories and memories acquired through personal interviews to construct the object biographies.

The soldiers’ military service does not have to be precise in this instance. Dates of this or that action/posting, are secondary to the family member remembering that ‘granddad said….’. Some military inaccuracies are expected and where these occur, the discrepancy will be noted. The narrative given by the current custodian is more important as it gives life to the continuing biography of the PMGB emphasising its current, rather than its past, ‘social life’.

It is important to be specific about what is meant by ‘original recipient’: apart from the soldier himself, it may include next of kin who received the PMGB after the soldier had been killed or died in service. Clearly this scenario will produce a different biographical trajectory than that of a soldier who returned from war and lived into old age. Many interviewees stated that very little was discussed with the original recipients about the war. Some regret not asking more questions when these people, or their immediate descendants, were alive and are now left guessing about the biographies surrounding the PMGBs and their associated items which represent what Turkle, quoting Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009), regards as those ‘goods to think with’ (2011:4).

The following is a selection of 13 interviews, representing 61.9% of the total, the remaining 8 (38.1%) mentioned briefly at the end of the section are fully
presented and analysed in Appendix 3. All interviews were virtual, the original face-to-face format abandoned due to the Coronavirus pandemic. All interviewee’s have been anonymised and are identified only by their initials. The original recipients’ surnames have been anonymised, but their Christian names are used.

PMGB status of ownership/custodianship (1C) and Categories 3, 4 and 5 (Contents) from Chapter 3 are used for these biographies but only where contents are present.

Transcribed Interviews

1. PMGB of Sergeant A. H, Army Service Corps

Sergeant H served with the Mechanised Transport section of the Army Service Corps, a part of the army supporting corps that actively recruited men with either civilian experience or an aptitude towards the use and maintenance of motor vehicles, particularly goods lorries.

PMGB Status (1AW/1Ci) Contents: Added by soldier; German medals and insignia (4D), World War Two medals (4A).

‘JT’ is the husband of Sgt. H’s great-granddaughter. The PMGB was passed to ‘JT’ because of his British army service. Sergeant H’s grandson, ‘JT’s father-in-law, felt that he would understand the importance and significance of the object and care for it, not only in the present, but also secure the legacy by passing it and other related memorabilia on to the next generation.

Although there are no photographs of Sergeant H with the family, ‘JT’ has his service medals from both the First and Second World Wars. The First War medals are framed and mounted but the Second War service medals are in the PMGB. Sergeant H kept his 1939-45 medals in his PMGB because they held a special significance for him. He was awarded a MID (Mentioned in Despatches) which, according to family tradition, was for services directly linked to Field Marshall Montgomery. Unfortunately, the family have no idea as to what these services were but speculate it was to do with chauffeuring duties.

The PMGB also contains some German medals and insignia. These were
probably acquired or ‘souvenired’ by Sergeant H at the end of the Second World War. They include an Iron Cross, Second Class, from the Second World War and a service medal given to German soldiers who had also served in the First World War. ‘JT’ is certain that the war service medals, and the German items were placed into the PMGB by Sergeant H. The reasons for this action are unclear but raise some intriguing possibilities. Although ‘JT’ never met his wife’s grandfather, family stories and tradition is quite adamant about the assemblage being significant to the memories of both world wars by Sergeant H. The ‘Hindenburg Cross’ is perhaps an odd item to ‘souvenir’. Its relevance in commemorating service during the First World War could have well struck a chord with ‘old soldier’ Sergeant H. as he shared similar experiences to his German counterpart. Could the two items have been a gift from a German soldier? A veteran of 1914-18 who, as a gesture of friendship or in exchange for some small service or kindness, gave his medals to this British soldier? During the interview, ‘JT’ made a valid point when he said that the German items were kept with Sergeant H’s war service medals, including the Mentioned in Despatches Oak Leaf emblem, which he (Sergeant H) was immensely proud of. German souvenir ‘battlefield trinkets’ would not have been kept in the same container.

The PMGB is not on open display and ‘JT’ is not sure how it was displayed by his wife’s family but, it has been carefully stored and will only leave his possession when it passes to another member of the family, possibly grandchildren, who can keep the memory of Sergeant H alive.

2. PMGB of Herbert S, Army Service Corps

The PMGB of Herbert S, 269 Mechanical Transport Company, Royal Army Service Corps, is kept by his grandson, ‘PG’.


Herbert married in January 1914 and was a chauffeur before the war to the owner of an engineering company in his hometown of Leicester. When they first met, ‘PG’s grandmother was awestruck with Herbert because of his chauffeur’s
uniform and that he had owned his own car since 1910. This was quite uncommon, and ‘PG’ tells of how his grandmother said it was like; ‘meeting a spaceman’. This experience with motor cars and their engines was probably why Herbert joined the Mechanical Transport section of the Army Service Corps.

269 Company was formed in early 1915 and went to France in March of that year with the rest of the 46th North Midland Division (Baker, 2020a:np). The division served in France and Flanders until the end of the war. The only other posting occurred during December/January 1915/16 when the division was sent to Egypt but returned to France after only 8 days (ibid). Herbert was discharged from the army in 1916 through an injury he sustained pre-war but appears to have joined the Army Pay Corps until the end of hostilities.

The only item inside Herbert’s PMGB is an Army issue New Testament prayer book. These were given free to soldiers by many different religious denominations. They were small enough for a soldier to keep in his uniform pocket and would easily fit into a PMGB. Although his grandmother’s family were strict Methodist, ‘PG’ recalls no alcohol at home in his youth, Herbert, and his brothers, liked to drink and have fun. ‘PG’ says that in later life his grandfather was vaguely agnostic at best, certainly not religious and the presence of a prayer book kept in his ‘Mary Tin’ seems odd. ‘PG’ agreed that for a lorry driver taking large quantities of ammunition and supplies from supply dumps up to the front line, particularly around areas like ‘Hellfire Corner’ 42, a man would accept all the help his soul could get.

‘PG’ has documentation listing Herbert as having attested into 269 Company in late January 1915, making him ineligible for the PMGB. This is a result of the fragmentary nature of First World War military records. 269 Company was only formed in January 1915 but as it was going to France soon after, would have consisted of fully trained personnel. Herbert would have joined in 1914, most likely with another company of the Army Service Corps and transferred after his training into 269 in time for embarkation.

After the war Herbert struggled with finding work and in later life, he and his wife moved to a corner shop on the end of a row of Victorian terraced houses in Leicester. Herbert’s wife was a hairdresser and plied her trade in the shop. ‘PG’ remembers that the PMGB was always on display. It was kept on the top shelf on a
small three-shelf bookcase. The bookcase only had important or significant books on it, the family bible and a self-published family history as well as almanacs. ‘PG’ recalls no novels, paperbacks or anything ‘kitsch’ at all. This was an important but low-key location. Pride of place with other important items but not ostentatious or showy in any way⁴³. There would have been a fireplace with a mantelpiece above and ‘PG’ remembers a large sideboard with a fruit bowl on it, two places where the PMGB would have a more prominent display location, but its home was on the top shelf of the ‘special bookcase’.

‘PG’ has Herbert’s PMGB safely stored away as there is no room to display it within his existing display of his father’s Second World War memories. It remains important and ‘PG’ regards it as a very potent and emotive symbol of his family’s heritage. ‘PG’ has yet to convince his wife that it must be on display as she regards it as being ‘more clutter that has to be dusted’. This attitude is a reflection back to a time when ‘women’s interaction with domestic objects was conceived of as a long-term commitment; women were expected to look after the everyday maintenance and the orderly arrangement and display of household goods’ (Ajmar, 1999:85). The act of delineating such a domestic space is ‘a historically specific exercise that sees this arena as something that grows in complexity, articulation and refraction. Claiming it, or delineating it, in whatever shape or form is, of course, a deliberate constitutional act, tied to historical and contingent particularities of time and space’ (Buchli et al, 2004:2).

3. PMGB of Sergeant (later 2/Lt.) Edward L, 19th Hussars

‘IW’ is the grandson of Sergeant, Later Second Lieutenant, Edward L who was born in Southampton, England in 1880 and served as a Sergeant Trumpeter in the 19th Hussars (Figure 5.1). He entered France in August 1914.

PMGB Status (1Fii) Contents: None.

‘IW’ recalls seeing photographs of his grandfather wearing his medals that included the 1914 Star with the August-November ‘Mons’ Bar⁴⁴. ‘IW’ still has the medal ribbon bar that was designed to be worn in place of the medals with the silver rosette denoting the Mons Star sewn onto it (Ducker, 2011:11).
Edward was a member of the ‘Old Contemptibles Association’ of 1914 veterans and ‘IW’ has several different examples of veterans’ association badges from the First World War as part of his militaria collection. Edward’s two brothers, Herbert and Alfred, both died during the war. Herbert, a Lance Sergeant in the Rifle Brigade, was killed at Ypres in Belgium on 6 January 1916 and is listed on the Menin Gate Memorial. Alfred, a Captain in the Australian Light Horse, died of wounds on 17 November 1917 and is buried in Deir El Belah War Cemetery, Palestine. During his lifetime, Edward was involved with the veteran’s associations in his home city of Southampton and, according to ‘IW’, visited the Menin Gate just after it opened in 1928. Edward died relatively young in 1948 and was buried with his service medals in St Mary Extra Cemetery, Sholing, Southampton.

Edward had collected during his time in the army, his pilgrimage trips back to the Western Front and from around the bric-a-brac dealers in Southampton, quite a collection of brass trench art that his widow, ‘IW’s grandmother, obsessively cleaned and polished for the rest of her life. ‘IW’ remembers her as a very precise, fastidious person and the house in Loane Road Southampton, including the brass trench art, was kept spotless and gleaming. ‘IW’ remembers Edward’s PMGB as being part of this collection of brass items on the sideboard of his grandmothers’ front room. It was worn smooth by the decades of cleaning, edges gently folding over and details on the embossed lid getting softer over the years, a process that Saunders (2004:15) believes had ‘therapeutic effects’. There would also be instances where ‘decades of often obsessive polishing erased the original decoration’, creating a ‘further

Figure 5.1 Edward L, 19th Hussars (Courtesy of ‘IW’ 2020 ©).
transformation of their materiality that literally and figuratively embodied the passing years and heart-felt connections between a wife and a long-dead husband’ (ibid).

He was also an active member of the British Legion and visited the Menin Gate Memorial at Ypres (Ieper) in Belgium in 1928, maybe as part of the Legion’s largest ever pilgrimage there with nearly 10,000 people travelling from all over Great Britain to attend a ceremony of over 25,000 people, including 1,400 war widows, in August of that year (Connelly et al, n.d:p:2). His motivation for visiting the memorial that commemorated his brother must have been compelling as Herbert, his brother, had no known grave, the pilgrimage may have been part of his search for ‘redemptive meaning’ as part of the mourning process (Winter, 2006:loc 1916).

British Legion and other ‘old comrades’ associations memberships were more than mere socialising for many veterans. It was the only opportunity to be with people who understood the horrors and privations of the war, something their families and the public in general could not even begin to comprehend. This sense of ‘being apart’ through his wartime experiences may have been the reason Edward chose to be buried with his service medals rather than leave them to his family. Although only four years out of a life that spanned nearly seventy years, the war was a significant event in his life. Winter notes that ‘traumatic times’ are fixed rather than linear events (Winter, 2006:loc 791). The medals represented Edward’s overall contribution of service and sacrifice during the war, whereas the PMGB was only a single event, one of giving and gratitude as befitting a Christmas gift.

The gradual amassing of brass souvenirs made as ‘trench art’ by Edward, and the implicit acceptance of these objects into the family home by his wife, ‘IW’s grandmother, shows several processes around commemoration, remembrance, pilgrimage and tourism associated with this type of object from the First World War (Saunders, 2000:51). They were physical mementoes of Edward’s time in the army, ‘authenticating his experience’ (Stewart, 1993:133) as well as a representation of his ‘missing’ brother (ibid) and for his wife both physical reminders of her two dead brothers in law but also desirable artistic objects that she was happy to have in her home, ‘tourist art’ (ibid:149).

Much of the scrap material left behind on the Western Front landscape was brass and so it is perhaps not surprising that many of the souvenirs fashioned by
French and Belgian artisans for sale to the growing numbers of battlefield pilgrims and tourists were made of brass (Saunders, 2000:47 and 2004:12). Saunders also notes the process of transition of trench art from being made by and for a male soldier audience during the war but evolving into objects more suitable for the growing tourism market (2004:14). During the early 1920s, the relationships ‘between objects, people and place, were mediated by battlefield tourism’s trade in war souvenirs and the activities of those who looted soldiers’ bodies’ (ibid:14). Souvenirs, for veterans and the bereaved families, can act as a ‘collage made of presents rather than a reawakening of a past’ (Stewart, 1993:145), so an artistic shell case can be purchased even if the husband or son had been killed by artillery. Naylor (1999:94) notes that Esther Leslie (1956-) describes souvenirs as ‘aids to practical remembering’.

After ‘IW’s grandmother died, the PMGB and most of the trench art passed to her elder daughter, ‘IW’s aunt. She lived in Rosomon Road, Southampton, that backs onto Loane Road. ‘IW’ was still able to see Edwards PMGB when he visited his aunt. After his aunt died the PMGB went away from Southampton to her own son, ‘IW’s cousin.

The PMGB in ‘IW’s possession is not his grandfathers but was purchased as a reminder of him and the boyhood visits to his grandmother and aunts’ houses in Southampton. It reminds him of the gleaming brass and the smell of metal polish and the service of a man who served his country and whose two brothers made the ultimate sacrifice.

The fact that the PMGB is not the ‘actual one’ given to Edward is of no consequence to ‘IW. It is ‘right’, a substitute, not a replacement or representation. The original is still in the family, but this PMGB helps to keep the fond memories of his grandfather. It also grounds him to the memories of his grandmother and aunt. Dant (1999:36) notes that the four theoretical processes of appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion have moved the discussion on from ‘considering commodities with exchange and use values’ and ‘shift focus to the context in which an object is to be located’ (ibid:36). Dant also identifies ‘objects that mediate are not generating their own message, they are mediating messages from other humans removed from the receiver in space and time’ (ibid:154). The original
PMGB mediated the memories and legacy of his grandfather for ‘IW’ and the substitute performs the same role, not for his grandfathers’ life but that of the missing PMGB. ‘IW’ has appropriated a PMGB to become the vessel of his grandfather’s legacy.

Felluga (2011:np) tells us that according to Baudrillard (1929-2007) ‘when it comes to post-modernism simulation and simulacra, it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs [values] of the real for the real’. There is an area of concern over the authenticity of the substitute, not the exchange or use value (Dant, 1999:36) of what is a ‘real’ PMGB, but in respect of the tactile memory of the much-polished original, although Miller (1987:215) does conclude that, ‘the authenticity of artefacts as culture derives, not from their relationship to some historical style or manufacturing process – but rather from their active participation in a process of social self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of our understanding of ourselves and others’.

Attfield goes further and regards the use of the ‘crude’ use value/exchange value signs as a ‘dichotomy that forms the basis of the critique of materialism often presented as consumerism’ (2000:42). She uses the example of Neil Cummings’s (1958-) ‘parachute’, where ‘whatever the thing may look like, the moment of truth is when it either works or it does not, and the jumper either plummets to earth and dies, or survives the fall’ (ibid). This theory may be applied where, unless ‘IW’ s substitute PMGB has the same amount and patterning of wear and softening of the brass surface, it can never create the same haptic response as with the original and so must have a diminished value although ‘IW’ does not appear to be bothered by this. The original PMGB is still with the family, his cousin in Northampton, and the substitute fulfils its role so well that he felt able to take part in an interview to share his memories.

‘IW’ recently acquired the original Victory Medal issued to his great uncle Herbert, Edwards brother, who was killed at Ypres in 1916, the item having been ‘lost’ to the family for decades. The medal also links ‘IW’ to his grandfather because of the pilgrimage Edward had made in 1928 to the Menin Gate Memorial to honour his brother Herbert. The object also in a sense represents Herbert’s ‘homecoming’, Miller (2010:50) concludes that such objects or the thought of such objects are
important, ‘not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but quite the opposite. It is often precisely because we do not see them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations’.

### 4. PMGB of Fred G, Hussars

‘IF’ is the grandson, on his mother’s side, of Fred G, a regular soldier in the Hussars who later served in the Royal Flying Corps.

- PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Original/Accompaniments; Bullet Pencil (2A/SST), 1915 Card (2Cii). Added by soldier; 2 silk postcards (3F).

‘IF’, a Yeoman Warder with 30 years’ service in the Historic Royal Palaces, has had an appreciation for history and heritage since childhood. He has collected Roman coins since the age of 10 and knows about the controversial issue around polishing, cleaning and the removal of age patina. ‘IF’ was brought up believing that you did not remove the age patina of old objects. The PMGB had resided with ‘IF’s grandmother before passing first to his mother and then to him. His grandmother had always been reluctant to talk about who had been given the PMGB and became tearful when asked. There is a possibility that it had belonged to her favourite brother, a soldier in the East Surrey Regiment who was killed in 1915. Not sure about this, ‘IF’ believes it was more likely Fred’s, his grandfather, rather than a great-uncle who his grandmother was to upset even to name when asked. Fred was invalided out of the service after being kicked in the head by a horse. ‘IF’ recalls that as a result Fred had to wear reading glasses because of this injury.

At this point ‘IF’s mother joins the interview. She recalls being shown the PMGB as a child. It was always kept safely in a drawer and only brought out on rare occasions. ‘IF’s mother recalls that this was when grandmother usually became emotional and refused to say anything more about the story around the brass box. ‘IF’ confirmed the reverential way in which grandmother treated the PMGB which still contains some of the original accompaniments, namely the bullet pencil and a 1915 New Year card and two silk postcards, typical souvenirs of the time. The lack of accurate information about the PMGBs true ownership are irrelevant to ‘IF’ and his mother as it still triggers memories. Either about Fred himself or ‘IF’s grandmother
and her grief as well as the overall significance of the service and sacrifice of the family during the war. Turkle (2011:5) regards some objects as ‘companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought’, so for ‘IF’ and his mother, Fred’s PMGB is a catalyst and companion for memory. The PMGB is in perfect condition and has rarely been polished. ‘IF’s mother had commented earlier in the interview as to how clear and life-like the image of Princess Mary was.

After the death of his grandmother, the PMGB passed to ‘IF’s mother. It became part of ‘IF’s ‘museum’, which was initially just a cardboard box with his collection of old coins and interesting artefacts as was, and still is, the ‘habit of small boys’ (Belk, 1995:54-57). ‘IF’s father bought him an old school desk which became the ‘home’ of the museum and the PMGB, possibly granddad’s, possibly great uncle’s, the accurate provenance was not important, it was family and that was enough, became part of the collection.

‘IF’ felt it important to give the PMGB some ‘age’, achieved by the application of a black wax crayon across the brass surface. This was not a search for ‘authenticity’ as part of the deployment of metaphors central to the ‘legitimation of Western heritage concepts’ (Lowenthal, 1985, Buchli, 2002 and Tilley et al, 2006:466) but rather a small boy’s need to make something that is old ‘look old’. Looking back today, ‘IF’ is mildly horrified at what he did as a child with the black wax crayon, but his actions illustrate an important point about how convention or best practice can stifle the life of an objects’ biography. The PMGB and other similar metallic items from the war, such as campaign and service medals and trench art were highly polished. Even the memorial ‘Death Penny’ was originally very shiny, being cast from bronze and ‘finished with precision’ (Dunne, 2012:3), it polished up to a high shine. While ‘IF’ agreed that no one would knowingly or deliberately countenance the destruction of an objects’ integrity if the patina were part of that integrity or biography surrounding the object, sometimes polishing it back to the original appearance can be rewarding and satisfying. It can take the object back to how it was when the soldier, Fred or great uncle, first brought it home thereby drawing a sensorial connection across time.
5. PMGB of 2nd Lieutenant Samuel J, Royal Irish Rifles

‘DP’ is the grandson of Samuel J. Samuel was born in Northern Ireland and served throughout the war and as part of the Army of Occupation in Germany in 1919. Samuel emigrated to Canada in 1919.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Original/Accompaniments; Bullet Pencil (2A/SST), 1915 Card (2Cii). Added by soldier; ‘Royal’ cigars (4D).

Samuel joined the 1st Battalion RIR (Royal Irish Rifles) on 14 September 1914. He transferred to the 14th (Service) Battalion (Young Citizens) before entering France in October 1915. Samuel started as a Rifleman but during 1917 received a commission to become a Second Lieutenant. After leaving the army in 1919, Samuel and his two brothers left Ulster, with Samuel settling in the ‘Mille Isles’ (1,000 Islands) area of Ontario, Canada.

Because of the 1915 New Year card it would indicate that Samuel received it sometime during the first half of 1915, before he went to France with the 14th Battalion in October 1915 (Baker, 2020a:np). The PMGB is in perfect, undamaged condition – there are no wear marks, and it is possible that he never took it to war.

Maybe, as the PMGB had been received on Christmas Day 1914, it did not have much emotional impact on him. It may have been regarded by many soldiers as an afterthought. However, there may be another reason for its pristine condition. Many soldiers were honoured to receive ‘a Gift from a Princess’ and preserved and cherished the object accordingly. It would, in many instances, be sent home to family with strict instructions to look after it.

‘DP’ found something in his grandfathers’ PMGB that may support this theory. The PMGB had not been touched for decades, ‘DP’ and his siblings, when visiting his grandparents, were not allowed to touch it. It was kept on a lace doily on a small table in the parlour (front room) into which nobody was allowed. Hamlett (2010:41-42) notes that by the Edwardian period, a time of strong influence for ‘DP’s grandparents, most homes had a drawing room, but parlours were being widely used. By limiting access to certain domestic spaces, such as the parlour, it became a place of ‘presentation as opposed to function’ (Stewart, 1993:150), parents were able to fashion their relationships with their children through this use of limited
access to create a ‘favouritism and reward process’ (Hamlett, 2010:114).

After clearing his grandmother’s belongings after she died, and long after Samuel’s passing, he came upon a wicker basket full of odd items. It was ‘DP’s wife who uncovered the PMGB, along with several period maps from France and Belgium typical of the type issued to officers, and his commission certificate rolled up in a cardboard tube. On opening the PMGB ‘DP’ discovered something that may support the Royal respect theory.

In the 1930s Samuel was president of the Mount Royal Legion during a Royal visit to the Windsor Hotel in Montreal on 18 May 1939 by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Samuel attended a dinner with the King and Queen and kept two banquet cigars that he wrapped and put into his PMGB along with an explanatory note (Figure 5.2).

![Figure 5.2 PMGB of Samuel J with Banquet Cigarettes (Cigars) from a Royal Dinner in 1939 (Courtesy of ‘DP’ ©).](image)

The significance is that he felt the two royal reminders needed to be together. The cigars are in delicate glass tubes. The original note and paper wrappings were so degraded that what is present today is a modern copy (by ‘DP’’s wife) and the wrapping is paper towel. The act of smoking, especially cigars, is full of ritual and ceremony with established etiquette around the ‘cutting, lighting and smoking of the cigar’ (newair.com, 2020:np). Weeks (2009:29-37) details similar rituals around the ‘smoking and sharing’ of cigarettes among soldiers during the war, ‘a relief and solace for frayed nerves’ (ibid:29). The distinctive smell of cigar smoke may also be
compared to some cultures where ‘smell is thought to reveal identities that visual appearances sometimes mask’ (Howes, 2003:146). The smell of cigar smoke would also be perceived as being more redolent of an all-male activity and perhaps also social elitism. Here the PMGB was used to protect these items of male status and identity. They became unfit for smoking after five years of storage, even in the glass tubes48, but then took on the role of Royal Souvenir, rather than just a cigar. Here ‘the souvenir is not simply an object appearing out of context, an object from the past incongruously surviving in the present; rather, its function is to envelop the present within the past’ (Stewart, 1993:151).

‘DP’ is an accomplished military historian and has researched several war memorials in the areas around Toronto. He has had Samuel’s Commission and Discharge certificate, restored and framed and they are in his study. The PMGB sits on a shelf, still containing the Royal cigars, next to a photograph of Samuel (Figure 5.3). The restoring of these documents had a significant importance.

Figure 5.3 PMGB and Photograph of Samuel (Courtesy of ‘DP’ ©).

For ‘DP’, the relationship between the ‘materiality of the artefact and the materiality of space is especially close’ (Miller, 1987:121). ‘DP’ wanted these artefacts to be part of an important space in his life, his study, and did not want them to be merely relics but much as they had been when Samuel first received them, restoration being the best way of achieving that goal. The photograph of Samuel, like most photographs of people from our past, is ‘perhaps the most ubiquitous and insistent focus of 19th and 20th century memory, it can infuse almost all levels of memory’ (Edwards, 1999:221). ‘DP’ uses Samuel’s PMGB and photograph to reconfigure his
domestic space as a landscape of memory.

‘DP’ had no interest in the war whilst Samuel was alive, and his grandfather was of the generation that never talked about their experiences. ‘DP’s own children have the same lack of interest in the topic as he had at their age. So, unless they become interested, the collection and archive of Samuel J will most likely go to a military museum. During the interview with ‘DP’, an interesting difference between the United Kingdom and Canada regarding the trade in First World War collectibles was noted. This is discussed in Chapter 8, ‘Market Value; Buying and Selling’.

6. PMGB of Petty Officer Samuel H, Royal Navy

‘BH’ is the great-grandson of Samuel H, a regular seaman from 1900-24, serving on HMS Glasgow, a Bristol Class Cruiser, between 1912 and 1916.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Added by family/custodian; war service medals, navy cap badge (5Aii).

Samuel’s commanding officer was Captain (later Rear Admiral) John Luce (1870-1932). Luce also commanded the HMS Ramillies, a Revenge Class Dreadnought, between February 1919 and April 1920 and was Admiral Superintendent of the Malta Dockyard between 1921 and retired in 1924 (Dreadnought Project, 2020:np). This chronology is important with this biography because Samuel went with Luce every time he was posted, finally retiring from the service in the same year as Luce, 1924, when the Admiral invited him to come and work as his chauffeur.

Samuel kept a diary of his time in service and noted about receiving his PMGB. HMS Glasgow was moored near the River Plate on 8 June 1915 when post and supplies finally caught up with the ship. Amongst the cargo and letters from home was Princess Mary’s Gift. Samuel was pleased to receive it and kept it with him whilst in service. After the war it was given pride of place on a small bookcase, (a recurring practice noted with other interviews), along with Samuel’s medals and a photograph of him in Naval uniform. When Samuel died in the 1960s, the PMGB passed to his daughter, ‘BH’s grandmother, who in turn passed it onto her son, ‘BH’s father.
Unlike the army, navy personnel had more structure to their lives. They had a bunk, or maybe a hammock, in a specific part of the ship. They had a space they could call their own. No rotation between reserve trenches, frontline trenches and behind the lines, a sailor would have space for himself, and more importantly for the PMGB, somewhere safe to keep it, i.e., his bunk. ‘BH’ believed Samuel was away from home for at least two years after 1914. PMGBs that are known to have been with the soldier whilst on active service almost always carry their own battle scars of constant use. It would appear from Samuel’s example, that the Navy had the opportunity and resources to keep individual possessions away from the ravages of conflict but still have them to hand day-to-day.

‘BH’ recalls seeing the PMGB in his parents’ house, again on a small bookcase, this time halfway up the staircase on a small landing. It had now been joined by more family Royal Naval memories. ‘BH’‘s father and grandfather also served in the Royal Navy. ‘BH’ never knew his great grandfather but remembers how happy his own father was to be able to meet Samuel when wearing his own Royal Navy uniform, continuing a family tradition of service.

The PMGB now resides on a shelf in ‘BH’s study and contains Samuel’s medals and Petty Officer’s cap badge. It represents a connection to someone, who he never met, but nevertheless has a strong connection of fondness and pride, that has elevated the object’s to an ‘icon of remembrance’ (Cornish, 2004:47).

7. PMGBs of the ‘T’ Brothers

7a of William T, 9th (Queen’s Royal) Lancers

7b of Albert T, Queen’s Own Oxfordshire Hussars (Oxfordshire Yeomanry)

7c of Alfred T, South Wales Borderers

‘MD’ recalls that his great grandmother had three brothers who all served during the First World War, all had PMGBs.

The PMGBs were in ‘MD’s great grandmothers care. After her death, they passed to ‘MD’s grandmother and this is where his recollections begin of the
presence of these brass boxes on a small bookcase in the front room. The bookcase also had photographs of the three brothers, William in uniform and Albert and Alfred in civilian clothes. ‘MD’s grandfather was a physiotherapist who also kept his medical textbooks on the bookcase.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents (7a, 7b and 7c): Added by family/custodian; names of soldiers on slips of paper, war service medals (4A).

The brothers were from a South Wales mining family. William was the eldest, Albert next and Alfred the youngest. William and Albert moved to Oxford sometime before 1910. Alfred and his parents also moved to Oxford at the end of the war. William worked as an inspector for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). Albert worked for an Oxford brewery driving a horse drawn dray.

Both William and the youngest brother, Alfred were killed during the war. William in November 1914 and Alfred in 1915. Albert survived the war but died in an accident in 1920. According to ‘MD’, the family knew Albert as ‘Thirsty Albert’ because of his fondness for alcohol. He fell off the back of a moving trolley bus whilst drunk and was, ironically, run over and killed by a brewer’s dray.

The identity of which PMGB belonged to which brother is known because their younger sister, ‘MD’s great grandmother, has written their names on a piece of paper and placed the papers in the relevant tin. The PMGBs also hold the service medals for each brother. William’s are court mounted and include the 1914 Star with the ‘Mons’ bar but the other two have loose, unmounted medals. Alfred’s do not have any ribbons. Also present are the two commemorative scrolls that would have been given to the next of kin of the dead brothers. Only one framed Memorial Plaque remains for William. Alfred’s has been lost even though the accompanying scroll remains.

William’s PMGB (7a), although stained, has no wear to it. This is not surprising as he was killed before the issue, his next of kin would have received the PMGB later in the war. Alfred’s (7b) is also in pristine condition indicating that he may never have used it or even seen it.

Albert’s PMGB (7c) is worn and dented indicating much use. Interestingly it may not have been during Albert’s custodianship. ‘MD’ recalls his grandfather,
Albert’s nephew, was an avid pipe smoker. Grandfather used Albert’s PMGB all his life for his tobacco. ‘MD’ says that the smell of tobacco is still present even now thirty years after his grandfather’s death. The theories around the significance of ‘olfactory stimulation of memories’ are well established (Howes, 2003:5). Seremetakis (1984:125) questions how the ‘desensitized Western embodiment of the senses, including olfactory, can experience the cultural other’. Clearly, in this instance at least, ‘MD’ has formed a memory bridge to his grandfather through the lingering smell of the tobacco once stored in PMGB (7c) by what Chidester (2005:61) notes as the inversion of the senses where ‘the eyes and ears could never compete for authenticity with eating, tasting, smelling, touching’. Classen (2005:307) notes that in some extreme cases, notably blindness, that ‘taste, and especially smell, provide invaluable supplements to the sense of touch’. It is possible that the sense of loss of both his father and grandfather has heightened ‘MD’s reaction to the smell of the tobacco once held in the PMGB.

This suggests an interesting biographical trajectory for this PMGB. Wear and tear are to be expected, most research so far indicates that PMGBs, once their original soldier owner has ‘passed’, enter a less active state, becoming an almost revered relic as a holder of memories. But here we have a PMGB that has carried on serving its original purpose providing a secure place to keep personal belongings, in this case tobacco. ‘MD’ recalls a photograph of his grandfather taken during the Second World War whilst serving during the battle of El Alamein. His grandfather is smoking a pipe and ‘MD’ is convinced that his great uncle Albert’s PMGB is in his pocket.

After grandfather died in 1990, the PMGBs and their associated items passed to ‘MD’s father who packed them safely away in a box. They have gradually been appearing over the years back on display in ‘MD’s father’s study, the memorial plaque even being, once again, hung on a wall.

The family’s collection of memories, including the PMGBs, will eventually come to ‘MD’, who, as a historian and published author on the First World War, intends to keep their importance for his family history alive. Today, no one in the family smokes, so the biography of Albert’s PMGB has lost the trajectory of continued use given to it for around 60 years by the previous custodian and has now
settled into the role of relic, for the time being at least.

8. PMGB of Francis S. Royal Army Medical Corps

‘LS’ was given his great-grandfather’s PMGB as a young child by his grandmother. Francis served as a Warrant Officer 2\textsuperscript{nd} Class with 104 Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps. ‘LS’ was also given Francis’s medals and an archive of documents to look after. Even at this young age, his grandmother felt that he could be trusted to look after these important parts of his family’s historical legacy.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: None (medals and document archive stored separately from PMGB).

The PMGB had been used by ‘LS’s grandmother, Francis’s daughter, as a sewing box and ‘LS’ recalls seeing it full of buttons, thread, needles, pins and needle threader. When asked if it resembles a soldiers’ ‘housewife’ personal sewing kit, ‘LS’ recalls that it was not of a military nature. The buttons were mixed and varied, not metal or army service buttons, and the cotton was of many colours, not plain black. This would indicate that the PMGB had been used by his grandmother in perhaps a more practical way than a commemorative way, and that certain chapters of the biography had now become feminised. The PMGB is a ‘male’ object, a Gift for a soldier fighting, and possibly sacrificing his own life, for his country. Tilley argues that biographies can be viewed as ‘texts’ (1990:153) that can be ‘read’ and can be ‘a form of difference and plurality’ (ibid:153). The resultant ‘text’ of this PMGB has given rise to both masculine and feminine chapters/biographies.

The keeping of Francis’s medals and paperwork from the period and entrusting these, along with the PMGB, to a child for safekeeping reveals a high level of trust by ‘LS’s grandmother. The PMGB was unpolished and dirty when it passed into the care of ‘LS’. Grandmother had never cleaned it and apart from using it as a sewing box, did not appear to regard it as a memento of her father’s wartime service in any way.

‘LS’ is a military history author and Battlefield Tour Guide specialising in the D-Day Normandy Landings. The PMGB represents a strong family connection for him, and he keeps it on display in his study. He is realistic about the future of the
PMGB within his own family. His grandmother had eight grandchildren but chose him, the youngest, to be the custodian of her father’s military legacy and he knows that, if his own descendants are not willing to carry this on, it will go to an appropriate museum or collection in his great grandfather’s native Wales.

9. PMGB of Gilbert P, 4th Battalion, Royal East Kent Regiment (The Buffs)

‘HC’ has extensive information about her husbands’ side of the family and thought that the PMGB in her possession belonged to Randolph ‘C’, a member of Reading University’s Officer Training Corps before serving as an officer in the 10th Essex Regiment during the First World War. However, a chance conversation between ‘HC’ and her own mother has identified the correct recipient of the PMGB as being ‘HC’s grandfather on her mother’s side, Gilbert P. Gilbert (Figure 5.4) was a regular soldier who had joined the army before 1913. He was in the 4th Battalion, Royal West Kent Regiment (The Buffs) and saw service in India and Palestine during the First World War. He left the army in 1923.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: None.

Figure 5.4 Gilbert, Royal West Kent Regiment, India (Courtesy of ‘HC’ ©).

‘HC’ describes her mother as the ‘family magpie’, who collected and stored a multitude of objects, photographs, memorabilia and souvenirs from her side of the family as well as that of her husband, ‘HC’s father’s side of the family, in a cupboard of a large sideboard that was in her front room. Nothing was in order, just stacked neatly and stored away. The PMGB had never been cleaned and was empty. There are photographs of Gilbert throughout his life including one in uniform shown in
Figure 5.4. Also preserved are his service medals which include a Territorial Efficiency Medal awarded for at least 12 years military service both active and in the reserves (Figure 5.5).

![Medals Image]

**Figure 5.5** 1914/15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal and Territorial Efficiency Medal for Gilbert (Courtesy of ‘HC’ ©)

These medals have been sewn onto a metal pin bar, but the British War Medal has somehow been placed face backwards on the display. The mixing of ribbons and misplacing of medals is not uncommon and indicates that the veterans were sometimes left without official instructions as to how certain things were to be done, in this case, which way round the medal went. There are no remaining Gift accompaniments with the ‘P’ archive, just the PMGB. ‘HC’ has inherited these ‘little treasures’ and now has them out on display, their role a reminder of her family’s history, especially that of her mothers’ side.

10. **PMGB of John B, DCM, MM⁴⁹, Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort’s Own)**

The current custodian of John’s PMGB is his granddaughter ‘EB’, a retired police officer who now works for the British Army as a battlefield guide specialising on the Western Front. The PMGB was gifted to her at birth in 1965 by her grandfather and she now uses it, filled with shrapnel and empty cartridge cases, as a handling object for visitors during guided tours. Keen on family history, ‘EB’s mother had asked her father-in-law for a ‘few lines’ about the tin he had just left to ‘the baby’. What she got was a well written, full narrative of John’s war service. John served with the Rifle Brigade before transferring to the Machine Gun Corps later in the war but always preferred to be associated with ‘the Rifles’. As well as being awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and the Military Medal (MM), he was Mentioned
in Despatches (MID) twice during his war service.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Added by family/custodian; Battlefield Tour handling objects (3Ii).

John was serving in the trenches of the Western Front at Christmas 1914 and, not only remembered but took part in the now iconic ‘Christmas Truce’, which rather than one single action, was a phenomenon of small, often localised, acts of non-aggression and fraternisation between enemies who, only hours before, had been killing each other. It was an ‘Outbreak of Peace’ (Weintraub, 2001:1).

His diary contained some significant entries that shed light on an important element of how the PMGB was issued. His diary was very specific about receiving the ‘non-smoker’s’ Gift which gives support to the authors’ hypothesise about there being some form of marking on the outside of the cardboard box that the PMGB and its accompaniments were issued in. His cardboard box, as well as having a PMGB, may have contained acid drop sweets along with other comforts such as personal grooming items, he may have even received one of the rare canvas writing cases produced for the Fund.

Of the ‘Christmas Truce’, John’s diary tells that all along the frontline, certain pockets of the British and German armies stopped, for a few days at least, trying to kill each other. Apart from playing football, sharing cigarettes and chocolate and showing each other photographs of family and loved ones, John’s diary recalls the harrowing task of recovering the dead from no-mans-land. The weather was sub-zero, and he recalled that the frozen corpses were carried ‘like sides of mutton from a butcher’s shop’ away to be buried. This response to the interview request for information about the PMGB has yielded a significant piece of first-hand information about the war thus reinforcing the notion of the PMGB as a powerful conduit and catalyst for memories and biographies.

‘EB’ recalls her grandfather fondly as a small, quiet man, who, when he knew she was coming to visit, would go down to the grocers for green grapes. These would be cut in half and de-seeded and put into a bowl awaiting her arrival. She recalls sitting on his lap and playing with the ‘lumps’ under his arm. These lumps were pieces of shrapnel that John still carried in his body, a physical reminder of the embodiment of war that caused some men’s bodies to become ‘irrevocably re-
moulded by their experiences’ (Bourke, 1996:15). By allowing his young granddaughter to play with these permanent, visceral, physical reminders of the war, John has given us a glimpse of the process of healing, recovery and acceptance of wounds as presented by Santanu Das (2005) and Joanna Bourke (1996). Both authors cite touch as an intimate process that became more normalised between the men serving in very close proximity during the war. Das (2005:189) focuses on how during the First World War, ‘the norms of tactile contact between men changed profoundly’.

Bourke notes how men serving in the trenches would ‘nurse and feed each other when ill, bathe together and wrap blankets around each other when cold’ – contradicting many of the defined masculine ‘norms’ around touch and intimacy (1996:133-6).

Classen (2005:5) notes that the Western approach to touch is that ‘it has been positioned in opposition to the intellect and assumed to be merely the subject of mindless pleasures and pains’. It is difficult to fully appreciate the impact of this sensoriality of touch between John and younger ‘EB’. There must have been very little or no residual pain from the shrapnel still in his body or he would not have let her touch it. Further analysis was deemed to be too intrusive by the author so was not pursued but again demonstrates how an investigation into PMGB biographies can be a catalyst for other avenues of anthropological research.

‘EB’ keeps John’s PMGB in a large display cabinet that also holds her father’s medals. As a Spitfire pilot during the Second World War, he was decorated for bravery with both the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and the Distinguished Flying Order (DFO). This layering of another biography does not diminish John’s primary associations, but enhances the overall life of the object and, with the inclusion of ‘EB’s use of the PMGB as a handling object during battlefield tours (Figure 5.6), has so far revealed three generations associated with the object – a three-chapter biography of the PMGB stretching over 100 years.
The PMGB has some signs of wear, particularly near the ‘France’ lozenge on the lid. John was left-handed, as is ‘EB’, and this would have been where the Gift was opened and closed and is an example of where an object can be ‘re-made’ by its everyday use.

‘EB’ feels a strong personal connection to her grandfather, both as the brave and accomplished soldier but also the kindly man whose lap she remembers sitting on. She cherishes his PMGB and the memories it holds. There are no children to pass the object on to and so when the time is right, and ‘EB’ s relationship with the PMGB ceases, it will join John’s medals at the Rifles Museum in Winchester as part of their permanent collection and start a new chapter of its biography.

11. PMGB of Ernest M, 1st Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment

‘PC’ is the granddaughter of Ernest, a regular soldier who lied about his age and joined the army in 1906. He was one of three brothers who had been orphaned at a young age and were sent to live with an Aunt and Uncle who ran a farm. All three brothers became butchers on the farm and Ernest lists this as his occupation on his enlistment papers. He rose to the rank of Lance Sergeant and left the army for the Reserves in December of 1913. He was called back into service in late 1914. He gained the rank of Colour Sergeant (Company Quarter Master Sergeant). He left the army in 1920 and re-joined during the Second World War, this time with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Ernest saw service in France in 1940. He was later sent to
the Shetland Islands where, in 1944, he died of tuberculosis.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: None.

‘PC’ has vivid memories of Ernest when she was a young child in the 1940’s before his posting to Shetland. She recalls the large family Sunday lunches around a big table at her grandfather’s home with her parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, her grandfather, father and uncle all being in uniform. ‘PC’ remembers her grandfather as being strict and autocratic and recalls being told at most of the family Sunday lunches to, ‘Sit Up Straight’. Her mother worked in a munition’s factory during the Second World War and ‘PC’ was cared for by her grandmother. She had a strong relationship with her grandmother and remembers her with much love and affection.

The PMGB resided on a mantlepiece over the kitchen fire in grandmothers house and ‘PC’ recalls that it was regularly polished, along with a copper kettle and a trench art shell case that held the fire irons. ‘PC’ particularly remembers the beautiful fern pattern engraved into the shell case. There may have been an element of ritual associated with the polishing of these objects by her grandmother after the passing of her grandfather (Saunders, 2004:15), but it could also have been simply a household routine rather than a memory/remembering process.

The PMGB went to Australia in 1949 when the family emigrated and came back with them in 1951. It remained with ‘PC’s mother until her death in 2011, her father had died in 1971, and then it came to her.

At this point the biography takes a new direction. For ‘PC’, the PMGB is a direct link to the fond memories she has of her time with her grandmother, not her grandfather. She does not regard it as a military item or a masculine object, or even her grandfather’s. She regards it as being more feminine and associated with the long and happy seventy-year relationship she had with her grandmother. This shows, yet again, how chapters layered onto a PMGB’s biography can emerge and change, but not replace, previous or alternative ones. These objects possess many lives and meanings, often simultaneously, as with ‘PC’s PMGB. The gender of the object has changed from male to female in the eyes of ‘PC’ but it is the chapter/biography that has changed and not the object. Despite many facets of the PMGB being female, it still appears to remain a masculine object, a brass box given
to a serving (male) soldier during a time of war. Even the PMGBs issued to nurses were still the same masculine object as given to the men, the accompaniments were changed to be more appropriate for a female and there may well have been some distinctive marking on the issue cardboard box to indicate it was to be issued to a female, but the PMGB always appears male. Perhaps it is time to re-define it as a more gender-fluid object in liminal space than just simply male or female?

The object carries no war association for ‘PC’. She intends that it will go to her grandson who is interested in military history and then the PMGB might once again become a military object with masculine associations.

12. PMGB of Lance Corporal James G, 1st Battalion, South Wales Borderers

‘LB’ became the custodian of this PMGB on clearing her recently deceased father’s house. ‘LB’’s father died around Christmas 2019 and her mother had died only a few years previously, so the grieving process was still raw. Tucked away in a cardboard box was the PMGB. ‘LB’ noticed the smooth form of the brass material and the detail of the embossed lid. Closer inspection showed the legend ‘Christmas 1914’ and having heard about the story of Princess Mary’s Gift, realised what it was although at this time she had no idea at all who the original recipient was or how the object related to her own family.

PMGB Status (1CiE). Contents: None.

‘LB’ could not find anyone in her direct lineage who would have received ‘a brass box’ during the First World War. With the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown easing in June 2020, ‘LB’ was able to meet a friend who works for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) to see if she could shed any light on the mystery. ‘LB’ s friend noticed that there were markings scratched into the bottom of the object (Figure 5.7). On closer inspection these markings turned out to be the rank, army number and name of Pte. [Private] 1***0 [anonymised by author] J H G. Also carved into one of the corners was ‘L/Cpl.’ [Lance Corporal]. This army number and name led ‘LB’ to the records of James who turned out to be one of her grandmother’s uncles.
James entered France on 13 November 1914 so would have received his PMGB at Christmas 1914. James was wounded at the battle of Auber's Ridge on 9 May 1915. He died on 12 May 1915 and is buried in Lillers Communal Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France. James’s PMGB has been lost from view for decades and only resurfaced in May 2020. The accompanying biography has itself only come to light since July 2020. This happened only two weeks before ‘LB’s interview took place.

The PMGB has signs of wear and use, with the distinctive turning down of one corner edge of the lid that was the result of putting in and out of a pocket. The PMGB was important and significant enough for James to have carved his details into the base. He has even noted his promotion to Lance Corporal on the PMGB, a clear suggestion of constant usage. He was not only using it as a container but was also using it as a permanent record of his progress in the army and his military identity. Less than five months later he died of his wounds at the base hospital near Calais. His death in hospital was probably instrumental in the survival of his PMGB as it would have been returned to his parents along with other personal effects.

Where it went from there is unclear. It is possible that it accompanied James’s mother when she went to live with one of her other children in her later years, which is how it may have entered the life of James’s niece, ‘LB’s grandmother. The object, although still preserved within the family, had disappeared.
until ‘LB’ cleared her parents’ home. Objects can be responsible for ‘leaving traces’ of memory (Naylor, 1999:91), just waiting to be re-discovered. At some stage, the PMGB was passed from ‘LB’s grandmother to her father’s possession but ‘LB’ has no recollection of ever seeing it in either household.

James’s PMGB has become more than just a physical connection to his life for ‘LB’. She feels that it represents a life unfulfilled of a young man taken well before his time; it also has a far deeper resonance for her. It has become a conduit for the sadness and loss she feels at her own parents passing. It has now become a powerful and personal object, indicative of love, memory and loss. Pierre Nora (1931-) outlines ‘the contours of lost memory, which is life, a perpetually actual phenomenon affective and magical’ (Hallam and Hockey, 2001:33). ‘LB’ is sad but immensely proud of having found James and his story and the PMGB will remain in her family for future generations with its identity restored and the re-discovered story of James G.

13a. PMGB of Archibald P, Wiltshire Regiment, Tank Corps

13b. PMGB of Charles W, King’s Royal Rifle Corps and the Wiltshire Regiment

‘JH’ has two PMGBs. One, 13a, is from her husband’s grandfather, Archie, which was found when clearing the house after her mother-in-law’s death. It was found in the bottom of a box and contained some pieces of shrapnel but nothing else. The significance of the shrapnel as either simple souvenirs or physical reminders of a more significant traumatic memory is unknown. The second PMGB, 13b, presents a family mystery as ‘JH’ recalls hearing multiple biographies surrounding it whilst she was growing up.

PMGB Status 13a/13b (1Ci). Contents: (13a) Added by soldier; Shrapnel fragments (3Ii or 3Iii).

(13b) Added by soldier; Cap Badges, King’s Royal Rifle Corps and the Wiltshire Regiment.

‘JH’s mother thought that it could have also belonged to one of ‘JH’s great-grandmothers two brothers who also served during the First World War. Archibald,
Queen’s Own Royal West Kent Regiment (The Buffs) and Reginald, of the Royal Army Service Corps are the two great uncles in question. ‘JH’ also recalls another story, this time told by her grandmother, concerning the care and comfort given by her family to veterans from the local area. They arranged meals and tea parties at their home for small groups over many years, well into the 1930s. Grandmother was present at these gatherings as a child and kept an autograph book which became filled with little messages, drawings and poems from the soldiers who had served in the trenches and returned home damaged. ‘JH’ now has her grandmothers’ autograph book. Her love of history and a growing array of annotated filing boxes are to be left to her own son and daughter for them to carry on the story, a story that includes two PMGBs. This gives a world of material culture and identity in both conflict and post-conflict eras, all centred around one object, the PMGB.

Figure 5.8 Sergeant Charles W and Family circa 1914 (Courtesy of ‘JH’ ©).

There was another possible recipient, Charles (Figure 5.8), her great-grandfather but ‘JH’ was not convinced that he was the one because, although PMGB 13b contained two military cap badges, one from the King’s Royal Rifle Corps and the other the Wiltshire Regiment, both of which Charles had served in, ‘JH’ had thought that the PMGB was only given to soldiers in the trenches and, as her great grandfather was too old to fight, he was not eligible. He had retired from the army in 1897 and had returned in 1914 as a drill instructor in the King’s Royal Rifle Corps and later as a recruiting Sergeant for the Wiltshire Regiment.

The author informed ‘JH’ that as Charles was ‘in the King’s Uniform on Christmas Day 1914’ he was indeed eligible for the PMGB and along with the two
specific cap badges, there is a very compelling argument for these items to be his. ‘JH’ is emotionally attached to both PMGBs. They represent an important part of her family heritage, and she wants them preserved for future generations. She has become, by her own admission, the family archivist and has painstakingly gone through the wealth of memorabilia, photograph albums, paperwork and other items left behind by both her family and her husband’s. She notes that whilst most families expand at each generation, some, like her own, can contract, leaving fewer descendants to carry on with the task of recording the on-going legacy.

**Further Transcribed Interviews (summary)**

These are recorded in Appendix 3 of this thesis and include;

‘JH’ Battlefield Tour Guide. ‘Whenever she travels abroad it always sets off the scanners at customs’.

John T, Royal Engineers. ‘The PMGB is ‘IH’s physical and tangible link back to his grandparents, parents and wider family, now gone but not forgotten.’

Edward P, 4th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment. ‘JK’ is unsure why grandmother felt so aggrieved towards the brass box.’

Walter T, 10th (Service) Battalion, Devonshire Regiment. ‘He was a wonderful grandad, always had a sweet or sixpence in his pockets for us.’

‘Tommy’ D, Royal Army Medical Corps. ‘The fellow prisoner he bartered the tin from was executed by the Germans’.

Robert D, Durham Light Infantry. ‘OK’ has also been moved by the plight of some of the returning soldiers who were forced to sell their medals to feed their families during the 1920’s.’

‘Robert’ or ‘Willy’. ‘AT’ has no idea who the PMGB in his possession belonged too, but there are two likely candidates.

John K, Royal Artillery. ‘PN’ recalls being given the brass box as a child by his beloved ‘Pappy’.
Concluding Comments

An analysis of these interviews reveals a much wider range of biographies than first anticipated. It was expected that all interviewees, except the battlefield guides and militaria collectors, would know the name of the soldier whose PMGB was being discussed.

Out of the 13 interviews above, three were not certain about the original recipient’s identity. ‘Gilbert P’ (10) and ‘Robert or Willy’ (Appendix 3) each had two candidates for one brass box whilst the second PMGB encountered through ‘Archibald P and Charles W’ (13a/13b) had three possibilities. One PMGB, that belonging to Ernest M, does not hold any military significance to the current custodian, ‘PC’, at all. It does not even link ‘PC’ to Ernest, her grandfather, as a person, but is an important physical reminder of her much-loved grandmother.

The PMGB discussed with ‘IW’ concerning ‘Edward L’ was not the original item. The original had passed onto another family member but had become so important to ‘IW’ during his growing up that he purchased a substitute when the original ‘moved away’. Substitute as distinct from replacement in this case as the original is still with the family. It is ‘standing in’ for the original. The PMGB of ‘James G’ was unknown until July 2020, when a friend of ‘LB’s happened to notice scratches on the base of the brass box that turned out to be the soldier’s name, army number and two ranks. The latter point of the two ranks is compelling evidence for the PMGB to have been with him constantly through his promotion from Private to Lance Corporal at least.

Many of the PMGBs have taken on different roles over the years from button box (Francis S), tobacco box (Albert T) and even a child’s portable museum (Fred G) and may be viewed as different phases of the object’s biography. This poses the question that these phases, active or dormant, only depend on who’s actions or activities are being viewed at any one time. Using ‘phase’ is far too simple, a phase would seem to indicate a linear process that has a clear start and finish, a beginning and an end. This would be very difficult to apply to an object with such an unclear ebb and flow of use, storing, finding, using, losing, discarding and discovering life cycle as a PMGB.

The object does not change but new layers are created each time there is a
change of fortune for the object. Some of these 'events' appear to be multi-layered or parallel and resemble chronologically linear chapters but with some occurring at the same time. The PMGB that was the active component of ‘IF’s portable childhood ‘museum’ was simultaneously also the source of inexpressible grief to his grandmother (Fred G) and the PMGB of a great-grandfather was also grandmother’s button box (Francis S) are examples of simultaneous layering.

All these interactions, linear and simultaneous, do give credence to the existence of many layers of identity, gender, history, being, purpose and intention – all brought together in one object, the PMGB.
Chapter 6

Soldier’s Comforts and Commercial Comforts

Introduction

This chapter investigates examples of manufactured Conflict Related Metal Boxes (CRMBs), packaging or ‘tins’, either contemporary with, or having a linked biography to, the First World War. Many were made as soldiers ‘comforts’ others have a patriotic or commemorative design. Some may have been used, either deliberately or accidentally, as memory repositories. Cigarettes and confectionery were the main contents.

Methodology and Classification

The additional CRMB categories are divided between this and Chapter 7 and are detailed in Chapter 3. Further sub-categories will detail design, construction, issue and use which will assist with analysing the tins. Discovering who was responsible for ordering or making the tin, who the intended recipient was, was it a gift or did it have to be bought, either by the giver or the receiver will also be analysed with each example. There is an expected difference in physical size between the tins in some of the categories. Tins to be used and carried by serving soldiers would be expected to be smaller, more portable designs, but the more static, ‘patriotic’ versions of everyday tins, given an appropriate re-branding to help maintain morale, would be much larger. Even large capacity tin steamer trunks (named after their use in cabins of steam ships) could be used for storing bigger ‘keepsakes’ such as a soldier’s uniform or any retained equipment or other larger ‘souvenirs’. There will also be inevitable cross-over, where tins produced for one purpose are re-purposed for another, be it because of size, convenience, or a deliberate action by the keeper of that tin.

The two categories in this chapter are;

1/(S/COM) Soldier’s Comforts. Tins, like the PMGB, that have been specifically designed, funded and manufactured with the sole intention of
being distributed free directly to members of the armed forces. These originate from philanthropic or charitable organisations or individuals whose intention is solely to provide ‘comfort’ to the serving soldier.

2/(C/COM) Commercial Comforts. These tins, like those in the S/COM category, are designed to be gifted to members of the armed forces, most likely those serving overseas away from home and loved ones. The difference is that these comforts have been designed to be sold directly to the soldier or civilian, usually in shops. There is nothing unique about these tins, they would have been available for anyone to purchase regardless of their military status. This category may not carry the weight of prestige of the S/COM or the PMGB but has the potential for being far more personal and poignant, they could be a gift from a father to a son or from a young child to their father or brother. They can carry far more emotional status than some distant Princess or committee could ever hope to do. They were personal.

As with the description and analysis of the PMGBs, each example of the CRMBs has been detailed regarding materials used in construction, methods of construction and processes, decorative processes and styles and, if present, original contents. Several brands investigated are still in business today and some information has come from their archives.

The commemorative tins produced after the end of the war reflect not only a desire to celebrate peace and remember the fallen but also a return to normality with manufacturers reverting to pre-war biscuit and tea tin production rather than arms and ammunition. The Reading firm of Huntley and Palmer’s had a subsidiary factory that made their biscuit tins but during the war switched to making Brodie steel shrapnel helmets (Corley 1972:186). Modern equivalent contents have been used to approximate weight and capacity, where appropriate.

A red outline, the same size as a PMGB, has been used in the photographs in both chapters to show comparative scale.

Item 1, Queen Victoria’s Chocolate Tin. A Gift to Soldiers during the South African War, Christmas 1900 (S/COM/1900ia/2Aii/Bi/C1Di/3NC)
Description

The first months of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 did not go well for the British army and morale duly suffered (Kebar, 1997:2). To counteract this, the government decided in October 1899 to give each serving soldier a personal gift from Queen Victoria. The monarch was enthusiastic and chose the gift of a metal box containing chocolate, and fully supported the project. It was the Queen’s;

child-like enthusiasm that propelled the idea forward to completion and her strong belief in the tin that inspired faith in all involved that the gift would be an unequivocal success. (ibid:5).

The Queen paid for the gift from the Privy Purse. Responsibility for design and production was given to the three principal chocolate manufacturers of the time, Cadbury of Birmingham, Fry of Bristol and Rowntree of York. The initial requirement of 90,000 tins was to be divided equally between the three companies. Production was to be undertaken by the three metal container manufacturers affiliated with the chocolate companies, Hudson, Scott and Sons of Carlisle with Cadbury, Barringer, Wallis & Manners of Mansfield with Rowntree and Barclay & Fry of London with Fry’s. An additional 30,000 tins were required and the contract for these extra tins went to Fry’s (ibid:10).

The three chocolate manufacturers were all owned and run by prominent Quaker families who had grave misgivings about any army contracts, their religious and moral beliefs prohibiting them from either supporting or profiting from armed conflict. Their solution to this dilemma was ingenious. They were given a Royal Warrant from Queen Victoria and regarded the project as being for the monarch, not for the government or the British army, and completed the work at cost without any profit being made. All three companies produced chocolate and cocoa products for the British military during both World Wars. The affiliated tin box manufacturers each submitted different designs around a suggested theme with the Queen’s head and shoulders embossed on the lid. The winner was Barclay & Fry, and the other two manufacturers adopted their design. Barclay & Fry immediately registered the design as copyright number 349850 (ibid:6). This was to ensure the Queen’s wish that no copies of the gift were to be made. Queen Victoria had already stipulated
that only soldiers serving in South Africa would be eligible to receive the gift.

The Fry's/Barclay & Fry tin (Figure 6.1) and the Rowntree/Barringer, Wallis & Manners tin (Figure 6.2) measure 158mm by 81mm and 22mm deep. The Cadbury /Hudson Scott tin (Figure 6.1) is overall slightly larger being 152mm by 92mm and 22mm deep. Slight differences in the colour used to decorate the tins are the only way to differentiate the two larger tins as no manufacturer details were printed on them. The Rowntree tin (Figure 6.2) has a darker blue border with an orange red background, the Fry's tin has a lighter blue border and a blood red background.

Figure 6.1 Fry's/Barclay & Fry and Cadbury/Hudson Scott tins (Author ©).

Figure 6.2 Rowntree tin by Barringer, Wallis & Manners (Author ©).

Without the subtle information above, the only way to identifying which of the three manufacturers was responsible for each tin was the chocolate itself. Each had their logo incised into the top of the chocolate segments. The chocolate was wrapped in foil which was in turn wrapped in greaseproof paper. To prevent damage to the chocolate through movement during transit, shredded paper was used as packing. When present in tins today, this shredded paper has dried to a point where
it resembles fine straw rather than paper. The inside of the tin was plain (Figure 6.3).

![Figure 6.3 Inside of Queen Victoria’s Chocolate Tin (Author ©).](image)

**Figure 6.3** Inside of Queen Victoria’s Chocolate Tin (Author ©).

Analysis

The design had rounded edges so if stored in a soldier’s pack it would not tear clothing or damage the pack itself. The expected use for the tin was to be as a personal souvenir from the Queen to the individual soldier. This intention is evident with the wording on the tins, a printed facsimile of the Queen’s actual handwriting (Figure 6.4), that says;

> I wish you a Happy New Year, Victoria Reg.

![Figure 6.4 Printed facsimile greeting in the Queen’s own handwriting (Author ©).](image)

**Figure 6.4** Printed facsimile greeting in the Queen’s own handwriting (Author ©).

The message is personal, ‘I wish’ being used instead of the usual ‘We’. The Queen’s Gift was also only ever intended for Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO’s) and enlisted men, not officers, although many officers ‘retained’ a tin for themselves when handing the Gifts out to their men (ibid:24). Unlike the PMGB that was given, either issued or applied for, to everyone ‘wearing the King’s uniform on Christmas Day 1914’, the Queen’s Gift was only issued once, during January 1900, distribution and transport difficulties making a Christmas issue impossible (ibid:16). Those
eligible also included wounded soldiers, members of the Naval Detachment, Local South African Forces and Colonial Regiments from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Native Indian bearers were not eligible, which included a young stretcher bearer serving in the British army – Mohandas Gandhi (ibid:25).

Very few diaries were written by enlisted men during the war but one, kept by Private Frederick Tucker of the Rifle Brigade, shows how an ordinary soldier felt about the personal nature of the Gift, a sentiment shared with those men, 14 years later, who also received a Gift from Royalty,

14th February 1900. We started out again the following morning with an artillery force to make a reconnaissance, then returned and took up our positions on Inkwane again. At 8.00 pm we received the Queen’s gift of chocolate which we had been anxiously waiting for. Such a cheer went up that the Boers must have thought we had taken leave of our senses and gone mad. That night I had a supper of chocolate, biscuits and water. After my meal I slept soundly with the chocolate box forming part of my pillow.

17th February 1900. I finished my chocolate and felt satisfied with my day’s work. The empty tin now became an object of interest, so I carefully wrapped it up and placed it in my haversack. I carried it all the fighting my regiment was involved in until I had a chance to send it to England. I fear the box got a few knocks, but it still remains the Queen’s gift and much cherished.


**Item 2, ‘The Gift of the Colonies’ Chocolate Tin (S/COM/1914ia/2Aii/Bi/Ci/Dv/3NC),**

**Description**

In October 1914, the British Caribbean colonies of Trinidad, Grenada, and St. Lucia sent £40,820 worth of the region’s cocoa harvest to be processed in England into chocolate. According to the Bank of England’s Inflation Calculator this is equivalent
to just over £4.6 million today (Bank of England website, 2019:np). The chocolate was packed into a tin and ‘given to British and Empire troops serving on the Western Front over Christmas of that year’ (Mylearning.org 2014:4718). The tin was manufactured by Barringer, Wallis and Manners Ltd., Mansfield, England. Given the previous close relationship between Barringer, Wallis and Manners and Rowntree’s of York concerning the production of the Queen Victoria Gift issued to troops in South Africa during January 1900, it is probable that Rowntree’s processed the raw cocoa for the ‘Colonies’ gift. The tin is pressed steel with a hinged lid (Figure 6.5).

![Figure 6.5](image)

**Figure 6.5** The Gift of The Colonies chocolate tin (Author ©).

The lid has three seafaring scenes representing the three colonies of Trinidad, Grenada and Saint Lucia. Two blocks of text are under the pictures, the left side has ‘The Gift of the Colonies of Trinidad, Grenada & St. Lucia to His Majesty’s Naval & Military Forces’, the smaller right-side block has ‘This chocolate is made from cocoa grown in Trinidad, Grenada & St. Lucia’. The base of the tin has a stylised logo in the middle (Figure 6.6). All the enamel decorative printing is by printed transfer.

![Figure 6.6](image)

**Figure 6.6** Base of Gift of The Colonies tin showing art deco detailing with a hole punched above (Author ©).

Dimensions; Width – 98mm. Length – 300mm. Depth – 26.4mm. Lid; Plain
edges with pinned hinge. Weight empty – 162g. Weight with contents (modern chocolate bars) – 460g (1 pound). It was noted that the tin could hold 568g (1 pound 4 ounces) of chocolate if tightly packed, but it is more likely that the process would have used conventional chocolate and confectionary methods and kept the weight to 1 pound (460g). Unlike the PMGB this tin was produced solely to hold and transport the chocolate produced from the gifted cocoa. The thin steel base and lid do not create an effective seal. The example here shows excessive oxidation to the interior making it unsuitable for long term storage of ephemera or other fragile items.

Analysis

No original contents were present and there was no indication as to who received the ‘Gift of the Colonies’. The larger size of the tin makes it difficult to transport in anything as small as a uniform pocket, but could have fitted into a soldier’s pack, either the Small Pack or the Large Pack.

There is a small hole crudely drilled or punched through the back which indicates that at some time it was mounted for display. The rear transfer printing is scratched over the central graphic. As this tin does not lend itself easily to the role of storage device whilst in the field it is likely that those examples that survive have returned home with the soldier, possibly when on leave, after spending time at the bottom of his large pack.

Despite the similarities with Queen Victoria’s Chocolate Gift, it is unlikely that this tin would have been held in high esteem as there was no direct Royal connection. It may also have been the case that some soldiers would not even have known where in the world Trinidad, Grenada and St. Lucia were. However, the hole made in the back of the tin would seem to indicate that the object was, for at least sometime during its life, displayed in some manner. Certainly not with the reverence and care of the PMGBs found today neatly mounted in glass fronted cases, but somewhere humbler, perhaps a shed or workshop?

Saunders (2007:125) notes that one of these Gift tins from the Caribbean was found in an area of No Man’s Land on the Somme Battlefield by excavators in 2006. It must have been carried to this location by a soldier who received it in 1914, kept in
his pack until he met his fate in 1916 on the Somme.

**Item 3a, b and c, Cadbury Brothers Christmas Tin for Wounded Soldiers**

- **Item 3a, Square Tin (S/COM/1914ia/2Aii/Bi/Cia/Di/3NC)**
- **Item 3b, Round Tin (S/COM/1914ia/2Aii/Bi/Ciib/Diib3NC)**
- **Item 3c, Cardboard Box (S/COM/1914ia/2Aiii/Bii/Ciib/Diib/3FO)**

(Only 3a was available for physical analysis)

**Description**

Cadbury Brothers of Bourneville, Birmingham, one of the three chocolate manufacturers involved in Queen Victoria’s Gift, also produced comforts for soldiers during the First World War. The most notable was a small tin of 24 individually wrapped ‘Neapolitan’ chocolates sent to all British military hospitals, home and abroad, for issue to wounded soldiers and the nurses and doctors caring for them. 69,000 tins were issued in total, 33,000 of the square ‘King’ design (Figure 6.7), 17,000 round ‘Empire’ design tins (Figure 6.8) and a further 19,000 cardboard boxes (Figure 6.9) which were most likely given out to medical staff rather than patients.

![Figure 6.7 Square ‘King’ design Cadbury’s gift box (Author ©).](image)

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Figure 6.8 Round ‘Empire’ design and square ‘King’ design Cadbury tins (Photograph courtesy of Cadbury Archive/Mondelez International ©).

Figure 6.9 Cardboard Cadbury Box (Photograph courtesy of Deborah Hinde, SlimandSugar, Glastonbury, England ©).

A card was placed inside the lid each tin (Figure 6.10) inscribed with a banner surrounded by holly stating, ‘Xmas 1914’, the body of the text reads, ‘*With Hearty Christmas Greetings to the Wounded Soldiers and Sailors, and with best wishes for their speedy recovery. From Cadbury Bros. Ltd. Bournville*. ’
The cardboard box in Figure 6.9 was inscribed from a lady to her granddaughter (Hinde, B., Per's Com 2019) indicating possibly a nurse as the original recipient. The most likely manufacturer of the tins was the Carlisle firm of Hudson, Scott & Sons as they were responsible for making Cadbury’s share of Queen Victoria’s Gift of 1900. The manufacturer of the cardboard boxes remains unknown.

The tins are made from thin steel with enamelled printed designs on the lids. The square tin measures 86mm square by 42mm deep, the round tin has a diameter of 96mm and a depth of 42mm. The square tin has a raised dome section bearing an image of King George V placed within a square cartouche bordered with raised scrollwork. The four sides each have a raised rectangular scrollwork bordered section measuring 56mm by 19mm with an oval cartouche measuring 30mm by 22mm overlaying the middle. Each cartouche has a different painted display depicting seasonal floral decorations (Figure 6.11). Weight of the square ‘King’ tin is; empty – 72g; with contents (24 modern Neapolitan chocolates) – 247g.
Analysis

As with Item 2, ‘The Gift of the Colonies’ tin, it is difficult to envisage any purpose of these Cadbury tins beyond their intended use as holders of chocolates, but the meaning and emotion for the wounded soldiers would have been the gift of chocolate itself and the much appreciated ‘Hearty Christmas Greetings’ message during a painful and possibly life changing experience, rather than the tin itself. The slightly damaged picture of King George V in Figure 6.7 highlights the fact that the coloured decoration was less durable than the plain embossed design of the PMGB. It is probable that many of these tins were retained as souvenirs by the wounded soldiers and hospital staff, but their non-durable nature has greatly increased the financial value of these objects to militaria collectors.

A Cadbury Gift in a condition like Figure 7.7 is currently worth more than five empty un-attributed PMGBs in perfect condition thus aligning them with Thompson’s theory of Transient (value decreasing) to Rubbish (no value) to Durable (value increasing), (Thompson 2017:27). As with the cardboard box that the PMGBs were issued in, this tin, and others investigated here, could be regarded as merely carriers or holders of much more valuable contents. The contents are the gift and the tins, perhaps, mere rubbish. Thompson invites us to ‘step outside these limits and one sees that the boundary between rubbish and non-rubbish moves in response to social pressures’ (ibid 2017:28). This is certainly true for collectors of such objects today. Unsurprisingly very few of the cardboard boxes (Figure 6.9) survive.

Item 4, Queen Alexandra’s Christmas Cigarette Tin (S/COM/1914ia/2Aii/Bii/Cib/Di/3FO)

Description

Alexandra of Denmark (1844-1925), wife and Queen Consort of King Edward VII and mother to King George V, gave a gift tin containing 26 cigarettes to members of the Household Division at Christmas 1914. The Division was made up of seven regiments: Cavalry – Lifeguards, Blues and Royals; Infantry (Foot Guards) – Grenadier Guards, Coldstream Guards, Scots Guards, Irish Guards and the Welsh Guards.
A newspaper article from Tuesday 1 December 1914 (Daily Sketch, 1914:13) indicates the presence of other gifts for these regiments when Mr D M Probyn, Comptroller (Chief Financial Controller) to the Queen, thanks the newspaper for the donation of 4,000 knitted woollen articles for distribution to said regiments. The items were 1,000 each of mufflers, pairs of socks, body-belts and pairs of mittens and most likely, along with the cigarette tins, were distributed to the soldiers serving on the front line. The publication date of the letter and the time needed to get the woollen goods to the front would have probably meant that this distribution happened around Christmas Day 1914. The same article also identifies two other possible army regiments that benefited, Alexandra, Princess of Wales’s Own (Yorkshire Regiment) and 3rd (Queen Alexandra’s Own) Gurkha Rifles (ibid 1914:13). Queen Alexandra would have had a close relationship with the Household Division and the two other regiments that bear her name responsible for guarding the Sovereign and the Royal Palaces as well as ceremonial and escort duties. However, unlike ceremonial troops from other countries, the Household Division also represents the professional elite of the nation’s fighting army (Dunstan, 1995:3).

It is likely that Alexandra herself financed the tin of 26 cigarettes (Figure 6.12a). The cigarettes, in two layers of 13 separated by a paper sheet, were wrapped in waxed paper, and placed horizontally across the tin rather than vertically. Rather than being marked with Alexandra’s monogram, as with Mary’s ‘M’ monogram on the PMGB cigarettes, these bear her whole signature ‘Alexandra’ printed onto the paper (Figure 6.12b).

Figure 6.12a Cigarette tin given to soldiers of the Household Division by Queen Alexandra (Author ©).

Figure 6.12b Printed signature of Alexandra on each cigarette (Author ©).
Queen Alexandra’s tin is a simple mild steel box measuring 112mm high by 75mm wide and 18mm deep. The lid is hinged on the left side of the tin and is a simple folded construction. Alexandra’s image is printed on a card which is in turn stuck onto the lid. The image has a profile of Alexandra with ‘Xmas 1914’ printed in the top right corner and a banner with the phrase ‘With best wishes from Alexandra’ printed in a facsimile of the Queen’s handwriting. The interior shows a high degree of oxidation due to being made of mild steel with only thin gilding on the outside of the tin (Figure 6.13).

![Figure 6.13 Interior of Queen Alexandra’s Cigarette tin (Author ©).](image)

Analysis

It may be difficult to imagine this tin being regarded as anything other than a souvenir, but the esteem Alexandra had for her soldiers is evident and her relationship with those receiving the tin is perhaps not done justice by the vehicle used. She has given her christian name, not Queen Consort but simply ‘Alexandra’. This level of intimacy seems to have been part of her evidently generous and genuine personality. Towards the end of her life Alexandra had become socially isolated due to severe hearing loss caused by hereditary otosclerosis but, despite this disability she remained committed to the care and welfare of her subjects and, relevant to this research, soldiers during the First World War. An early example of this relationship was in 1908 when the Daily Telegraph newspaper published ‘Queen Alexandra’s Christmas Gift Book – Photographs from my Camera’. This album was as intensely personal as any family photograph album could be. The difference here was that it was a member of the Royal Family sharing the images with what
Alexandra probably considered as her wider ‘family’.

The materials and construction of the tin are inclined towards economy of production rather than any longer-term usage and the use of a stock tin that would both accommodate the printed photograph, and a quantity of cigarettes is evidence of this. The odd number of 26 cigarettes further supports a tin of convenience rather than design. A likely explanation for this use of a ‘stock’ tin was to do with the numbers required; all the soldier’s comforts so far investigated were produced in large quantities, the Cadbury tins in the tens of thousands and the PMGB in millions, but Queen Alexandra’s tin was only in the low thousands. The cost of a printed tin made to the correct size would have been very expensive for such a relatively low number of units and so a simple, pre-existing, and easily adapted solution was found. This tin was probably chosen as it was the nearest ‘fit’ for the desired purpose of holding the gift of cigarettes in a strong but cheap container that was already available to merely adapt by sticking a picture on the lid and filling it up. Figure 6.14 shows the hinge detail of Queen Alexandra’s tin compared to another tin, an un-branded one containing liquorice, from the period. The liquorice tin is 5mm larger but the same depth and design. This is an example of re-purposing rather than specific manufacture of a tin during wartime.

![Figure 6.14](image)

Figure 6.14 Queen Alexandra’s Tin compared to period Liquorice Tin (Author ©).

This apparent alternative use of an existing tin may have also been more to accommodate the image of Queen Alexandra rather than the contents. The image is strikingly like that of Princess Mary as it is a portrait format showing the head, arms and upper torso only with Alexandra facing away. A landscape format tin would have required the image to have a border to fill in the space. It is challenging
to see how it could even continue to hold cigarettes placed in it subsequently by the soldiers after the issue was smoked as the material used would soon oxidise and the image would soon detach. This tin was not made to last much beyond Christmas 1914 although Queen Alexandra was a popular member of the Royal Family so the tin may have been retained by some soldiers as a keepsake or souvenir of her patronage (evident by the survival of the example shown in Figure 6.12b), rather than having any other purpose for holding alternative items or memories.

Item 5, Rowntree’s Chocolate Tin (S/COM/1914ia/2Aii/Bi/Cib?dii3NC)
(An example of this tin was not available for analysis)

Description

The call for volunteers to join the army was enthusiastically answered by over a million men during the late summer and autumn of 1914, not least in the city of York. As well as the thousands from the city and the surrounding area, over 500 workers in the Rowntree’s chocolate factory volunteered to fight. To say ‘thank you’ to the men of York for their service, it was decided by the Lord Mayor of York, John Bowes-Morrell (1873-1963) and the Sheriff of York, Oscar Rowntree (1879-1947), to present every person from the city in military service a gift of chocolate. John Bowes-Morrell was a director of Rowntree’s and Oscar Rowntree was the youngest of Joseph Rowntree’s four sons, the company founder.

The gift was a rectangular mild steel tin with a hinged lid. The construction was simple with the edges of the lid being folded rather than roll edged to simplify production and keep costs down. The tin measures 155mm by 80mm and is 29mm deep. A transfer printed design with four flags from France, Belgium, the Union Jack and Irish St. Patricks Cross placed around a central scroll. The scroll contains the message to ‘all York men who were serving their King and Country’ and has the date ‘Christmas 1914’ below (Figure 6.15, courtesy of The Rowntree Society).
The full greeting on the lid is as follows:

‘The
Lord Mayor of York
John Bowes Morrell
And The Sheriff
Oscar F. Rowntree
Send best wishes for a
Happy Christmas and a bright New Year
to all York men who are serving
their King and Country
Christmas 1914’

The manufacturer of the tin would have been Barringer, Wallis & Manners of Mansfield. The Rowntree’s chocolate was wrapped in waxed paper.

Analysis

Although this gift was only ever intended as a gesture of support and goodwill to the fighting men of York from the Mayor’s office and Rowntree’s, it did receive a significant response from the soldiers in the form of letters, many of which are today in the York Museums Trust archives. Many are simple letters of thanks and gratitude, but some have come from soldiers who missed out on the gift, ‘What have I done wrong?’, was quoted by one such soldier.
Item 6, British Grocers Federation ‘Fighting Hero’s’ Sweet Tin (S/COM/1914ia /2Ai/Bi/Ciiib/Di/3NC)

Description

This is an example of a civic organisation, here a trade federation, sending a token of thanks and support to soldiers on the front lines over Christmas 1914. The British Grocers Federation, which no longer exists, represented the interests of greengrocers and general provisions merchants around the country. The organisation was active from the late nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century. The tin is a tall oval shaped container with a tightly fitting lid (Figure 6.16).

![Image of sweet tin](image)

**Figure 6.16** British Grocers Federation ‘Fighting Hero’s’ sweet tin 1914 (Author ©).

The lid presses into an oval opening on the top. The metal used is coated steel and the design showing King George V on the front and a message transfer printed on the back;

To our FIGHTING HERO’S with Best Wishes from BRITISH GROCER’S FEDERATION XMAS 1914

The tin is 122mm high, 97mm wide and 49mm deep, and can comfortably hold 227g (8 ounces) of modern, wrapped boiled sweets (sherbet lemons were used to test this). Individually wrapped toffees would have been the most likely contents as the recessed tightly fitting lid creates an effective moisture seal and would prevent
the confectionery from sticking together. The evidence for the contents being toffees comes from *Decorative Printed Tins* (Griffith, 1979:52) which contains a photograph of two toffee tins made by Barringer, Wallis & Manners of Mansfield that held ‘Coconut Crunch’ and ‘Vose’s Toffee’. Although these two tins are square in shape, they bear a striking resemblance to the British Grocer’s Federation tin with the same recessed lid and a pronounced lip around the base and top of the tins. A likely conclusion, given the other tins made by Barringer, Wallis & Manners at this time, is that they were probably also responsible for the manufacture of the ‘Fighting Hero’s’ tin. Griffith shows an example of Item 6 (S/COM) in *Decorative Painted Tins* (ibid:81) along with examples of Items 2 (S/COM) and 3 (S/COM) as well as a PMGB but unfortunately his description of the PMGB ‘contents’ is inaccurate.

As the British Grocer’s Federation no longer exists it has not been possible to establish how many of these sweet tins were produced.

Analysis

Although the recessed lid does create an effective seal it is unlikely that this tin could be put to any real practical use beyond its original purpose. The lid is very tight with only a 4mm gap between the edge of the recessed lid and the lip of the tin which does not allow any leverage if only using fingers to open the lid. A coin, knife or other slim metal object can be used to easily lever the lid off but will inevitably cause buckling damage to the mild steel lid which may adversely affect the seal. In common with many of the commercial comfort containers encountered so far, this tin was used for the original purpose of containing sweets, and if retained, was most likely only as a souvenir. The tin itself has become part of those memories of the soldier’s life as a stand-alone item with an identity as an individual object from the time rather than having a role as the holder of other memories.

Item 7, ‘Operation Christmas Box’ (formerly UK4U) ‘Square Stocking’ (2011), given to United Kingdom Armed Forces Personnel Serving Overseas or on Other Active Deployment at Christmas Time (S/COM/2004iiia/2Aii/Biili/Cia/Dv /3FO)
Description

In 2004 a group of British military officers organised a scheme to provide a Christmas gift to all British servicemen and servicewomen on overseas deployment. They cite the PMGB as being the inspiration for this gesture of support to the armed services. The gift has been issued to all unaccompanied members of the armed services posted overseas away from their families at Christmas every year since.

The first issue was around 19,000 boxes and has been in the low 20,000’s ever since, peaking at 24,000 in 2005. A charity ‘UK4U Thanks!’ was organised and registered with the Charity Commission in 2005. The organisation changed name to ‘Operation Christmas Box’ in 2017. Funding is provided by public donation and commercial sponsorship, with many companies donating actual gift items as well as financial support. There is no direct government funding although the charity has the full co-operation of the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

The gift contents are many and varied from Christmas hats to Starbucks® Coffee vouchers (Figure 6.17). The first container used in 2004 was a square cardboard box with a lid that had a snowman’s face on the front and ‘Let it Snow’ on the sides. This use of a square box with a multitude of small Christmas gifts, some reminiscent of very high-quality Christmas cracker gifts, led the item to be known as the ‘Square Stocking’, a term of endearment that has endured.

In 2005 the square cardboard box was replaced by a version of the standard British Army 24-hour Ration Pack, shown here next to a PMGB (Figure 6.18). The PMGB was used as the inspiration for this gift (Operation Christmas Box, 2018a:np). The metal container measuring 11cm by 18cm and 20cm high. The hinged lid has a recessed carrying handle and the sides of the box are embossed with the ‘UK4U Thanks!’ logo. A clasp held in place with a nylon ‘zip-tie’ holds the box closed until required but will not effectively close again until another method of fastening is used. Unlike the official 24-hour Ration Packs, this tin, having the charities logo on the side and being finished in a different ‘festive’ colour, could not even be recycled back to the original use of a 24-hour Ration Pack.
Analysis

Because of the on-going status of the charity ‘Operation Christmas Box’, there is a wealth of biographical data in the form of quotes from recipients of the gift. Many mention the massive boost to morale especially given that these gifts come from the public. It makes the service personnel feel less isolated from ordinary society, especially if they are serving in an area of conflict such as Afghanistan;

It’s morale in a box, and unlike the personal presents your family might send,
these are practical items and they’re well received. Last Christmas, it had a Rubik’s cube, a Santa hat – though there were a few restrictions on where you wore that hat – and a sewing kit that I’ve kept. When you open it, it gives you that feeling that you’re not forgotten out on operations, so it’s really nice to receive them. Santa’s been very busy on the frontline. Though in Helmand, he’s probably got an armoured sledge.

(Major Mark Scadden, BBC 2012).

Other comments include;

I have just opened my Christmas box that I received whilst deployed. I must say I was very impressed. There had clearly been a lot of thought given to the contents and I was most pleasantly surprised.

The parcels helped to brighten up the soldier’s day despite them all being away from their families at Christmas. As such, they provide a welcome link with home.

(Operation Christmas Box, 2018b:np).

Apart from some of the language and terminology used, such as ‘Rubik’s Cube’ and ‘deployed’, these words could just have easily been written over a hundred years ago by soldiers experiencing the same emotions and feelings. One significant contrast is that the Square Stocking is issued every year whereas the PMGB was only intended for those serving on Christmas Day 1914, controversial at the time but still resonates today.

Item 8, Rowntree’s Chocolate, Postcard and Cigarette Tin (C/COM/1915iiib/2Ali/Bi/Cib/Di/3PO)

Description

This is the only tin encountered during this research that shares with the PMGB another intended purpose beyond its original use of holding two bars of Rowntree’s Vanilla Chocolate. It was designed to be re-purposed for storing cigarettes and
there were six picture-postcards contained in a slide-out tray underneath the tin. Rowntree’s initially advertised the tin in 1915 as an ideal Christmas gift for family members and friends at home in Britain to buy for their soldier relative or friend serving overseas. It was later sold commercially in shops as a regular product with no specific recipients in mind throughout the remaining war years (Figure 6.19).

![Rowntree’s Chocolate, Postcard and Cigarette Tin 1915 (Author ©).](image)

**Figure 6.19** Rowntree’s Chocolate, Postcard and Cigarette Tin 1915 (Author ©).

The mild steel box measures 155mm by 79mm and has an overall depth of 31mm. The depth is given as overall because this object is more complex than a simple construction of sides, bottom and lid. The box has two distinct sections, one containing the bars of Rowntree’s Vanilla Chocolate wrapped in foil and waxed paper is reached from the top by a hinged lid, and the other, designed to hold the six picture-postcards, has a drawer-like section that slides out from the base to the right-hand side of the tin (Figure 6.20). Also, on the base, on the left-hand side of the tin, there is a section of ridges measuring 38mm by 19mm that have been made by pressure moulding. There are 28 ridges, each just over 1mm thick which serve as a striking plate for non-safety matches. This is the link to the intended future use of the tin.

Once the chocolate had been consumed the top section could be used to hold cigarettes and the tin has a striking plate built into the bottom for the purpose of lighting non-safety, ‘Lucifer’ matches. Given that the cigarettes could be refilled at any time and the metal construction of the striking plate is very robust, the life-expectancy of this object was potentially very long. The tin is metal litho decorated with an oval cartouche containing an image of King George V surrounded by six Royal Standards, three on each side, and the date ‘1915’ underneath the King. Later versions of this tin do not have any date. The background is reddish-brown in
colour and appears to represent leather. There is banding around all side panels of the tin in an 8mm wide floral pattern. There are no images, apart from a background litho printed ‘leather effect’, on the base.

Figure 6.20 Rowntree’s Tin showing slide-out base, Match Striker and Postcards (Author ©).

The sliding tray holds six thin postcards measuring 140mm by 72mm. Each has a small, 62mm by 32mm, scene showing landmarks from around the city of York (Figure 6.21). The pictures are simple in nature but are printed in vivid colours. The legend ‘York is the “Home” of Rowntree’s Elect Cocoa’ is to the top side of the coloured picture and each scene is labelled as in ‘Walmgate Bar, York, and ‘Petergate, York’. The larger section of the tin can easily accommodate 4 ounces (110g) of chocolate, giving an overall weight when full of 258g.

Figure 6.21 Closer detail of the six postcards (Author ©).
Analysis

This tin is the only example so far encountered that has a similar shape and general design purpose to the PMGB. Both have a purpose beyond the original holding of contents and ‘gift-giving’. The PMGB was designed to safely hold items of memory and family precious to the soldier whilst the Rowntree’s chocolate tin was to be used to hold cigarettes, this example had cigarettes in it when it was acquired in 2015 (Figure 6.22).

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 6.22** Interior of Rowntree’s Tin, chocolate missing, 17 cigarettes remain (Author ©).

This gives rise to the possibility of an interesting anthropological timeline by giving users of the tin the opportunity to carry out activities beyond just simply consuming the contents. This tin, the PMGB and the ‘Square Stocking’, are the only ones so far encountered that allow this multiple use where different sensorial dimensions can be experienced. These dimensions/stages are as follows;

Receiving the Gift Tin – Pleasure, surprise and even sadness and nostalgia if the gift has come from family far away from the soldier. This would have been especially poignant if the gift had come from the soldier’s children.

Eating the Chocolate – Sensorial dimension, the simple luxury of eating good-quality chocolate, a much-welcomed addition to army rations especially if consumed ‘up the front’. Another dimension may have been the bonds shared by comrades in arms and adversity if the soldier shared the chocolate with his ‘mates’.

Postcards – A potentially visceral link to home, with the soldier feeling obliged
to write but always trying to keep the brutal aspects of his experiences away from his loved ones. Letters were an important link between the soldier and the normality of his family and friends at home.

Cigarettes and sharing – When empty, the tin was designed to hold cigarettes for the soldier and give him a handy match striker into the bargain. The tin can easily accommodate fifty cigarettes, giving rise to another opportunity for sharing, this time a ‘fag’ rather than chocolate.

Memory Box – When the soldier had no further use for the tin as a cigarette store, maybe when he came home and reverted to more conventional pocket sized ‘fag’ packets, the tin may have provided a useful store for memory objects from his time in the army.

The relationship the Edwardian soldier had with the cigarette is perhaps underestimated by the current twenty-first century attitude toward the dangers of tobacco, but the real nature of ‘Tommy’ and his ‘fag’s’ needs to be understood. Cigarettes had gone from being regarded as effete into ‘an object which lay at the centre of an often brutal, aggressive and rigorously masculine ritualised language’ (Hilton, 2000:117). Weeks (2009:29) summarises the general feeling, especially by those soldiers in the trenches, in his introduction to his chapter on ‘Fags’;

Tommy relied more continuously on cigarettes than tea or rum because he could light up at any time – so long as he had a fag (or fag-end) and a match to light it. It was a craving like those for tea and rum; he couldn’t get enough of them. Cigarettes were a relief and solace for frayed nerves; you could puff away whilst waiting for the next bullet or shell. To be short of cigarettes was agony.

A striking plate is also found on other tins of the period. Figure 6.23 shows a 7 g (¼ ounce) Cadbury Bournville Cocoa sample tin. The re-purposing of this tin to hold matches is perhaps more to tie the tin to lighting the gas to boil a kettle to make the beverage than to light cigarettes.
The possible biographies of this tin are many and varied. The initial advertising by Rowntree’s suggesting that it would make an ideal gift from home for a soldier serving overseas was gradually replaced by it being offered as an item for general, even non-military, consumption. This tin may never have been given to a soldier at all. Does this make the tin unfit for inclusion in this chapter? The answer is no, regardless of the biography of this individual tin, there was a clearly intended purpose for it, or others identical to it, to be sent, initially at least, to a soldier as a gift from a loved one.

Concluding Comments

Although this chapter deals only with a sample of ‘comforts’ produced during the First World War for the benefit of serving soldiers, they represent enough of a cross-section to give several observations and conclusions to analyse. It is quite apparent that the items within the S/COM category, apart from the ‘Square Stocking’ (Item 7), were only intended to be given as comforts at Christmas 1914. There were no repeats of these specific ‘comforts’ being given in the same format on any subsequent Christmas’s during the war. This shares a direct comparison with the PMGB which also was only ever intended for persons ‘wearing the King’s uniform on Christmas Day 1914’. The Rowntree Chocolate, Cigarette and Postcard Tin (item 8, C/COM) was produced to be sold to the public, albeit initially for them to send to serving soldiers, but also to keep for themselves. These two categories have the benefit to the soldier at the heart of the existence of the ‘comforts’. The tins made
nice souvenirs but, for the most part, were never intended to be more than sturdy conveyors of their contents and it is by chance that they survive to this day.

Apart from Queen Victoria, Queen Alexandra and King George V, the only other ‘human’ depictions on these tins are the representation of Britannia (Figure 6.8) and a ‘Town Cryer’ (Figure 6.9). Most notably missing are figures from the military establishment or hierarchy of the period. No Generals, Field Marshalls or Admirals are on any of these tins being analysed. This may have been to prevent the tins appearing too partisan by having the images of Kitchener, French, Jellicoe and Beatty - Admirals Jellicoe and Beatty would not generate any loyalty or affection from a soldier in the trenches nor would Kitchener and French do the same for a serving sailor. It was also the case that the ordinary serving soldier or sailor would probably have never seen these exalted figures of authority, let alone have any direct dealings with them. The Royal figures, although from a vastly superior class to the average soldier or sailor, are much more acceptable. This may be because even with the social divide, the ordinary people are ‘their’ subjects and perhaps as such, certainly with the gift-giving of these comforts, this convention of a divide is meaningless.

There may also be another more visceral reasoning behind the choice of image. The senior officers were responsible for giving orders that could lead to battle casualties and so may not be received by some as appropriate decoration for a tin of cigarettes or chocolate being sent as a gift from home at Christmas.

The only tin so far encountered that has the same sense of innocence as the PMGB with its image of a seventeen-year-old Princess Mary, is the cardboard box from Cadbury’s (Item 3c) that has a festive Town Cryer on the lid. This innocence is more powerful than the surrounding military heraldry and names of the allies on the PMGB. Every other tin in this chapter has either a Royal dressed in military uniform or some form of military or patriotic heraldry. Even the ‘Square Stocking’ depicts militaristic imagery with the stylised embossed globe being reminiscent of the Royal Marines cap badge or the distinctive segmented structure of a No.5 Mk.1 Mills Bomb (hand-grenade). Not the most subtle of Christmas images.

Regardless of the ‘innocent’ branding and packaging of these items, and others encountered during this research, the fact cannot be ignored that these
objects were part of the very fabric of the First World War. Even those items that never left these shores were still immersed in the iconography of the conflict. Jones (2007:20) notes that Alfred Gell is ‘concerned with the temporal position of artworks in networks of casual relations’ (Gell, 1998:233-42). Gell’s description of ‘material objects as indexes of human agency and intentionality’ (ibid) has led Jones (2007:21) to emphasise these artwork index events ‘provides one example of the way in which material culture might be considered to index past actions; objects are physical traces of past action’.

Dant (1999:197) notes that ‘we come across objects as neophytes, discovering strange objects within the midst of our contemporary culture’. Many of the items analysed in this chapter do not appear to have biographies that extend beyond their initial use around the first two years of the war (modern conflict for Item 7) but are still physical embodiments of that very focused time in our history.
Introduction

This chapter investigates the two other categories of CRMBs that are contemporary or associated with the First World War by use or commemorative design. These tins, produced for personal or commercial gain, reflect the changing public taste and level of patriotism as the war progressed. The examples used are a representative cross-section from the period 1914-2014 collected by the author between 2008-2019.

The two categories in this Chapter are;

3/(PT) Patriotic Tins. As with Commercial Comforts, some tins were simply a re-branding and re-packaging of everyday items, but with nationalistic or patriotic themed labelling, indicative of the casual militarisation of society. Because of their size and shape, these were not intended for soldiers in the field, but can be a repository of memory. The patriotic tea tin containing period photographs or the wartime tobacco tin that now contains war service medals may have interesting cultural biographies for research. Size is important in a PT biography, too large and it may have been used as a static object rather than one carried by a soldier. There may be examples of smaller or medium sized Patriotic Tins that, by the nature of their intended use, remained with the soldier more as a convenience than a gift. Examples here would include cocoa and tea tins. This category includes tins produced after the war and some more recently, reflecting both a desire to celebrate peace and remember the fallen or by having a ‘borrowed’ military biography. The fake ‘1914’ Tin is included because its colourful and difficult biography is relevant to the overall story of the PMGB.

4/(ORD) Ordinary Tins. These are tins designed for other uses which have been appropriated, deliberately or coincidentally, into a biography directly
linked to a soldier’s life during the war. They may have never even been in
the possession of a soldier or his immediate family but their proximity to this
time in history makes them susceptible for use either by co-incidence or
accident and so are valid inclusions. The size of the tin will be relevant to how
the tin’s biography developed. As with C/COM and PT, the more portable, the
more likely they would have been used to hold small intimate, personal
memories or war memory objects.

Sub-categories are the same as used in Chapter 6.

Packaging

Packaging of one type or another has been encountered throughout this research
and its impact on the themes of material culture being analysed is presented in this
chapter.

Item 9, Huntley & Palmers ‘Sentry Box’ Biscuit Tin (P/T1913iii/2Aii/Bi/Cia/
Dii/3NC)

Description

Designed and manufactured from 1909 (Corey, 1972:175) for Huntley and Palmer’s
of Reading by Huntley, Boone and Stevens, also of Reading, this biscuit tin
represents a tall, square military sentry box with a square pyramid shaped hinged lid.
Embossed from behind to give a simple relief effect for four ‘soldier sentries’, each in
a military uniform of Great Britain, France, Russia and Germany. First produced in
1910 but adapted in 1913 to reflect the growing animosity towards Germany with the
German soldier being replaced by a Belgian (Figure 7.1). Some examples have
been found with the German soldier defaced rather than being replaced (ibid:174).
Production stopped in 1914 because the tin was costly to produce.

Dimensions; Width/Depth – 66.3mm. Height – 130mm – 175.6mm to top of lid.

Lid (Figure 7.2); Recessed into body by 8.2mm with 2.8mm lip around top of lid base. Simple folded hinge with rolled edge to main body of tin.

Analysis

This tin has an intriguing biography as it subtly begins a process of, not only militarising the ordinary, in this case biscuits, but also normalising the growing animosity towards Germany in the eyes of the British public, at least those who consumed Huntley and Palmer’s biscuits. The replacement of the German soldier by Huntley’s in 1913 with a Belgian soldier is significant, given that Great Britain
ostensibly went to war with Germany over the invasion of Belgium and very quickly ‘Poor Little Belgium’ and ‘Valliant Belgium’ became rallying cries for action against Germany. The images below (Figure 7.3) show two postcards from 1915. The ‘Vaillant Belge-Merci (Valliant Belgium-thank you)’ is a commercially produced French postcard depicting a French soldier thanking a Belgian soldier. It was sent from France via a British army field post office on 4 May 1915. The other, a homemade card wishing ‘A Hearty Greeting – A prosperous New Year and Happy Birthday’ was produced by Miss Eva Wicks of 140 Curzon Street, Leicester and is titled ‘Brave Little Belgium’.

![Figure 7.3 Postcards depicting ‘Valiant Belgium’ and ‘Brave Little Belgium’ (Author ©).](image)

Huntley and Palmer’s produced biscuits for the army during the war. Some were packed into large tins, but others were sent to the front in pulped cardboard cylinders (Figure 7.4). These containers for the Huntley & Palmer ‘Superior’ army biscuit generally did not survive long after delivery as they easily absorbed water. They did however have a use as fuel in trench braziers. The company also made ‘hard-tac’ whole wheat flour Army biscuits. Corley (1972:186) notes; ‘The ex-serviceman who said that his least happy memories of the Great War were the trenches, the mud and Huntley and Palmers’ No. 4 biscuit’. Commonly referred to as ‘dog biscuits’, they were so hard that they were a danger to soldiers’ teeth (Weeks, 2009:17). Das (2014:np) notes that the experience of soldiers on the Western Front was ‘one of the most sustained onslaughts on the human sensorium’ and quotes a letter from William Beach-Thomas (1868-1957) where ‘everything visible or audible or tangible to the sense – to touch, smell and perception – is ugly beyond imagination’ (ibid).
Corley (1972:186) notes that as a company owned and run by Quakers, Huntley, Boone and Stevens were unwilling to make artillery shells for the war effort but became the first company to manufacture the Brodie shrapnel helmet in 1915. Huntley and Palmer’s did, however, make around 60,000 artillery shells during the war (ibid:186). This situation faced many Quaker-owned industries that were struggling with the moral dilemma of their faith verses the survival of the country, not to mention their commercial and financial survival against non-Quaker rivals.

**Item 10, Round Collar Stud/Trinket Box, General Sir John French, Electroplated Nickel Silver (EPNS) (P/T/1914ia/2Av/Biv/Ciia/Dii/3PO)**

Description

This metal cylinder is electroplated with nickelled silver. ‘EPNS’ (Electro Plated Nickelled Silver) is stamped into the base but there is no makers mark. Diameter is 54mm and is 25mm high at the edge of the lid rising to 31mm at the centre (Figure 7.5). The 6mm collar around the lip of the close-fitting lid holds a circular image printed on celluloid in place (Figure 7.6).

**Figure 7.4 Cardboard tube for Huntley & Palmer ‘Superior’ army biscuits (Author ©).**
Analysis

Although officers’ shirts issued and privately purchased in the British army during the First World War were made of soft cotton with attached, fold down collars, many civilian men still used shirts with stiff, detachable collars. These detachable collars were fitted to the shirt by two studs, one at the middle of the back of the neck and the other at the throat. ‘White Collar’ workers would have included all but the most menial and manual workers in society, from humble clerks to bank managers, politicians and members of the aristocracy. All would have needed somewhere to store their collar studs. This object is an ordinary everyday container that reflects the sense of patriotism that was influencing the decorative styles of many containers of the time, with other examples bearing images of Lord Kitchener, and Admirals ‘Jackie’ Fisher, Jellicoe and Beatty. It is possible to date this example to around 1914-1915, rather than later, as the changing fortunes and popularity of Sir John French changed significantly at the end of 1915.

These boxes were common during the Victorian/Edwardian period and the
patriotic theme here was perhaps a reaction to the war. Such activity appears common amongst other ‘patriotic’ tins where an every-day object, boot-polish tin, toothpaste tube, tea caddy or, as here, stud box, has been effectively hijacked to enforce or strengthen patriotic belief and acceptance in the pursuance of the war. Also, the subject of such an item, existing in what Hamlett (2010:1620) describes as ‘male space’, would naturally have a masculine theme. To highlight this, an identical box with a different image in the lid has been identified online. A ‘Scarce c1900 Vintage H.M.S. Britannia (sic) Dartmouth Souvenir Celluloid Stud Box’ (theminetedon, 2018:np) depicts an image of H.M.S. Britannia (built 1820). Identical to Item 10, the EPNS is stamped in the same position on the base, but also a makers mark of ‘S&Co’. John Walter Spurrier and Company registered sterling silver hallmarks in Birmingham, London and Chester between 1886 and 1911 (Giorgio, 2004:np) and had showrooms in Birmingham at 13 George Street, and in 1914, London at 15 Wool Exchange, Basinghall Street (ibid). Another box with a male identity for a male purpose, holding shirt studs.

Item 11, Halton’s Toffee Tin, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe

Description

Halton’s were a small company renowned for making good quality toffee and Edinburgh Rock at a factory in Uddingston, seven miles southeast of Glasgow, Scotland. This confectionary tin measures 137mm by 102mm and is 48mm deep. The construction is a simple rolled and pressed rectangular mild steel box with a plain, slightly domed edged, close fitting hinged lid (Figure 7.7).

Figure 7.7 Halton’s Toffee Tin, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe (Author ©).
The front and rear sides have ‘Halton’s Toffee’ within a rectangular gold rope border with leaves at either end of the border. The two side panels are gold wreaths. The main painted design on the lid is an image of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe (1859-1935) who commanded the Grand Fleet at the battle of Jutland in 1916. Jellicoe’s portrait is surrounded by a laurel wreath. The oval portrait has a rectangular union flag behind it. The flag has a background of textured cloth, representing movement of the material. Apart from some oxidation to the unpainted base and interior surfaces, this example is in a very good condition with very little damage to the decoration. Tins of a similar physical design have been found decorated with different patriotic figures such as Lord Kitchener and Sir John French.

Analysis

This is another example of a manufacturer plugging into the public fashion and taste for popular military and political figures of the time, the use of Jellicoe probably dates the object to between 1915, when Jellicoe took over from Fisher and Churchill after the disaster at Gallipoli, and 1916 when he commanded the Grand Fleet at Jutland. It is difficult to accept that Halton’s needed patriotic decorations as a strategy to boost their profits by selling more toffee to the public. Their confectionary already had a reputation for very high quality and did not need such gimmicks. Public support for the war effort was increasing and such patriotic images were becoming the norm. The Halton’s Toffee Tin is the closest in dimensions to the PMGB. Although it is 1cm wider it can still easily fit in a British 1902 pattern tunic pocket. This example has the delicate decoration in such good, undamaged condition it has most likely been kept as a souvenir for over a century and had no other use other than a collectable object.

Item 12, Ridgeway Tea Tin/Caddy 1/2lb (226.7g), King George V, Jellicoe, French, Nurse and Boy Scout (P/T/1914iiiAii/Bi/Cib/Di/ii/3NC)

Purchased by the author in December 2018, the example being analysed here has a hitherto unknown object biography that it shares with many of the PMGBs encountered throughout this research. What makes this specific example stand out
is where it has been for the last 104 years. It was found, supposedly in an attic or celler, in the French town of Arras. The seller on the internet auction site eBay describes it as having been in the British cantonment area for over 90 years (Heusaiibus/ebay.co.fr, 2018:np).

The British front line passed close to Arras and for most of the war the underground cellars, known locally as ‘Boves’, were used extensively by the Allied forces as shelter, living space, storage and medical stations (greatwar.co.uk/Legg, 1998:np). The caddy may have been either brought out to France by a British soldier or sent out from home. He then went on to serve in one of these semi-permanent positions beneath Arras or perhaps he was billeted in an attic or cellar somewhere else in the city and his tea caddy has remained, either deliberately discarded or accidentally lost, in this location until recently when it was acquired by the antique dealer. It was most likely ‘there’ during the war, fulfilling the needs of the soldier, or even officer or perhaps nurse, the most basic of British requirements, tea.

Friday, 16 June 1916. Arras. Our billet for this job was E Works – a kind of strong point in the line midway between the cooks’ place and the front line. I did not get away ‘till 4am and had to get to Roclincourt where [sic], in a cellar of a house, the cooks boiled tea.

Ration carrying has its points. We arrived at the cook’s place at 5.30am along disused trenches and started by having a hot cup of tea ourselves; always a factor and very acceptable after being out all night. We loaded up and started back for the front line, every two men carrying a dixie of tea, about ten gallons between them.

(Drinkwater, 2014:103).

The provenance of this tin is not beyond doubt but there is compelling evidence for it having gone to Arras during the war and remaining there until coming back to Britain in 2018. A translation from the French description on eBay describes the tin as having been found in an attic in a British cantonment area (Heusaiibus, 2018). The tin was advertised under the heading of collections/militaria/accessories/spare-parts/1st world war. Had the dealer been attempting to get a higher auction price he would have placed the item within a more prestigious
category other than ‘spare-parts’. A counterargument against the possibility of the tin being brought out from Britain and ‘planted’ in Arras to get a higher price is substantiated by the actual selling price of €30.50 (£26.02) which hardly seems worth the effort.

Description

This tea caddy tin by Ridgeway of London has a capacity of half a pound (226.7g) of loose-leaf tea and measures 100mm by 81mm by 104mm high (Figure 7.8). The metal litho depictions of King George V, Admiral Jellicoe and Sir John French are present as with the larger caddy, but there are also panels on the sides of the tin depicting nurses and Boy Scouts. The lid has the picture of the King whereas the larger caddy has a plain lid.

Figure 7.8 Ridgeway Tea Tin/Caddy 1/2lb (226.7g) (Author ©).

Analysis

By including an image of Sir John French this would most likely date to 1914 or early 1915. This tin would have been in the parlours and kitchens of many houses in Great Britain of the time, an everyday item typical of the period. It was perhaps purchased as a one-off gesture of patriotism and then refilled again and again with loose-leaf tea until the owner decided to purchase a new tin, either because it was becoming worn, or they wished to replace it with one that had the latest ‘celebrity’ image on it.

What makes this specific example stand out here is that it has not had such a hum-drum domestic existence on the home front but one on the front line at Arras, taken by or sent out to a British soldier.
Description

In 2014 Fortnum and Mason produced a version of the PMGB to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Named ‘Tommy’s Tin’ (Figure 7.9), it was designed with the full co-operation and assistance of the Harewood House Estate, Princess Mary’s matrimonial home, and a donation was made to the Enham Trust®, a charity originally established for the care of disabled ex-servicemen, for each tin sold in store. The retail price of the tin was £20.00.

The tin is made of pressed steel with a hinged embossed lid. It measures 13.5cm by 7.5cm and is 3cm tall. The inner lip of the tin is rolled as are three edges of the lid. The embossed decoration is very similar in character to the PMGB with a stylised Grecian female bust in the centre surrounded by a vine leaf wreath and the word ‘Army’ above. The initial ‘F’ and ‘M’ are either side of the bust in the same position as the ‘M’'s on the PMGB. A cartouche above the bust has crossed swords above the helmet of King Richard 1. The badge of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force are within two sections of the decorative band that runs around the four edges of the lid. The cartouche below the bust has ‘Tommy’s Tin 1914-2014’ within it. The four sections that, on the PMGB bear the names of allies, are blank. The contents are two 25g blocks of foil wrapped Fortnum and Masons chocolate in a paper sleeve. There is a pack of playing cards bearing the same Grecian head bust as the tin lid. The King, Queen and Jack cards use illustrations of King George V, Queen Mary and Edward, Prince of Wales. The Ace card has a bulldog wearing a bowler hat.
There is also a folded card, ‘Fortnum’s at War’ explaining the idea behind the tin.

Analysis

Fortnum and Mason trade from a shop at 181 Piccadilly, London and have a high reputation for their luxurious and expensive gifts. They have not been, however, without a social conscience. When their shop windows were smashed in 1911 by members of the Suffragette Movement, they sent food hampers to the women imprisoned for the crime (fortnumandmason.com, 2019:np). The company website notes that during the war:

‘1914. Officers of the British Expeditionary Force in Northern France were kept going by Fortnum’s hampers.’
‘Furthermore: All staff serving in France and Flanders were guaranteed to have kept their jobs on their return, which a surprising number managed, in the meantime the women of London kept things buzzing along brilliantly. Fortnum’s supplied our soldiers with hampers full of the usual quantity of tuck, where we soon learned that only metal tins were any use against the ever-present gourmet rats.’ (Ibid, 2019:np).

There is not much of a cultural biography associated with this item. It was designed as a commemorative piece to nod respectfully towards the aims of the original PMGB. Such commercial activities around the centenary of the start of the war have received criticism for being nothing more than money-making exercises rather than respectful, commemorative gestures. The choice of the Enham Trust as beneficiary has a direct link to the war and the Royal family, the charity catered for the needs of wounded ex-servicemen and in 1919 received a donation from King George V of £100,000, a considerable sum of money at the time.

The items in the tin are also reminiscent of the comforts from the PMGB, being centred around the simple pleasures of chocolate and playing cards (smoking and cigarettes now socially unacceptable) and both could have the ‘2J’ classification of PMGB accompaniments.

An intriguing chapter of this objects possible biography is as an example of simulacrum when compared to the PMGB. It is roughly the same size, shape,
design and has similar imagery. Comparing these two similar styles in the same way Gell (1998:162) describes synecdochic relationships with artistic style, this object and the PMGB are connected. Given that only a limited number were made in 2014, this object may well become a rare and valuable ‘First World War’ related collectible in years to come. Examples are now to be found on eBay for around £50, so the journey towards collectible simulacra has begun.

**Item 14, PMGB ‘Daily Mail’ Newspaper Replica (P/T/2014i/2Aii/Biv/Cia/Di/3NC)**

**Description**

On 11 July 2014, the *Daily Mail* newspaper launched a campaign offering readers a ‘free’ replica of PMGB and a ‘King’s Shilling’ coin (Figure 7.10). The two items could be redeemed in return for a quantity of vouchers cut out of the newspaper over several weeks. This was a calculated financial approach by the newspaper, as someone wanting these ‘free’ gifts would have to purchase a considerable number of copies of the newspaper to accumulate enough tokens to be eligible to claim them. The coin and replica PMGB were to be collected from branches of the stationer W. H. Smith.

*Figure 7.10 PMGB ‘Daily Mail’ Replica (Author ©).*

The box is made from steel and measures 82mm by 122mm and is 30mm deep. The rolled and pinned hinged lid is like the original PMGB but has the rolled tubes enclosed under the lip of the lid rather than the original that has them exposed. The inner raised lip of the lid, whilst bearing a passing resemblance to the original, has a squared off profile rather than a round one (Figure 7.11). This is because on the original brass box the raised rounded profile inner lip acted as a seal, but the steel of the replica does not perform the same function. The embossing on the lid is
not as well defined or detailed as the original and the profile head of the Princess is so poor that it looks like a completely different person. Weight when empty is 81g compared to the original PMGB which is 127g. The ‘King’s Shilling’ coin is presented in a plastic case and represents the coin given to new recruits into the British Army to signify their willingness to serve the King.

Figure 7.11 Interior detail showing differences between Daily Mail Replica and original PMGB (Author ©).

Analysis

The *Daily Mail*’s offering was controversial from the outset with the paper’s editorial of 14 July having many inaccuracies. The first concerning the ‘King’s Shilling’ which had ceased functioning in the British Army in 1879 (dailymail.co.uk/Hardman, 2014:np) and became a term simply indicating Army membership. Posted comments at the end of the on-line version of the article did indicate some regiments reviving the tradition at different times but it never became overall policy in the army again (ibid). The second photograph in the editorial is of an original PMGB with card, cigarettes and tobacco that has the Gift being from Queen Mary rather than Princess Mary (ibid), a common mistake in the story of the PMGB.

After the initial newspaper campaign, the replica tins started to become commercially available on the internet and can still be purchased on eBay from as little as £3.75 (based on a lot of 36 for £135.00) to £7.50 (based on a lot of 2 for £15.00). The ‘King’s Shilling’ is also still available commercially rather than free but at a proportionally lower price of between £1.99 and £5.99. Unlike the Fortnum’s tin, which does not pretend to be simulacra but rather a respectful homage to the original PMGB and supported a charity through sales, the *Daily Mail* replica is little more than
a pastiche that seems to have minimal intrinsic or monetary value. Despite being a copy of the PMGB, it is still classified here as a Patriotic Tin (P/T) because its purpose is merely as simulacra and not a gift for soldiers at Christmas. The Daily Mail had missed an ideal opportunity for meaningful interpretation and presentation around an important part of the culture of the First World War. With a little research the newspaper could have created a cardboard box for the reproduction PMGB, rather than an unadorned plastic bag, and even included some reproduction accompaniments to give a flavour of what the soldiers experienced when opening their gifts a century before.

**Item 15, ‘1914’ Tin (P/T/1918[?]ia/Av/Biiii/Ciia/Div/3NC)**

The only object believed to have been a direct attempt to copy or ‘fake’ the PMGB was the ‘1914’ Tin (Figure 7.12). The origins of this object are mysterious with little credible academic or even referenceable research. Conversations on the Great War Forum website during 2010 have presented some possible explanations as to the origin of this object. Using these ‘threads’, it has been possible to identify some pieces of the puzzle that support a credible biography for the ‘1914’ tin. The ‘1914’ tin has been assigned many identities over the years, mostly to enhance the monetary value of this ‘rare’ item and, as with other elements of the material culture surrounding the PMGB, has caused these fanciful stories to morph into fact.
Description

The construction is of Electro Plated Nickel Silver (EPNS) over a base metal. The lid has no hinge and is a loose fit (Figure 7.13). Base dimensions are 13cm by 8.6cm and 2.6cm deep. The lid is 13.8cm by 9.3cm and the edge, which appears soldered to the flat lid, is 12mm deep, larger than the PMGB (Figure 7.14). The weight when empty is 217g, heavier than the 125g of the PMGB.

Figure 7.13 Inside ‘1914’ Tin (Author ©).

Figure 7.14 ‘1914’ Tin compared with a PMGB (Author ©).

Determining the manufacturer of the tin is difficult as the range of EPNS makers marks were not as structured and regulated as those producing in gold, silver and silver plate. One of the marks on the tin (Figure 7.15) resembling a fish is present on several manufacturers based in Sheffield but, as Georgio B concludes (www.silvercollection.it, 2004:np), these are pseudo hallmarks.
Analysis

Two of the more colourful, but entirely false, identities encountered are the ‘Irish Tin\textsuperscript{57}, where because of issues around Irish independence and nationalist feelings, the British Royal imagery was removed for Irish soldiers serving in the British army and the ‘Officer’s Tin\textsuperscript{58}, where a special version of the PMGB was made for officers. The idea that these two identities represent substitution, simulacra or even replacement is an inaccurate view of their role as a ‘PMGB’. One possible motivation for their production, from some of the more academically minded military historians, leads towards a copy being produced just after the end of the war as a commemorative piece that was offered for sale to the public. At first the ‘copy’ was an accurate representation of the original but soon gathered criticism and very strong opposition from the highest authority in the land, King George V himself (Greatwarforum/4thGordons.org, 2010:np). The early versions had a relief of the King instead of Princess Mary, but the King objected to any royal figure, or even royal symbolism, being used for this purpose and threatened ‘dire consequences’ if the manufacturers did not desist. The subsequent version had the symbols around the edge of the lid simplified and the figurehead was replaced with ‘1914’.

The examples cited so far are made from brass with one being silver plated and bearing a ‘Royal Sheffield’ maker’ mark (ibid). This confirms that these objects were post-war as the production of a ‘fake’ box using a vital munitions material, brass, would never have been tolerated by the authorities during the war.

The Faking of a Fake

An intriguing trajectory for this objects’ biography was encountered during this

![Figure 7.15 Pseudo Hallmarks on ‘1914’ Tin (Author ©).](image)
The ‘1914’ tin is increasingly difficult to find on the open market, probably because collectors are realising the true purpose and status as a copy without any credible military connection, but the author acquired one in March 2020 on eBay. On reflection there were some anomalies with the object’s description.

It was listed as ‘new’, ignored at the time as being a simple mistake with the listing, however the asking price of £14.99 was very unusual for a collectible object. Objects with age are generally auctioned to maximise gain or given rounded-up values, £15 or £25. The tin arrived packed in a tight-fitting cardboard box specifically made for it. The barcoded label on the box stated, ‘1 Pc [Piece] 14497’ and this was duplicated on a label stuck to the base of the tin itself (figure 7.16).

![Figure 7.16 Modern version of ‘1914’ Tin (Author ©).](image)

The base is the same size as the original ‘1914’ Tin but the lid is smaller, 13.4cm by 8.9cm, and the colour, dark grey, appears to have either been dipped or powder coated. It is considerably heavier at 299g (Figure 7.17). It was made in India by Bhag Singh & Sons of Samrala, Punjab.

![Figure 7.17 1920’s and Modern ‘1914’ Tins (Author ©).](image)

This version of the ‘1914’ Tin is of modern manufacture and presents us with the intriguing situation of it being a fake of a fake. The status of this object has also changed. It is no longer just an unauthorised, poor-quality replica designed for the fringe market but has become a legitimate ‘copy’ of an object that, regardless of
‘authenticity’, has become part of the overall story of the PMGB, or perhaps an ‘authentic reproduction’ (Belk, 1995:112).

**Items 16, Rowntree’s ‘Elect’ Cocoa Tin (ORD/1915iiia/2Aii/Bii/Ciiia/Dv/3NC)**

This tin is an identical example of one originally held in the Rowntree Society’s Archive in York that had saved the life of a soldier by stopping a German bullet. This tin started off with a non-military related purpose but gained a conflict biography by its presence at a specific point in time, in this case, a soldier’s pack.

Sergeant T. J. Williams, a native of York and former worker in Rowntree’s factory, wrote to the factory management about an incident that had happened to him whilst serving on the front line;

‘Elect Cocoa Saves a Soldier’s Life’

I am writing these few lines just to inform you what good service one of your tins of cocoa did for me. I was present at the battle of St. Julien, and no doubt you read an account of the same - a very warm corner, I can assure you. Well, I had, two days previous to this engagement, receive from home a 1-lb. tin of your Rowntree’s Cocoa, as I always found it to be very strengthening, and I have made a good drink whilst in the trenches. Well, however, I placed this fresh tin in what we call the emergency rations bag, along with a tin of tea and sugar, etc. Now I will tell you what happened. We were advancing across an open field under very heavy fire, and now and again dropping flat on the ground. Well, I had just got down when a bullet entered my valise or pack as the boys call it. The next man to me said, “Are you hit, Sergeant?” I said, “No” However, we had no time to think about this at the time; as long as I wasn’t hit all was right, but imagine the surprise I got the next day when I looked into my ration bag. First of all I found the bullet had gone through the tin containing the tea and sugar, then I noticed the tin of Rowntree’s was penetrated on one side and not on the other. “What luck!” The bullet had lodged in the cocoa, thereby saving my life. If it had gone through the tin of Rowntree’s it would have penetrated my back. So I consider myself lucky, and I shall always keep the tin
and the bullet, and if you care to have a look at the same I would be only too please [sic] to send it along, on condition you sent it back to me. It speaks well as to the strength of the tin, but more so for the strength of the cocoa. ‘Ha! Ha!’

Extract from letter from Sgt. T.J. Williams, 5th King’s Own Royal Lancaster Regiment. (Rowntree Society, 2015:np).

The letter was reproduced in the ‘1914: When the World Changed Forever’ museum exhibition opened in York Castle Museum in 2014 although in an edited version (Darley/youtube.com, 2014:np). The original letter and a photograph were printed in the Cocoa Works Magazine (Autumn, 1915:p 1775) and reproduced by Chrystal and Dickinson (2012:109) and is reproduced here (Figure 7.18).

Description

Rowntree’s of York first developed their ‘Elect’ brand cocoa drink in 1887. From the beginning, the teetotal Quaker chocolate manufacturers, including Cadbury and Fry’s, promoted chocolate drinks as an alternative to alcohol for the working man.

Figure 7.18 Sgt. Williams’s ‘Elect’ Cocoa Tin (Chrystal and Dickinson, 2012:109).
‘Elect’ cocoa was marketed as ‘More than a drink, a food’, and stayed in production until the end of the Second World War. The tins came in many sizes, each containing a specific weight of cocoa powder from a sample tin with a $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce packet (7g), enough for one mug of cocoa, through to larger containers designed for catering on a commercial scale. The tin here is holds 453.6 g (1 pound) of cocoa powder and is the same size as Sergeant Williams’s tin (Figure 7.19).

Dimensions of the 453.6g tin are 97mm by 57mm and 170mm high. The construction is pressed and seamed mild steel with a simple close-fitting lid. The lid is embossed ‘A FOOD AS WELL AS A DRINK’ and the base is embossed with a stylised ‘ROWN TREE’ emblem in the shape of a tree. The paper label is missing on this example but would have given information as to how to use the product, including how to make a chocolate drink using ‘Elect’ cocoa powder, sugar to taste and boiling water. This is relevant for the biographical analysis of this tin in relation to the use by soldiers on the front line. The tin was intended to be discarded after the contents had been used.

**Figure 7.19** Rowntree’s ‘Elect’ 1 lb (453.6g) Cocoa Tin (Author ©).

Analysis

Although he makes light of it in his letter, this incident where an ‘Elect’ cocoa tin saved his life must have had a profound and lasting effect on Sergeant Williams. Enough to retain the now ruined tin but also to pack it up and send it, along with a letter, to his former employer effectively thanking them for vicariously saving his life. The possibility of being wounded or even killed weighed heavily on soldiers serving on the western front with 5 out of every 9 being wounded, slightly or seriously, at some time during the war (Bourke 1996:33).
The 'Elect' cocoa tin carried by Sergeant Williams offers this opportunity to explore the anthropological relationship between the tin and the human body but also justifies the inclusion of another simple, every day, non-military tin into this research. The interaction between the tin, the German bullet and Sergeant Williams’s body have transformed it into a CRMB, like the, less dramatic, Ridgeway’s Tea Caddy from Arras (Item 12). Had it been a PMGB that saved Sergeant Williams’s life it would be classified as ‘1Di/3iii’, indicating battle-damaged and containing evidence of conflict, namely the bullet lodged in the cocoa powder. As stated previously, similar classification for these conflict related metal boxes has not been possible as the sampling is too limited. Sergeant Williams’s tin is the only such ‘casualty’ so far encountered.

Item 17, Bishop’s Move Tobacco Tin (ORD/1915ia/2Aii/Bi/Cib/Div/v)

Description


The tin is a pressed steel rectangular container with rounded corners to allow placing and removal in a trouser or jacket pocket without any possibility of damaging the garment with sharp metal corners (Figure 7.20).
The tin measures 82mm by 58mm and is 23mm deep. The lid is raw, or ‘knife’ edged and has a simple rolled and pinned hinge. The tin is designed to hold ‘one ounce’ (28.34g) of pipe smoking tobacco mixture wrapped in a waxed paper tin liner. The lid is decorated with chess pieces, hence the name ‘Bishop’s Move’ and states underneath ‘A unique Blend of Rare Quality’ followed by the CW&Co logo. This example was acquired by the author in 2018 containing two buttons, a large 23mm tunic front button and a smaller 15 mm tunic pocket button, from the 16th (Service) Battalion, King’s Royal Rifle Corps (The Church Lads’ Brigade). Both buttons have the maker ‘J R Gaunt & Son Ltd. London’ on the rear. The tin did not contain any traces of tobacco (Figure 7.21).

![Figure 7.21 ‘Church Lad’s’ Buttons and packing found in Item 20 (ORD) (Author ©).](image)

Analysis

Of all the ‘non-PMGB’ tins studied by the author this is the only one that contains any objects that could be classified as ‘souvenirs’ or ‘mementoes’ from the First World War. Whether this was the actual biography of the tin, to become a repository for souvenirs, or merely a construct by a seller to make more money from the transaction is not clear.

The Church Lads’ Brigade, the 16th and later, 19th, Service Battalions of the King’s Royal Rifle Corps were recruited mostly from the religious organisation of the same name (Morris, 2015:37). Despite the seemingly pious background of the battalion, the reality during war was somewhat different, Lyn MacDonald notes;

This was a matter to which the Battalion’s Padre had become resigned. He
had come upon Jack Brown’s platoon and announced, as he jumped down among these black sheep of his flock, ‘I knew where you all were. I couldn’t see you but I knew where you were from the language that was coming up. I knew it was the Church Lads’ Brigade and I've never heard anything like it in all my life.

(MacDonald, 1993:location 2674).

The buttons are in a small modern plastic resealable plastic bag. They are mounted on a small piece of white card with a light orange border measuring 62mm by 45mm and are held in place with a modern bent paperclip. It is most likely that this arrangement was made just prior to the sale of the tin in 2018 possibly for information to the prospective buyer.

What is less likely is that the ‘labelling’ occurred when the tin and buttons first came together as the current chapter of the objects' biography. Other chapters may exist, and it is possible to extract further analytical information by examining some credible alternatives which are;

- If the buttons and tobacco tin were a souvenir collection assembled by the original soldier who not only smoked the tobacco from the tin but was also a veteran of the 16th. He would not need to label anything he already knew. Buttons, either singular or in small groupings, as a memento of military service seems to be common, as are cap badges, identity tags, service medals and photographs. These objects form the usual contents of such 'memory-caches'. The tin would also seem to be a convenient receptacle rather than a significant one that was carried during the war. An ounce of tobacco would not last even the most frugal pipe smoker much more than one week and the tin itself is not elaborate enough to justify re-filling. An exception would be in the case of a ‘good luck’ tin that perhaps had deflected a bullet but no evidence of such an occurrence in this case.

- Part of a soldier’s wider range objects of memory, commemoration and remembrance. The tin would be too small to hold mounted service medals or photographs but is ideal for two buttons and may have been part of a collection, including other tins, that has subsequently been broken up and the
significance of the remaining tin has been lost.

• The buttons may have been gifted to another person, maybe a family member, as a souvenir or keepsake given to a son or younger brother perhaps. The implicit knowledge of the soldier's association, and therefore the son/brother's, with the buttons would, again, not have needed a label. Military buttons given as souvenirs or keepsakes has been a regular occurrence since the introduction of insignia buttons on uniforms began. During this research examples of this practise have been encountered. The PMGB (PMGB 003) of Private Donald Manson contains several buttons that had been given by him to his family. In the example of the PMGB associated with Elizabeth Carpenter (PMGB 007, Appendix 1), the button was Saxon in origin and was either found, bartered or 'liberated' from a soldier serving in the German army.

• The buttons and tin were not originally associated with each other but became amalgamated as part of the memory or collecting process of another person, not necessarily directly connected with the soldier. Collecting for collecting's sake is a widely accepted phenomenon and Belk (1995:54) notes that Newson and Newson (1968) found that in the United Kingdom, boys were collecting objects from as young as the age of four. Of course, girls were also collectors but this tin as an object would indicate a male dominated influence. A pipe tobacco tin is most likely to be a male object. The use of buttons for gift-giving, especially to sweethearts, both actual and potential, was common but the container would more likely be either feminine or more neutral. A chocolate or toffee tin perhaps, or even a throat pastel tin, would be more gender neutral.

• That this grouping was a pure fabrication to raise the monetary value of the tin and contents on the open market. This scenario, in the authors experience of over 45 years of collecting militaria and 12 years of designing and curating museum exhibitions about the First World War, does not bear the usual hallmarks of a 'scam'. The internet auction site eBay had this tin listed in the First World War 1914-18 militaria category as ‘Bishop's Move Tobacco Tin containing two Church Lad's Battalion Buttons, WW1’. No mention was made of the manufacturer of the tin Cohen Weenan in this listing when, under the
category of ‘Tobacciana’ (collectables relating to smoking), ‘Bishop’s Move tins from Cohen Weenan are for sale regularly and at much higher average prices than was paid for the example here that contained the Church Lad’s buttons. The seller would have most likely made more money if the tin and buttons had been sold separately in different categories. The process of ‘faking’ either for financial gain, deliberate misrepresentation of military service or as a vehicle of improving self-worth is well documented (Richardson, 2009:pp109-112).

Concluding Comments

The ordinary (ORD) and patriotic (P/T) tins should not be dismissed as nothing more than society’s understandable response to the war, with the Royal, patriotic and general militaristic imagery merely a sign of the times that people found themselves in, but should be analysed for the, albeit vicarious, roles they can have as vehicles of conflict memories. It is the wartime chapters of these seemingly humble objects’ biographies that can imbibe relevant trajectories for analysis. The cocoa tin with a bullet hole that saved a soldiers life, the tea caddy that ‘stayed’ near the trenches or the tobacco tin containing souvenir army buttons, these are all examples of the vibrant ‘lives’ some of these more mundane objects have had.

The militarisation of British Edwardian society, certainly through the symbolism and design of these tins, seems universal and relentless. Unlike today’s digital society where intrusive images can be removed from immediate sight by simply turning off a television, smartphone or tablet, the Edwardians patriotic and military symbolism adorning the everyday material culture of the home, town, city and nation. How easy it was for Huntley and Palmer’s to switch Germany from friend to aggressor (Item 9 P/T) and promote ‘poor brave little Belgium’ to a position as guardian of our British sovereignty and morals, on a tin of biscuits.

Imagine the daily routine of a middle-class Edwardian 55-year-old bank clerk; his day starts with him putting on his collar and cuff links, Sir John French is on the stud box. He goes down to breakfast; Sir John French is on the tea caddy. He is surrounded by advertising posters on public transport. Wages, especially those of the working-classes, had risen sharply during the war, mostly because of the shift to
war related production but also the need for more overtime to be worked. The efficiency of the British economy in distributing goods and resources between civilian and military requirements (Winter, 1986:280) led to greater disposable income and the ability to buy more non-essential produce, which in turn led to more advertising. This era of ‘modernity is marked by the proliferation of made objects, their display in public, the reverence with which they are treated, both by those who can afford to collect and those who can afford only to view’ (Dant, 1999:141). Social acceptance, especially in wartime, means also being drawn to items that bear the heraldry of patriotism.

There is also an emerging characteristic, that of monetary value, that has started to accompany the biographies of the tins being studied. The increase in public interest around the centenary of the First World War has created an upsurge in the value to collectors of many objects of material culture from the period. Medals, uniforms, Brodie steel helmets, photographs and other ‘ordinary’ items from the war have gradually gained in value.

It is perhaps surprising that this trend to increase the value of anything ‘WW1’ has also affected modern commemorative pieces in much the same way. When the author discovered the existence of the Fortnum and Mason’s tin, an example was sought to add to a growing collection of conflict related metal boxes for research. An example was found to be available on eBay at a price of £50.00. One was eventually sourced in March 2016 from Fortnum and Mason themselves through their website at the original price of £20.00. This growth of value from the perspective of the collector will be investigated further in this research.

Packaging

Throughout this thesis the issue of wrapping or ‘packaging’ has been encountered. The processes and materials used for wrapping and unwrapping the PMGB and its accompaniments is every bit as complex and nuanced as any other issues described and analysed here. It may not be as powerful as memory or as poignant as remembrance, but it needs to be acknowledged and analysed. Packaging has been identified as having significance in three broad areas of interest;
• The packaging of the PMGB, its accompaniments and other ‘comforts’ sent to serving soldiers, especially around Christmas 1914. This includes how it relates to the material culture theories around gift wrapping, in particular Christmas gift wrapping.

• The use of packaging as a source of empirical evidence around an object and how the lack of any packaging can hamper any analytical processes.

• How the presence or lack of original packaging can impact financial value in the world of First World War collectibles.

During this research an example of a non-PMGB object, still relevant to the central material culture issue of identity, was encountered. The normally discarded packaging, having in this instance been retained, had given the object its ‘identity’ back. The object was a Bronze Memorial Plaque, the full story is presented in Appendix 4 – Packaging and Identity.

Wrapping Up Christmas

Given the nature and timing of the PMGB as a Christmas 1914 gift, Miller’s (1993:26) study of the structure and dynamics of Christmas notes that there are three major attributes to be considered; ‘its relation to the family, to materialisation and to syncretism’. He further observes that ‘the festival manages to be both inversion and embodiment with respect to family values. Similarly, it seems the most extravagant promotion of commodity values and yet the instrument which negates them as gift. It also manages to be both the most local and the most global of religious festivals’ (ibid:26). Set against the backdrop of war it seems even more incongruous that festivities and presents from home, on both sides of the conflict, should be at the forefront of soldiers experiences that Christmas Day so long ago.

Nothing epitomises this stark contrast to the everyday horrors of the Western Front more than the ‘Christmas Truce’. Never a single, organised cessation of hostilities, but more a collection of small locations where both sides stopped trying to kill or maim each other for a few days. The time was used to retrieve and bury their respective dead who had been left out in no man’s land for many weeks. This led to inevitable fraternisation between enemies that still has a powerful resonance today.
Regarded as ‘a celebration of the human spirit, the Christmas Truce remains a moving manifestation of the absurdities of war’ (Weintraub, 2001:199). The soldiers who experienced this event and received their PMGB at the same time must have linked the two occurrences together. A gift from a princess at home and a time when the ‘enemy’ were not trying to kill them must have had an impact that linked the two, PMGB and truce, together.

One of the most important Christmas rituals concerns giving and wrapping which ‘reflects the contradiction between gifts and commodities’ (Carrier, 1993:60). If the gift is too large or is of a shape that is difficult to wrap, a symbolic ‘wrapping’ is achieved by adding a ribbon or bow to the object. Carrier also notes that certain items do not need any formal gift wrapping, citing home-made jams and preserves, ‘because they have the personal identity that commodities do not’ (ibid:61). In the case of the PMGB accompaniments this is achieved by having the ‘Christmas Fund 1914’ legend on the items packaging or surface such as the distinctive yellow wrapper of the cigarettes and pipe tobacco, or the outside of the canvas writing case. These items were the ‘gifts’ and any further wrapping, Christmas or otherwise, would have hidden their identities. Kuper (1993:169) notes that Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) ‘identified the association with the dead as a central element of Christmas, and suggested that children are associated with the dead, as beings beyond society’. These views have a resonance when analysing the PMGB, as the motivation for a soldier to preserve the Christmas Card or cigarette wrapper may have as much to do with remembering Christmas as it does with remembering the war.

**Why Keep the Packaging?**

Research revealed that the lack of packaging can lead to incorrect assumptions and lost opportunities for meaningful analysis. The most significant being that without the cardboard box that contained the PMGB and its accompaniments, most individuals, including those custodians interviewed, believe that the ‘contents’ were packed into the PMGB.

Although predominantly a tobacco smoker’s gift, there were exceptions, and it is reasonable to assume that there was some form of marking on the non-smoking boxes to differentiate them. There is a precedent for differential marking of comforts
during this period. The King and Queen’s Christmas Card (Figure 3.16, Chapter 3) with the wording for wounded soldiers was in an envelope with a red strip below the royal crest on the edge of the flap, the version for non-wounded soldiers being a plain white envelope with just the royal crest on the flap. Although as a hypothesis this is credible, it is difficult to prove as the cardboard boxes rarely survive and no examples with any forms of external markings have been encountered.

Packaging Value

Belk (1995:45) reminds us of the taxonomic ‘Type A’ collector and the more aesthetic ‘Type B’ collector. The ‘Type A’ is more likely to desire examples of his or her collection to include packaging as well. This has given packaging a new emphasis in the field of collecting with a subsequent rise in the value of packaging as a commodity.

The collecting of objects from the First World War has become more popular in recent years and consequently the commercial value of these items has steadily risen driven partly by the rise in internet-based auction sites. These sites give the collector world-wide access to objects and a much better chance of finding rare items including packaging. There are, however, issues around contextualising and provenance. The more traditional ‘live’ auction, complete with gavel-wielding auctioneer, generally produced ‘published auction catalogues, providing a permanent record of an object with accurate and sometimes contextualising description and professional valuation’ (Saunders, 2003:161). The author has noted that some of the internet auction sites appear to ‘window dress’ and bring together objects simply to increase their price. There can be situations where a taxonomic collector, to retain the value of an object, can miss some of the more nuanced information contained inside the packaging, simply by never opening it. The author acquired Item 13 (ORD), Fortnum and Mason’s ‘Tommy’s Tin’ (Chapter 7) in 2016. The block of chocolate and pack of playing cards were left sealed in their cellophane wrappers. It was not until another example was acquired in 2020, this time with an open pack of playing cards, did the author realise that the face cards were depictions of King George V, Queen Mary and the Prince of Wales.
What is very rare with the PMGB is to have the outer cardboard box packaging, and when examples do come to the market, they can sell for over £200. If a cardboard box with any indication that the contents was intended for a non-smoker were to come onto the market, the author believes that it could command quadruple the asking price of an ‘ordinary’ unmarked version. A vintage toy will have a greater commercial value if it is still with its original box. This may be because a toy is more of a gift than a commodity and the retention of the box more likely, as it is seen as part of the overall ‘gift’. The same may be said about the ‘internal’ packaging for the PMGB. Cigarette and tobacco wrappers still exist in relatively high numbers, many now empty of the original contents, long ago smoked, shared, traded or bartered, but their distinctive yellow and ‘Her Royal Highness, The Princess Mary Christmas Fund 1914’ logo, that are the very essence and identity of the ‘Gift’, remain. Even the simple, plain white envelope that held the Christmas 1914 of New Year 1915 Cards can be found for sale, empty and alone but still commanding prices between £25 and £40. It is interesting that the people who produce the reproduction ‘contents’ for the PMGB see fit to embellish their Christmas/New Year cards envelope with the ‘M’ cypher of Princess Mary. The most likely reason is that these cards and envelopes are never the same dimensions as the originals and maybe the fraudsters need some mechanism to legitimise their ‘fakes’. Belk (1995:123) notes that the New York Metropolitan Museum uses ‘authentic reproductions’ to bring art to the visitor by offering affordable copies ‘that helps transfer to the buyer the aura’. Perhaps the same can be said for some of the reproduction PMGB accompaniment wrappings.
Findings, Analysis and Conclusions

Introduction

This thesis has sought to bring to life an object from the First World War that has touched and been touched by conflict but is not intrinsically warlike. It is a rectangular box made of strip brass with an Art Nouveau embossed brass lid that contains, along with patriotic and imperial symbols, the relief image of a seventeen-year-old girl, Princess Mary. In 1914 she wanted to send a Christmas gift, the PMGB, to all soldiers and sailors fighting overseas. Her simple wish became a national campaign that eventually saw the issuing of around 2.6 million PMGBs.

Advances in the study and understanding of material culture, particularly in terms of modern conflict archaeology and conflict anthropology, provide the opportunity to place the PMGB in context and allow it to resonate with stories and complex biographies about the First World War. Archaeologists regard physical items of material culture as artefacts whilst anthropologists regard them as objects, Berger (2009:16) sees them as being both or ‘interchangeable’.

Kopytoff (1986:64) accepts that a definition of a commodity is ‘where an item with use-value also has exchange value’ and suggests that ‘one may present an actual biography or one may construct a typical biographical model from randomly assembled biographical data’ but Miller (1987:130) is concerned that ‘the deeply integrated place of the artefact in constituting cultural and human relations has made discussions of it one of the most difficult of all areas to include in abstract academic discourse’. Despite these concerns, the author believes that the PMGB has enough structure to both create and hold onto many biographies and their various chapters, a belief strengthened by observations made during the case studies and research interviews presented above.

Findings

To fully understand the true nature and ‘place’ of the PMGB and to answer the
Research Questions posed in Chapter 1, several different strands of investigation were identified and pursued. The first of these was historical. An accurate history of the PMGB from idea to delivery and beyond was always more than just challenging ‘labelled authenticity’ (Miller, 1987:10) or ‘characterless anachronisms’ (Saunders, 2001a:46), it was needed to redress the constant onslaught of misinterpretation. It also allows us to place the ‘actor networks’ (Dant, 1999:44) and the ‘agency’ of how the object relates to people around it (Leach, 2007:168) or how a ‘thing’ could become an ‘agent’ (Gell, 1998:19) in relation to the PMGB.

Background research on the origins, design, manufacture and, above all, distribution of the PMGB was essential to unlocking individual biographies. This was not to pursue simply a ‘cachet of authenticity’ (Lowenthal, 1985:171) but to provide an accurate framework for those PMGB biographies likely to encountered during the research.

PMGBs from the Authors’ Private Collection

The four principal PMGBs all had contents and accompaniments, much dating from 1914-1918 or the early 1920s. At least two had been sold by the families of the original recipient. Dant (2005:18) notes that ‘it is in the exchange of objects that social subjects exchange values and value becomes an objective characteristic of the culture of their society’. The ‘value’ of these items has moved from being one of family, memory, remembrance, loyalty and even love, to one of commercial gain on the part of the seller. Miller (2001:91) identifies this transition from ‘gift’ to ‘commodity’ where the ‘value’ of an object changes as emotional attachments fade or change. Once the objects are offered for sale, in this instance all through the internet auction website eBay, they enter a state of ‘commodification’ (Dant,1999:73) that has, potentially, several layers. If we look at each of the four PMGBs in turn, we can see these different layers as they flow from the object;

PMGB 001, Harold Haigh. Collection of photographs, ephemera and objects charting the life of the recipient as influenced by his war experience.

- PMGB, 1914 Christmas Card – value as militaria/First World War collectibles.
- Bullet tiepin – militaria/trench art collectible.
• Photographs – First World War/social history collectibles.
• Old Comrades Badge – First World War/badge/Wm. Gaunt collectibles.
• Ribbon bar – militaria/medal collectible.
• Photocopy from newspaper – social/military history.

As individual objects, all the items from Harold’s PMGB have ‘value’. They descend in ‘desirable rarity’ (Belk, 1998:88-89) from the PMGB, Card and ‘Trench Art’ to the photocopy, which, as it could be sourced from the newspaper archive at no cost, is a ‘non- or anti-value object’ (Thompson, 1979/2017:20). The objects only ‘come alive’ when viewed in the context of Harold’s biography. These objects must have been, for Donald’s family, a balm for what Stewart (1993:14) describes as ‘the sadness without an object’.

PMGB 002, Ernest Haslam. Mostly paper ephemera placed in the PMGB by Alice Wright, Ernest’s sister.

• PMGB, Christmas Card and envelope - value as militaria/First World War collectibles.
• Religious pamphlets/book – value as religious/social history collectibles.
• Cigarette/trade cards – value as social history collectibles.
• Compliment cards - value as social history collectibles.
• Medical certificate – military/social history collectibles.
• YMCA letter - military/social history collectibles.
• Handwritten notes – non-value.

Again, we see a diminishing commercial value to these objects and their true worth was only ever as a ‘whole’ when being viewed by Ernest’s sister as described by Empson (in Henare, et al, 2007:117-121)) when investigating ‘kinship’.

PMGB 003, Donald Manson. PMGB issued to next of kin after soldier died on active service. Army Letter, newspaper clipping, military buttons and assorted souvenirs /keepsakes.

• PMGB, Seaforth Highlander buttons - value as militaria/First World War collectibles.
• General Service buttons - value as militaria/First World War collectibles.
• Army letter to next of kin - value as militaria/First World War collectible (more
so if left with PMGB).

- Newspaper clipping – as above but on its own, non-value.
- Souvenirs/keepsakes – social history, non-value.

The objects in Donald’s PMGB exhibit a sense of inter-reliance, described by Holbraad (2007:214) as ‘hyper-metonymy’ they differ from ‘ordinary metonymy in which a part comes to stand, symbolically, for the whole, [exempli gratia] crown for king’ (ibid:214). Here the assemblage of objects is a metonymy for Donald whilst PMGB 003 without that identity, created by his ‘interrelation with others’ (Attfield, 2000:238) is just a metonymy for a ‘soldier wearing the King’s uniform, Christmas 1914’.

PMGB 004, William Cutting. A PMGB with an assemblage of objects from the war years and medals from after the war.

- PMGB, British War Medal (BWM) and Victory Medal (VM) - value as militaria/First World War collectibles (unethical as William was not eligible for the PMGB).
- British War Medal and Victory Medal - value as militaria/First World War collectibles.
- British War Medal – 1 Troy Ounce (31.1035g) British Sterling Silver, as a precious metal this object has a determinable scrap value regardless of condition or status.
- British ‘Lusitania’ propaganda medallion - value as militaria/social/maritime history/First World War collectibles.
- Pocket Watch – value to watch collector.
- Travel Ink Bottle – value to stationary/writing material collector.
- Thin chain – not precious metal, no identifying marks, non-value.

Many of the objects from William’s PMGB contents stand on their own as individual collectible items. The scrap value of the silver BWM will always give the assemblage a base value regardless of the condition or status. Weighing more than half a kilo (509g), this collection was more a gathering of objects for convenience rather than representing the contents of a soldier’s pocket. When the objects in this PMGB are presented individually they do not decrease in ‘value’ as with the other three PMGBs. The biography (Chapter 4) revealed issues around identity and
ownership that needed to be unpicked. The question remains over the reciprocity around William’s PMGB. Determining if it was a gift from his mother or her husband in honour of his brother’s death on the Western Front was impossible to confirm but is still a credible biography. The gift of one soldier’s PMGB to another would seem to fulfil the ‘laws of reciprocity and gift giving’ noted by Berger (2009:127) as it was a way for William’s family to keep the purpose of the ‘brass box from a Princess’ alive.

Linear Biographies

These four principal Case Study PMGBs appear to have a definite end point in their lifecycles, a point at which they are no longer being actively used and have become dormant or ‘transient’ (Thompson, 1979/2017:120). The change of use over time, as they move from one generation to the next, and the use of the object diminishes, also fits well with this theory (ibid:116). Here the change in ‘value’ of the PMGBs is represented in their change of ‘use’. Two of the ‘use’ phases are relatively short. Ernest and Donald (PMGB 002 and PMGB 003) both died early in the war and so once their families had placed contents into the respective PMGB, nothing else was added. William’s (PMGB 004) has the last datable item, his service medals, indicate 1920 but the wear on the ribbons would suggest later, but nothing newer has been added. Harold’s (PMGB 001) has the longest lifecycle with objects added at various times over the course of his life.

PMGBs, Original Recipient Family and Other Custodians

The mix of the 13 different people whose interviews are presented and analysed in Chapter 6 are surprisingly varied and exhibit many different nuances of ‘living with an object’ (Dant, 1999:198). This may be partly because of increased access to technology that was not present with the biographies of PMGBs 001-004. Dant (2005:142) notes that ‘the telephone [substitute ‘smartphone’] and computer as interconnected networked systems – have interposed in material life to produce a further transformatory impact’. People now, through the internet, have greater access to their family’s past and can be better informed of their own, and the heritage and legacy of the PMGB in their care.
The range of relationships by time was also vast. From ‘PN’ being given John K’s PMGB (Appendix 3/interview 14) by his ‘Pappy’ half a century ago to ‘LB’ identifying the PMGB of James G (interview 12) only a month before the actual interview. Many of the interviewees also had memories of other people whose lives intersected with the PMGB in their care. ‘PC’ said that the PMGB of Ernest M (interview 11) held more memories for her of her grandmother than of Ernest whose legacy is more around telling her to ‘sit up straight’ at Sunday lunch. Also insightful was ‘IW’s relationship with the PMGB of Edward L (interview 3) where the original had gone to another member of the family and he filled the ‘nothingness of loss’ (Winter, 2006:loc 1566) by purchasing a replacement PMGB. His memories are still centred on Edward L and the replacement PMGB has become ‘symbolic’ (Gell, 1998:251) of those memories.

The contrast with the biographies of PMGB 001 to 004 has led to a re-evaluation of how biographies relate to the PMGB as an object. The biographies, although some may have linear characteristics, seem to be made up of many overlapping chapters and episodes. This allows for different people to have different relationships with the same object without changing the identity of the object or being encumbered by time. A PMGB will always be a wartime gift to a soldier in the trenches even if for a time it was ‘grandmother’s button box’ (interview 8).

Soldier’s Comforts, Commercial Comforts, Patriotic Tins and Ordinary Tins

The 17 different types of tins analysed in chapter 6 and 7 are a fraction of the many hundreds of different types of containers, metal and cardboard, that were used during or to commemorate or parallel the First World War processes around putting ‘comforts’ into transportable containers to give, sell or send to soldiers’ away fighting.

All the S/COM category, except for the ‘Square Stocking’ (Item 8 S/COM), were only intended to be given as comforts around Christmas time 1914, the same as the PMGB. Ironic in one sense, as the PMGB was still being issued to soldiers in 1920.

The tins in the other categories seem to have a more fluid lifespan, seemingly more interested in how long the item was likely to be commercially desirable by the
purchasing public. It was also noted that all the example tins that were produced up to 1918 have a distinct military or patriotic theme. The only exceptions being Item 16 ORD, Rowntree’s Cocoa and Item 17 ORD, Bishop’s Move Tobacco.

Another irony, as noted in the concluding comment of Chapter 7 of this thesis, is that the one tin that has the least display of militarism (Item 7 S/COM, the Square Stocking) is in fact a re-purposed design of the British Army’s 24-hour Operational Rations Pack and therefore a piece of military equipment.

Analysis

Research Questions

The four research questions at the core of this thesis were designed to provide a structured framework around the biographies encountered, considering the context of what has been ‘deposited’ with the object and to ‘bring to life’ the stories surrounding ‘Princess Mary’s Gift Box’.

From the initial issue, either in a muddy trench in Flanders on Christmas Day 1914 or through the post sometime during 1916, 2.6 million people eligible to receive the PMGB did so at some time between 1914 and 1920. Mapping the movement of the PMGB within families as old soldiers die and the material evidence of their lives gets passed down the generations becomes more unclear over time. Today, many remain in the care of the original soldier’s family or another ‘custodian’, all directly engaged in preserving the legacy of both the object and the original recipient.

Q1: What is the history of the PMGB?

It is not possible to answer this question unequivocally; the process of design, manufacture and distribution of the PMGB was vast, complex and confusing, and impossible to investigate definitively as to every possible nuance of Princess Mary’s Gift Fund project.

Nevertheless, what has emerged is the most accurate overview to date thus allowing findings and observations to be analysed in context. This overview sweeps
away the historic assumptions around issues and ‘contents’ and fully grounds the PMGB in a way that makes sense of the biographies created by it and around it. These inaccuracies, perpetrated by even the most prestigious of institutions, have stifled the true understanding of the PMGB for over a century. This research has provided the framework for detailed analysis to take place with confidence about the material objects most likely to be encountered within a PMGB. When viewing the ‘rectified past’ Lowenthal (1985:328) notes that ‘Imitations, fakes, and new works inspired by earlier prototypes extend and further alter the aura of antiquity. The scarcity of originals spurs the making of replicas that at least echo the old’ (ibid:xxiii). The issue with this process of ‘credible heritage’ is that it must alter the context of the biography of which it is a part.

A critical listing of the historical elements of the PMGB, and thereby an accurate assessment of its character can be given thus:

- Although important to the overall Gift, the PMGB was only part of the Gift.
- Except for the bullet pencil (2A) the PMGB had no contents, it was itself part of the contents of the overall Gift.
- The PMGB and accompaniments were packed into a cardboard box for distribution and issue.
- Less than 18% of those eligible received their PMGB on Christmas Day 1914 (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005).
- Early PMBGs were handed out at the front or on-board ship but later had to be claimed for by the soldier or sailor themselves. These were issued by the Army/Navy.
- Many thousands were sent to the soldier’s next of kin. They were packed into a shallower cardboard box and had no accompaniments.
- Many items, such as the King and Queen’s Christmas Card, were not part of the PMGB but by being issued around the same time and have become inexorably linked with it.
- The funding of the PMGB was by public subscription, sent directly to Buckingham Palace, and no sum was considered too small.
Q2: What is the relationship between the PMGB and the other British ‘comforts’ issued, given away freely or sold during the First World War?

During this research it has been established that the PMGB occupies a unique position when comparing with other comfort boxes or tins given to serving troops during the First World War. Although the other ‘comforts’ were generally freely given with a sense of true altruism, most were never intended to be anything beyond the initial gift-giving and the fact that any examples still remain with us today is probably down to their change of use to a ‘souvenir’ rather than by design or intention. During the years of research, and before, there has not been a single instance of one of the other ‘comfort’ tins being present at the same time as a PMGB.

The shortage of the raw material, strip brass, during the production of the PMGB is evident. Some examples have been found where only a thin application of brass plate has been used.

All the other period ‘comfort’ boxes in this research (not modern items) were found to be manufactured from mild steel. This material provided a range of easily manufactured and inexpensive containers for many different types of contents from cigarettes to biscuits but limited the life of the ‘tin’ and consequently there was never a need to give these containers any expected use other than as packaging for their contents. The PMGB was different; designed to fit perfectly into a 1902 pattern tunic pocket and be sealed against moisture, it provided an ideal receptacle for all manner of personal items including letters from loved ones back home. Many of these comfort tins and many conflict related metal boxes do share one similarity with the PMGB, that of being the right size to fit into a pocket. This allows them to have a greater relationship with the soldier’s body and become part of his biography than if it was left in a webbing pack.

The size of the PMGB presents another valid issue for debate; storing photographs. The standard, although not mandatory, size of photographs was set in 1899 as 5.5” (139.7mm) by 3.5” (88.9mm) (Harding/sciencemuseum.org, 2013:np) and would not easily fit into a PMGB. Photographs encountered during this research do not reside in a PMGB, the photographs in Harold Haigh’s PMGB (PMGB 001/3CS) have been trimmed. A much larger PMGB would have been impractical to keep in a pocket and perhaps negating the anticipated ‘use-value’ (Dant, 2004:17) of
the objects’ design. By the Edwardian period photography was becoming a ‘rite of family life’ (Sontag, 1979:9) and it made ‘images accurate and ubiquitous’ (Lowenthal, 1985:257), but the PMGB appears not to have been designed to hold photographs. Although some of the other tins researched would also fit into a pocket, they would quickly rust in the wet conditions, especially in the trenches of the Western Front, and would ruin their contents. This possible incompatibility with being an efficient receptacle for photographs, unless trimmed or folded, does seem at odds with the overall purpose of the PMGB as a holder of precious memories and it may be that the Gift Fund Committee simply did not take them into account when preparing the design brief for the brass box. Edwards (1999:221) notes that ‘like relics, photographs are validated through their social biography: ordinary remains (family snapshots) become treasured, linking to traces of the past’.

Polishing fits into ritualised practices around memory (Saunders, 2004:15), and the materiality of the PMGB utilising brass is a factor here. When polished, brass has an attractive golden sheen and although will wear with age and excessive mechanical cleaning, will produce a high shine for decades as though the object is made to retain its original form;

As the past seems to recede from us, we seek to re-evoke it by multiplying paraphernalia about it – souvenirs, mementoes, historical romances, old photos, and by preserving and rehabilitating its relics (Lowenthal, 1958:259).

The mild steel construction limited any future use for these containers beyond ‘souvenirs’, packed up and sent home or discarded and repurposed later in their biographies by convenience rather than design. The only exception is item 8 (C/COM) Rowntree’s Chocolate, Postcard and Cigarette Tin of 1915 (Chapter 6) which was specifically designed to be re-purposed as a cigarette container, complete with striking plate for non-safety matches. The nickel plated and transfer print surfaces do not leave any exposed steel that would oxidise. The three different uses are a curious mix, chocolate, writing and sending postcards of York, and smoking cigarettes. Although still very much a masculine activity, it was the First World War that ‘democratised the cigarette more than any other event’ (Hilton, 2000:126).

One aspect of material culture shared by the PMGB and the other CRMBs concerns them all now being collectible items in one way or another. Militaria
collecting has become increasingly sophisticated over the past two decades. No longer ‘just a boyish habit’ (Cornish, 2009:11-26), militaria and ‘war trophy’ collecting, notably around the PMGB, has become ‘big business’ with many associated accompaniment items being very expensive to purchase. During November 2020, the internet auction website eBay listed a PMGB that still had the pack of strong acid drop sweets with it. The asking price was £1,000.

Although rarely approaching this monetary value, some of the ‘other tins’ analysed have the potential to come close. Miller (1987:71) notes that ‘objects are seen as increasingly exchangeable with one another, but also increasingly specific in terms of the values assigned to them in the form of prices’. The price value assigned to some of these objects is very high indeed. The gift boxes, for example, given to wounded soldiers from Cadbury’s at Christmas 1914 (Item 3a, b and c S/COM). Item 3a S/COM is often seen for sale at around £100 whilst Item 3b S/COM has never been encountered in over a decade of collecting. Item 3c S/COM is so rare that the Cadbury Archive at Mondelez International, the parent company, do not even have a photograph of one.

Given that most collecting ‘would seem a reasonably clear case of terminal materialism since the objects acquired are generally not intended for use or else are placed beyond use in the collection’ (Belk, 1995:140) it would seem that the more rare an example of a tin is, the greater the value and desirability of the object.

Q3: Biography and entanglement: What are the relationships, both historical and current, between the recipients and current custodians of PMGBs?

The initial assumption of linear chapters for the biography of the PMGB gave way to one of multiple or even parallel chapters when looking at how the object interacts with the world it occupies. Dant’s (1999:16) study on how ‘temporality is reflected in the biography of things’ would certainly apply to most of the other conflict related metal ‘comfort’ boxes encountered during this research. These other boxes were only ever expected to do one thing in their ‘lives’, and that was be a conveyance for some welcome consumable items for either eating or smoking.

The PMGB Categories and contents/accompaniments classification created
for this research and presented in Chapter 3, has enabled some of these chapters to be given greater context in the overall biography of the object. Even if the PMGB does not have an individual soldier’s identity associated with it, the classification can still provide some structure to the timeline around issue importance of the object to that soldier. Dating evidence can be gleaned from some accompaniments. The 1914 Christmas Card (2Ci) indicates an early issue, most likely to personnel serving in the trenches, whilst the 1915 New Year Card (2Cii) would indicate someone in uniform but not yet serving overseas at Christmas 1914. The classification of objects from or in the PMGB also allows the psyche and personality of the owner of the brass box to be analysed. The placing of sentimental or religious keepsakes can be used to illustrate these traits as the PMGB was a safe place to keep objects that were important or meaningful to the soldier or his family.

The classification tool can also indicate the point where the PMGB either changes custodianship or changes use from an active carrier of small portable objects to a repository for accumulated memories. Letters from loved ones (3A) would be placed in the PMGB by the soldier for safety while letters sent by him (3B) would have been placed there only after the role of the PMGB had changed, maybe to one of reliquary after his death. A military button (4A) would be kept by the soldier as a souvenir, but a military button fashioned into a ‘sweetheart’ brooch (4C) would have been given to a loved one and would have only been re-located to the PMGB at the start of a new chapter in its biography.

Several of the PMGBs reveal long linear chapters within their biographies. PMGB 001 was used by Harold Haigh from 1914 until very late into his life. PMGBs 002 and 003 in contrast seem to have been stopped in their tracks at very precise times. This is likely due to the untimely deaths of their original owners, after which they took on the mantle of a focal item of ‘objectification’ (Miller, 2000:54) or ‘mourning’ (Winter, 1995:78, 2006:loc 1915) and their biographies have become fixed at this time. PMGB 001 and 004 also have a start, middle and end in one sense, they both have datable objects placed in them that have a linear progression, Harold’s 1914 Christmas Card (2Ci) through to the photocopied 1971 newspaper article (4B) and in William’s, a 1915 propaganda ‘Lusitania’ medallion (3Fiii) through to his service medals (3A).
The two items that have the least ‘authenticity’ (Lowenthal, 1985:328), the Fortnum and Mason ‘Tommy’s Tin’ (Item 13) and the Daily Mail Replica (Item 14) clearly have no biography before 2014 and it could be argued that their biographies, if they have any, are just beginning. This must be hampered somewhat by the intention of the design as curios being sold to the public rather than issued to soldiers.

After the interview stage of this research. It became clear that the PMGBs that were in the possession of these ‘custodians’ had already impacted many different people, their lives and situations, over many years. These relationships often occurred at the same time, a custodian would be immensely proud of the legacy around his grandfather’s PMGB whilst his wife regarded it as an annoyance because it needed dusting regularly. These concurrent and overlapping biographies paint a very different picture of the PMGBs’ lifecycle than first envisaged by the author. Their dynamics ebb and flow over time and from person to person but they still move and have relevance. Sometimes that relevance only comes to light when the object is studied, but sometimes it is already part of a family identity, on proud display along with other items of memory and remembrance.

Gender is a key issue in this investigation, and particularly that of the object itself. The PMGB is a male object. Despite the image of a seventeen-year-old girl embossed on the lid, it was designed by men, manufactured by men, distributed by men and given as a gift to (mostly) men. It was given to some women, maybe around 2,000 nurses, administrative staff and drivers and of course thousands of bereaved mothers and widows, but the overwhelming bulk of the 2.6 million went to men. Of course, any hard-and-fast rule requires an exception. In this case it is PMGB 025 (Chapter 4) where the lid section around the wreathed head of Princess Mary has been cut away and replaced with a section of clear Bakelite. This was done to turn the object into a jewellery box thus feminising its identity for ever. Even if the biography changes, which it clearly has here with it no longer being a jewellery box but now part of an extensive militaria and research collection, the identity is now fixed as a feminine object.

Many of the PMGBs encountered during this research, particularly those which appear in Chapter 5, have had feminine chapters to their biographies.
‘Grandmother’s button box’ in interview 8 or the transferring of a PMGB as a gift from the original recipient John B to the baby girl ‘EB’ in interview 10, are all examples of PMGBs with feminine chapters to their biographies currently. But this could change, ‘EB’s PMGB may, at some time in the future, pass on to a male descendant. It could still retain a female identity, regarded as ‘mum’s’ (‘EB’s’) PMGB or revert to the PMGB of John B DCM, MM, Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort’s Own).

Q4: Is the PMGB a valid exemplar of Material Culture from the First World War?

The answer to this question was always going to be a resounding ‘yes’ but the challenge is to place the PMGB into a specific classification of material culture from the First World War. As such, the PMGB is a complex, dynamic, and complicated object. The relationships it had, and is still having, the memory journeys it can start or be part of and the lives it has touched in the past are legion. Chapter 4 sought to identify and analyse those elements around the themes of material culture of the First World War that are present with the PMGBs in the author’s collection (listed in Appendix 1) and some encountered during research for museum displays in 2008/9.

Many of the PMGBs listed in Appendix 1 have individual characteristics, or chapters, of their hitherto unknown biographies that align directly with the themes of material culture being analysed here. These characteristics were generally the motivation for the author acquiring the examples in the first place. The empirical data from these PMGBs is limited to this one chapter of their biography but does not signify an absence of a full biography, just one that is currently lost or hidden.

Where it was relevant to compare or contrast the biographies of the PMGBs from Chapter 4 with the specific themes identified around material culture, it was done within the analysis. The same was applied to the limited examples of the other 4 categories of Conflict Related Metal Boxes investigated in Chapters 6 and 7. Full analysis of these other non-PMGBs would be difficult as only 16 examples were presented, 16 out of many hundreds, if not thousands, of similar metal boxes produced during or related to, the First World War.
The examples of where the PMGB, or one of the Gift Fund accompaniments, have been identified as being relevant to one of the above headings have allowed the research to unpick these relationships. It was never a case of simply ‘shoehorning’ conveniently acquired PMGBs into conveniently structured headings.

All the following headings are legitimate areas of material culture and would be applicable to many other objects and artefacts from the First World War.

A Royal Relationship, ‘What’s in a name’?

The investigation has revealed significant aspects of the materiality of ‘comforts’ given or sponsored by a member of the Royal Family. The cigarettes (2G) that accompanied the PMGB were marked with Princess Mary’s ‘M’ cypher (Figure 3.11) whilst Queen Alexandra’s Gift (Item 4, Chapter 6) had cigarettes with a facsimile of her full signature, ‘Alexandra’, printed on them (Figure 6.12b). Not ‘HRH’ or ‘Queen’, but her Christian name as if giving to a friend.

The different levels of ‘distancing’ between Princess Mary and Queen Alexandra to their ‘subjects’ may have been more about the age and relative exposure between the two women. Queen Alexandra was more experienced and probably had a deeper relationship with the people whilst Princess Mary, still only seventeen in 1914, was young and naive.

Trench Art

Saunders (2003:11) has defined trench art as, ‘any item made by soldiers, prisoners of war and civilians, from war material directly or any other material, as long as it and they are associated temporally and/or spatially with armed conflict or its consequences’.

Two areas where the trajectory of the PMGB has intersected the world of trench art include being used as a repository for such objects and where the PMGB contents/accompaniments are transformed or modified into trench art. Examples of the PMGB itself as trench art were analysed in Chapter 4.
A. Repositories for Trench Art

The PMGB is an ideal storage place for small, portable items of trench art (PMGB 020). Many examples of First World War trench art are large, artistic and sometimes very complicated pieces, too large to fit into a PMGB. Even the smaller, more common examples of cartridge case letter openers or bullet crucifixes’, would be too large. It is more likely that the more personal self-made items made from ‘souvenired’ waste materials, most likely by the PMGB’s owner himself, were included. Many of the CRMBs encountered during this research are small and transportable enough to be repurposed as a holder of portable trench art but as all are made from mild steel they would have been prone to rusting unlike the brass PMGB.

B. Contents/Accompaniments of PMGB as Trench Art

Few of the PMGB accompaniments or contents lend themselves to adapting into works of trench art apart from the monogrammed .303 cartridge casing that holds a sterling silver or nickel silver tipped pencil. Made from durable, workable brass, this object can be engraved. Two examples of the ‘bullet pencil’ are investigated and analysed here but as neither of them has an associated PMGB and do not appear in Appendix 1, they are classified here as 1B/2A/SST/TAP (Trench Art Pencil) i and ii. A further example, the Gift photograph of Princess Mary 1B/2E/TAF (Trench Art Frame), is from a 1915 newspaper article.

Engraved Bullet Pencil (1B/2A/SST/TAPi)

This is skilfully engraved. Directly below the crown and ‘M’ cypher is the name ‘G. W. FLINDERS’ (Figure 8.1)59.

Figure 8.1 Engraved PMGB Bullet Pencil ‘G Flinders, HMS Kent’ (Author ©).
Below the name is a figure of a unicorn facing right and a banner across the lower part of the animal. The banner reads ‘INVICTIS’ (‘unvanquished’ in Latin). Below this is engraved ‘H.M.S. KENT’ and finally the last line has the dates ‘1914-15-16’ (Figure 8.2). The ‘16’ date is slightly to the left of the otherwise symmetrical engraving, indicating it was added at least a year after the original creation.

**Figure 8.2** Detail of Date Engraving on ‘G Flinders’ Bullet Pencil (Author ©).

The addition of ‘16’ to the dates on the pencil may have been that, although stationed in Portsmouth in 1916, George may have been assigned back to HMS Kent when she returned to dock for refit, Portsmouth being her home port. His experience on the Kent must have been significant or meaningful enough for him to ‘update’ his memento from his service afloat. Classification from Saunders (2003:39) is CATEGORY 1, Sub-category 1a, section ii, Writing Equipment.

*Mounted Bullet Pencil (1B/2A/SST/TAPii)*

Here a bullet pencil has been soldered onto a 9cm by 6cm brass plaque, that is in turn mounted onto a 10.5cm by 7cm Bakelite plaque (Figure 8.3).

**Figure 8.3** PMGB Bullet Pencil Mounted on Bakelite Plinth 1B/2A/SST/TAPii (Author ©).
Sometime during the objects’ lifecycle, it has been severely damaged. The Sterling Silver tip of the pencil has been crushed and a corner of the Bakelite plaque is missing. It would have been possible to remove the silver tip and re-form it by applying pressure from the inside or replace it with an undamaged tip, but the Bakelite plaque would need completely replacing. The damage may have rendered the ‘Present From Princess Mary’ no longer important or significant, or perhaps the object had passed to another person who may not have had an emotional attachment to it. It may also have been sold.

This presents an interesting paradox when considering Thompson’s ‘Rubbish Theory’ (1979/2017). The object has clearly moved from ‘Transient’ to ‘rubbish’ (2017:27) and has effectively ‘been made into dust’ (ibid) as there is no evidence of repair or restoration. The paradox here is that this presumably discarded object has been ‘rescued’ by an antique dealer and purchased by the author, for the sum of £44.00 in January 2019, and the objects’ status and meaning has completely changed. It is now Trench Art/PMGB memorabilia/research material, that now must, using Thompson, be ‘durable – value increasing’ (2017:27) even though it will never be returned to the original design.

Saunders (2003:77) notes that the First World War was a ‘letter writing war’ and further describes the PMGB bullet pencil (2A/SST) as ‘an official kind of trench art, made by civilians at home for use by soldiers at the front, and which explicitly associated war matériel with writing and emotion’ (ibid:81), especially with bullets being used to both kill and communicate. However, the distinction, as noted previously, between the PMGB bullet pencils and those fashioned from bullets salvaged and re-purposed from battlefield scrap into writing instruments, is that the PMGB bullet was never a bullet, merely a bullet-shaped cover for a pencil and the .303 cartridge cases used were salvaged from firing ranges in the UK, facsimile bullets from facsimile battlefields.

Newspaper Photograph (1B/2E) of Army Biscuit Photo Frame

The humble hard-tack army biscuit\textsuperscript{61} has been noted for its persistent durability. The hardness of the biscuit makes it possible to carve and shape the object. There are recorded instances of hard-tack biscuits having a postage stamp glued to them, an
address written on a sanded down section and posted home (Ewbank, 2018:np). Saunders includes an example of a naval scene being painted onto a biscuit that has been subsequently framed (2002:40 and 2003:12). Weeks notes that John Osborne from the 4th Devonshire Regiment carved the centre out of a biscuit and used it as a frame for a photograph of his mother (2009:17) and it is this type of trench art usage that concerns an example of Princess Mary’ photograph (Figure 8.4).

This image is taken from the *Daily Sketch* newspaper of Saturday, 23 January 1915 (1915:6-7). It is difficult to determine the reason for such a construction. Was it respectful? It was certainly durable, the biscuit, unless soaked for a long time in water or smashed, would have lasted years. Perhaps that is the whole point, and it was a comment on the rations the soldiers were expected to endure.

The transformation of food into art has an irony about it, particularly as art was, and still is, seen as sustenance for the soul and food as sustenance for the body. Here they are combined perhaps for the body and soul of the soldier through humour. This example shows a humble military food ration, perhaps even essential sustenance on the battlefield, being recycled as a piece art. Food has for centuries also been both ‘topic and medium’ (Mishan, 2018:np) in art but this photo frame is more irony than recyclia. This object falls under CATEGORY 1, section vi (Saunders, 2003:46).

![Figure 8.4 Scan of Article about Army Biscuit Photo Frame/PMGB Photograph (*Daily Sketch*, 1915 ©).](image)

Evidence of Trauma

The retention of material objects relating to trauma and wounding is revealed in the many examples that exist where the evidence and, in some cases, the cause of the
trauma have been preserved. This may have been part of the healing process for a soldier or his family or it could have been ‘a lucky escape’ or even evidence of ‘doing their bit for King and Country’. The fact that these research examples survive is perhaps evidence that their preservation was important to someone, maybe a soldier or his family. Five PMGBs that have either direct evidence of trauma, or are part of the material residue of trauma, have been analysed in Chapter 4. Their link to the human body is the possibility of having been responsible for saving the life of the soldier or, if not, then they provide an interesting talking point for the recipient/owner of the PMGB. The 1915 newspaper article has been included here as it is PMGB specific, and the object is instrumental as both saviour and assailant in this story.

**Newspaper Article 1915 (1/Bii/3J)**

This example is a story of a conflict damaged PMGB from the *Daily Sketch* of Saturday, 16 January 1916. The article, near the bottom of column four on the second page of the newspaper, barely uses three column-inches of space (Figure 8.5). It tells the story of 240314 Private (later Sergeant) Harold Metcalfe, of the Royal West Kent Regiment, whose life was saved by his PMGB when it deflected a German shrapnel bullet. The deflection was assisted by the presence of the tobacco and smoking pipe placed in the tin for safe keeping by Metcalfe (*Daily Sketch*, 1915).

![Newspaper Article 1915 (1/Bii/3J)](image)

**Figure 8.5** Newspaper article about Private Metcalfe’s PMGB (*Daily Sketch*, 1915 ©).

The article continues that the bullet deflected and killed the man standing next to
Metcalfe. The unfortunate soldier killed by the deflected bullet was Private 8699 Thomas James Denton, 1/Batt. Queen’s Own (Royal West Kent) Regiment. Thomas was killed on 7 January 1915; he was 19 years old. No other soldiers from this regiment were killed between Christmas Day 1914 and the publication date of 16 January 1915. This same story is used by Doyle (2021:172) but Private Denton is not identified.

From a biographical perspective this PMGB, whether it is with Harold Metcalfe’s descendants or is lost forever, intersects the lives of two different soldiers and their families in very different ways. Because it deflected the bullet, it was responsible for saving the life of one soldier but was instrumental in killing the other. The irony here is that, even though it was a ‘comfort’ for the soldiers’, its presence here was contributary in ending a life. The only current evidence of it ever having existed and playing such a significant part in the lives of two different soldiers, one lucky and the other not so, is in the faded pages of a century-old newspaper. There is also another irony with the style of reporting in the article. Metcalfe’s salvation is celebrated whilst the unfortunate death of Denton is only mentioned briefly. Denton is not even identified. This instance of sheer luck verses unfortunate disaster is perhaps an example of ‘gallows humour’ (Winter, 2006:loc 1241), accepted by soldiers but not common in a newspaper available to the public. This is another example of where the social life of a PMGB can be as ambiguous as trench art.

Many of the objects encountered in this research either have no, or very limited, biography or identity but lend themselves to the thematic analysis around their specific circumstances. These circumstances are often unique. No PMGBs have been encountered, having been subjected to the same level of trauma of the three examples of PMGBs 005, 010 and 022, that are still used as active memory boxes by the family of the original recipient. Once ‘shot’ or ‘killed’, just as with the human body, the PMGB ceases to function in the same way as before and now becomes a relic, or in the case of PMGB 010, a reliquary holding the German bullet that ‘killed’ it.

The classification developed above allows for the recording of empiric evidence around trauma (1/Di) and gives an indication of this trauma even if no other ‘proof’ is present. If a Silver War Badge (3/1ii) is present it would indicate the
recipient was wounded sufficiently badly to be discharged from service.

PMGB 022 and Charles's spoon (Chapter 4) also represent personal and intimate physical remains. Should they be with the families of the soldiers? This question presents an ethical dilemma for researchers and collectors, although collectors who only see these items as profit will be unconcerned with some even willing to plunder burial sites in the pursuit of financial reward. Arguably the families would have received the 'official' symbols of gratitude from the King and Government of the time by way of the Bronze 'Next of Kin' Memorial Plaque, as well as the service medals due to the soldier. The issue here is that these two symbols of thanks and commemoration were never in the possession of the soldiers themselves, they came after and to the family.

Analysing the symbolic importance of these material remains and the landscapes they have been found in has reached another level with the relationship between substance and attribute during the commemoration of the Somme in 2016 through the Centenary Poppy Brooch. Artist Christopher Bennett and his company TMB Art Metal created a commemorative poppy lapel brooch for the Royal British Legion (Figure 8.6).

**Figure 8.6** ‘Somme’ poppy badge 2016 (Author ©).

The brooch was made from British brass shell fuzes recovered from the Somme battlefield. Bennett also collected small samples of soil from areas significant to the battle including Beaumont Hamel, Gommecourt, Hebuterne, Serre, Ovillers and La Boiselle. This earth was finely ground and mixed with red liquid enamel and forms the centre of the poppy. 19,240 poppies were produced, one for each British life lost on 1 July 1916. The presentation box contains a
commemorative biography for a soldier lost during the battle. Given the high concentration of deaths, the Somme front was only 18 miles (28.96km) long, it is possible to surmise that at a microscopic level the powdered soil mixed with the red enamel might contain human bone fragments. Saunders (2007:159) notes that ‘remains are often just scattered fragments of human beings who were killed by high explosive’ and goes on to state that during their recovery ‘there was a very anthropological dimension to what appeared to be a strictly archaeological investigation’ (ibid:160).

This object now re-unites elements of the landscape (soil), battle, the mechanics of battle (shell fuze), remembrance (the poppy) with a man (blood-red soil) and even gives a vicarious identity with the man commemorated in the presentation pack. Identity and memories ‘help us see what ties together these stories and the suffering they disclose’ (Winter, 2006:loc 698).

Analysis of the PMGB, giving and receiving of the ‘Gift’

It has been difficult to establish if the PMGBs in this research were part of the first issue on Christmas Day 1914. The classification tool helps with dating, but only if certain objects, like the 1914 Christmas Card (2Ci), are present. The testing of each example for the brass content, solid brass strip being replaced by brass plating for the later issues, would have been impractical and costly. It is reasonable to expect a PMGB received in the trenches on Christmas Day 1914 was something special. The press was full of stories and appeals in the weeks leading up to Christmas. The initial success with capturing the public’s support and managing to manufacture, pack, ship overseas and deliver ‘a Gift from a Princess’ was an exceptional achievement. But what were the feelings towards the Gift from all those eligible but did not get it until much later? It must have felt to some as though they were just an afterthought.

Interviewees were asked to try and ascertain when the PMGB was received by the soldier. So far none has been able to confirm this exactly. Also, as noted in Chapter 2, the literature published since the end of the war have yielded very few references to the PMGB. The one exception being Nurse Edith Appleton.
One way of addressing this question of gratitude and feelings is to acknowledge those examples of framed PMGBs and accompaniments that occasionally come onto the open collectors market. If these assemblages contain the New Year 1915 Card (2Cii) then it seems obvious that someone, presumably the soldier, thought enough of the PMGB to preserve it. Of course, another alternative may be that these assemblages were instigated by the family of a fallen soldier, and this is now part of their grieving and remembrance process. The sheer number of unidentified PMGBs on the open market does lead to the possible conclusion that, for the vast number received after Christmas 1914, the motivation to value, use or even retain the object was diminished. Without any original biographies available we can only guess how the soldiers felt about the PMGB, regardless of it being from a Princess or grateful nation or just ‘from home’.

Analysis of Memory and the PMGB

An important point to consider is how the PMGB can be associated with so many forms of memory. Either as a memory, ‘this was granddad’s tin’, or as a holder, repository or conduit of memory and memories, ‘this was Private Brown’s Tin’. Or as part of cultural memory both real and imagined, ‘this was a soldier’s tin’ or perhaps ‘this was a relative’s tin’.

The PMGB has become a vehicle for the emotions of families and loved ones of soldiers who did not survive the conflict. Around 340,000 British and Commonwealth service personnel have no grave whilst there are around 188,000 unidentified graves from a total of around 957,000. Even if there was a grave, the PMGB would still provide a physical link to the parson no longer there. In one respect the PMGB takes on the role of a ‘cenotaph, an empty tomb, becoming the focus of memory and commemoration’ (Moshenska, 2014:137). Even if there was a grave, and if the family had the ‘good fortune’ to have the grave nearby rather than Rupert Brooke’s The Soldier’s ‘Some Corner of a Foreign Field’ (Walter, 2004:108), having the PMGB in the home, close by and visible to all every day, must have given comfort to some families. That is until, through the passage of time, memory fades. Those who knew the soldier personally get old and die, and the biography of the PMGB changes again. It now becomes a memory of a memory, linking the now to
the then by being a bridge across the generations. During this research children of the current custodians of PMGBs express a profound sense of pride and connection, even though they were born eight or nine decades after that person died. The PMGB, along with family photographs, letters, medals, and other material ‘evidence’ of the soldier, continue to keep the memory and sacrifice of that lost generation alive.

The memories placed in a PMGB tend to flow in a certain direction, usually towards the soldier/recipient from the experiences that generate the memories in the first place. A letter from home, a photograph of a child, a souvenir of battle. All these memory triggers have deliberately been placed in the PMGB to be taken out occasionally and used to recall the associated memories whether they be good ones or bad ones.

Occasionally PMGBs are encountered where the direction of these memories is reversed, they appear to be from the soldier to someone else. A letter from the soldier to his wife or a photograph of the soldier himself. It may be that the PMGB transitioned from the repository of the soldier’s memories when he was away from home into a collective store of accumulated memories relating to the war after he had come home. Or it went from a store of ongoing memories to a vault of collective past-memories of a time now gone.

An example is Harold Haigh’s Field Service Postcard to his wife, Winifred, informing her of his wounding, now forming part of the whole past memory of the experience. There would also be inevitable examples where the family, often generations away from the soldier, have created assemblages that confuse the flow by creating divergent memories. One explanation has already been offered in Chapter 3 with the issue of PMGBs to the next of kin of soldiers serving with the London Regiment but recent evidence of a next of kin PMGB for sale on eBay, bearing the instruction not to send it out to the soldier, was for a member of the Royal Field Artillery, albeit one living in West Croydon, London in 1915. The method of issuing the next of kin PMGB may also account for the examples that sometimes (rarely) come onto the collectors market in a cardboard box deep enough only to take the PMGB, Christmas or New Year Card and nothing else. such as the pipe, cigarettes and tobacco.

Soldiers who received their PMGB in this way must have been disappointed,
even insulted, that they were not even allowed to be sent their Gift. This must inevitably have had a negative effect on their feelings towards the object and consequentially how it was treated post-war. It did not accompany them through ‘thick and thin’, it probably never left Great Britain. This may have led to the downgrading of the object, as far as the soldier was concerned, to a mere trinket, not worth holding on to, and therefore more likely to pass casually from his possession. This may be a factor in why so many PMGBs are on the market, unknown, unloved and without biographies.

The PMGB as Cenotaph: Remembrance and fugitive meanings

The PMGB of Sergeant 5999 Charles Berry, 186 Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps (PMGB 028/1/BR) was not the original. Charles’s PMGB had been lost decades ago by his family during numerous house-moves they endured as members of the armed forces themselves. His niece, the current custodian, decided to acquire a PMGB and substitute it for the missing one. It now contains Charles’s medals and is part of an almost shrine-like assemblage maintained by his family, occupying pride of place in their front room.

The re-use of a substitute PMGB for one missing from a family’s care has been encountered several times during this research. As a process of remembrance, it surely has validity; the possibility of a direct replacement does not exist as the Gift Fund closed in 1921 and the criteria for having a PMGB, being in the King’s uniform on Christmas Day 1914, the use of a replica is unnecessary as the number of unattributed PMGBs available on the market is vast. Replacing like-for-like would seem appropriate as the integrity around the object is the same. The same cannot be said for some uses of a PMGB as a symbol of family remembrance. A PMGB, accompanied by a photograph, has been attributed to Rifleman ‘Y’\textsuperscript{64} of the Rifle Brigade (PMGB 029/1/A/O) that his descendants identify as him. ‘Y’ was killed at the age of nineteen in 1916 during the Battle of the Somme, too young to have been eligible for the PMGB in 1914. Also, the photograph is of an older officer with South African War medal ribbons from 1902 over his left breast pocket.

Analysing this substitution from the perspective of the relevant families, this replacing of the vessel of remembrance allows for a continued process of memory
and does not diminish the status of the object. The family of ‘Y’ were in possession of this PMGB, and it most likely belonged to another, currently unidentified, family member whose photograph is still in their possession. The poignancy, loss and grief have somehow cemented the PMGB with the memory of Rifleman ‘Y’.

Cleaning as a Remembrance Ritual

Cleaning and polishing as part of a memory or remembrance process has been widely acknowledged and researched. The PMGB, in common with a great many other material souvenirs or mementoes from war in general, is made from brass which, because it tarnishes quickly, requires regular cleaning. Saunders notes (2004:15) that this simple domestic process, carried out regularly for perhaps decades has turned it into a ‘if not religious, then certainly therapeutic, ritual of comfort and remembrance’. This model of ritual process, defined by Victor Turner (1920-1983), where the polisher is ‘sacralising the image in a specific form, removed here from the daily practise of memory, into the realm of a specific, focused form of contemplation’ (Edwards, 2005:422). Even the smell of the brass polish can become a physical trigger to memory. Howes (2003:146), when citing the Kwoma culture of New Guinea, notes ‘smell is thought to reveal identities that visual appearances sometimes mask’.

Over polishing of brass will eventually lead to the loss of surface detail. This could remove any specific identifying markings adorning the object. This process of ‘sacred’ ritual of polishing/remembering may be the cause of the opposite over time. Rather than preserving the memory of the soldier, it will become the ultimate irony, disappearing into nothingness like the dead soldier himself. This can reveal polishing as merely a palliative for the living. Such a process would also remove any personal engraving, although the PMGB, despite having provision for the recipient to have their name engraved, in the ‘Christmas 1914’ lozenge on the lid, almost none did, mostly because the Gift Fund Committee did not give any instructions or guidance as to its purpose or even existence. The only exceptions being those PMGBs for officers which had the names engraved inside the brass box (PMGB 008, General Eaton) but being less likely to obliteration because of their interior positioning.
Many of the PMGBs encountered during this research have evidence of wear and tear that had resulted in the brass finish being worn down in places. PMGB 024 (Figure 8.7) however, has been over-polished so many times during its life that all surface detail has been polished out except for ‘Montenegro’ and the faint remains of ‘Christmas 1914’.

![Figure 8.7 PMGB 024 showing wear due to polishing (Author ©).](image)

**Figure 8.7** PMGB 024 showing wear due to polishing (Author ©).

Analysing the impact of Fake PMGBs

Was faking an attempt at giving soldiers’, supposedly slighted by not being eligible for the PMGB, access to a facsimile or just plain commercialism? Richardson (2009:112) notes that in the case of ‘missing’ service medals, ex-servicemen would go to great lengths to have originals re-engraved by skilled jewellers to fit into a specific social group. Surely the same would apply for a PMGB? Why bother with a poor quality, and inaccurate, copy rather than just buying an original? Perhaps the object was never intended for actual soldiers but fulfilled a need for those members of society who did not serve, either too young or too old or perhaps precluded for medical reasons or having a reserved occupation. Not eligible for the real PMGB but being able to acquire a copy may have fulfilled a social need for some. A modern version of this phenomena may be found with ‘replica’ football kit. People can purchase, often at high market prices, a football shirt in their team’s strip with the number and name of their favourite footballer on the back, again probably ‘more profit driven than social altruism’ (Miller, 1987:159). This social need to be part of something bigger and more significant, in this instance military service, taps into the
‘agency’ around these objects (Gell, 1998:19), and may give them a greater role in the story of the war by other means than specific experiential memories. They may have become part of the ‘actor-network’ (Dant, 2005:78) simply by associating with an object that represents a greater meaning to others in society.

Analysing PMGB Collecting and Market Value

It is clear from this study of CRMBs, especially the PMGBs, that whenever an object has any historical significance it inevitably gains a financial value as well.

PMGB commercial values in today’s market is revealing. A PMGB in good condition but without any contents or attached biography would likely sell for around £40. Add the Christmas Card with envelope and the price goes up to £80. The card holder for the bullet pencil generally sells for around £40 whilst the pencil can reach £75, more if it has the rarer nickel tip instead of sterling silver. The photograph of Princess Mary £40 - £60 and a full packet of cigarettes or tobacco can fetch over £100 each. The Asprey lighter can sell for more than £300 whilst the Writing Case, very rarely seen on the collectors market, more than £500. This objectification of these rarer components of the PMGB accompaniments by collectors are constantly driving the market prices up. Miller (1987:129), in his conclusion around artefacts and their contexts and relevant to the open collectors market states ‘it is that the medium of objectification matters. It makes a difference what form is used in the process of becoming’. The more collectors purchase these items, the rarer they will become and consequently the higher the prices will be. Collectors also ‘value rarity in collected objects because it provided both more challenge and a greater feeling of accomplishment and higher status within the circle of collectors of similar objects’ (Belk, 1995:74).

The packaging for the PMGB and accompaniments rarely survive. The only exception being the envelope that held either the Christmas or New Year greetings card. The envelope can command anything up to £45 on the collectors market. The cardboard boxes, either the 67mm or 27mm high version, are very rare today. After all, these were simply discarded by the soldiers perhaps seconds after receiving their Gift. Even if the PMGB and accompaniments were safely packed back into the box and sent home to be later presented in perpetuity, the cardboard boxes were most
likely discarded. Attitudes have changed over time and items of no apparent value or use, like cardboard boxes and envelopes, are now representing the rarest elements of the Gift, especially to militaria collectors. This gives an interesting perspective to the definitions within Thompson’s ‘Rubbish Theory’ (1979/2017) when actual ‘rubbish’, not objects whose status has changed into rubbish, but actual waste packaging can command a much higher sale price than the object it wrapped. This would most likely appeal to a ‘Type A collector’ (Belk, 1995:45).

Whilst this process is important, the anticipation of opening a Gift in the trenches on Christmas Day or the trepidation of a wife opening the package containing her husband’s PMGB after he had been killed and his body lost, it can often be the case that the packaging itself is merely discarded and not considered important or relevant. Transportation logistics make use of regular sized packaging to maximise packing efficiency during transit. Cardboard boxes are easier and safer to stack.

Because of this rarity, coupled with a desire by some of the more obsessive collectors to get it ‘perfect’, these cardboard boxes can fetch sums around £250, making it more valuable than most PMGBs encountered on the open market.

These individual values must tempt unscrupulous sellers offering these objects for sale to boost their potential profits by adding extra items. Items that may have very likely been purchased separately for less money but now together, are worth more. Although unprincipled, this may not always be a negative activity. The ‘additional’ items, if genuine, are contemporary companions and accompaniments to the PMGB and it may be desirable for the collector/researcher/museum/family member to still purchase these items as they are ‘right’.

What is problematic for the investigator (but also an analytical challenge) is where the seller adds an identity to an object to gain financially. An example of possible ‘window dressing’ situation could occur with PMGB 008, Brigadier General Eaton. This is the only PMGB so far encountered that can definitively be attributed to the named recipient as it has his name engraved inside the lid. This process could of course be faked although it would be very difficult to ‘age’ any new engraving. If PMGB 008 were to be offered for sale with an Asprey Lighter, it would now command a price tag of more than £600-£750.
These examples, either deliberate or innocent, are rife. The BBC television programme ‘Antiques Road Trip’ (BBC, 2020) showed a dealer purchase a set of First World War fibre identity discs. Subsequently he purchased a PMGB for £10. These items were auctioned together and made the dealer a small profit. There was no indication if any research had been undertaken to see if the soldier identified on the discs was entitled to a PMGB. It is difficult to decide which was the most disrespectful aspect of this scenario, the inappropriate pairing of the objects or the fact that it was done for ‘entertainment’.

Even when dealers do not ‘window dress’ for the sake of a quick profit, there is a growing tendency to break large lots of objects up into smaller ones to sell more. This can destroy an assemblage’s biography and diminish the anthropological value of the objects. A dealer would perhaps argue that if a collection is split up into ‘lots’ it is still possible to keep it together by bidding or buying all the lots offered. This only works if the lots are offered at the same time. Also, dealers often split lots up to appeal to a wider range of collectors. Breaking larger lots into smaller ones simultaneously increases overall commercial value and decreases anthropological value at the same time as creating multiple different trajectories for the newly independent items.

During a conversation with a Canadian interviewee, it emerged that Canadian militaria dealers seem to prefer not only to keep things together, but also go to great lengths to try and restore fragmented collections, particularly with war service medals (Pullen, 2020, pers. Com).

Conclusions

Even though only around a quarter of the soldiers who served in the British Army during the First World War were eligible to receive a PMGB, and of these only 18% received the item on Christmas Day 1914, it still has had a lasting significant impact as an object of material culture from the war with the soldiers’ who survived it and their families then and now.

If a PMGB is attributed to a person who was not eligible for it, (William Cutting
PMGB 004), it cannot be viewed as being ‘how did it come into his possession’ but must be ‘how did he acquire it’. Granted this is very subtle, but the emphasis must be around how the world fits the PMGB and not how it fits the world.

The PMGB is more emotive than many of the other objects and artefacts because of the multiple biographies that it can have. A steel helmet or a shell case has a biography limited by the ‘use-value’ (Dant, 2004:17), unless of course the object has undergone a ‘transformation into trench art’ (Saunders, 2003:152). The PMGB, as evidenced by the interviews presented above, has a much greater range of dynamic relationships with people, not just families and descendants but all manner of custodians and stakeholders. The ‘actor-network’ (Dant, 2005:8) associated with the PMGB, and therefore with material culture of the First World War, is vast and encompasses many different types of people, all with different motivations for engaging with the PMGB. It could be a soldier ‘re-membering’ (Bourke, 1996:210) his life-changing injury (PMGB 005), or the grief of a family touching the ‘person-objects’ (Hallam and Hockey, 2001:153) once belonging to Donald Manson (PMGB 003). Perhaps it was an old soldier remembering his service days through his professionally ‘mounted souvenir’ (Saunders, 2003:39 and 2007:54) courtesy of the Army and Navy Stores (PMGB 023).

Perhaps there is enough justification for the PMGB to now have its own classification within the material culture of the First World War, maybe as ‘Memory Box’ or even ‘Box of Memories’. It could be applied to all manner of CRMBs, not just those associated in some way with the First World War, but other conflicts before and since. The criteria could be that the box has some form of artefact or ‘memory’ clearly defined or associated with it. The concept of ‘memory boxes’ is gaining popularity within contemporary society, with families who have a member going through the difficult processes of palliative or terminal care.

The most poignant and culturally significant data to come out of this research is that derived from the interviews. It is therefore regretted that, despite reaching out to both heritage organisations and faith groups, no responses were received from families of Indian soldiers who served in the First World War. Many thousands received the PMGB, some with the regular accompaniments and some with the packets of cooking spice chosen by the Gift Fund Committee to be more fitting to
their various cultures. These biographies would have added a further dimension to those already investigated.

Regardless of the circumstances around how a soldier received his PMGB, either in the Flanders trenches on Christmas Day 1914 or by post sometime in 1916, they must all have had an opinion and even emotions about the object. If we can begin to understand and analysing those opinions and emotions it may unlock more of the true ‘identity’ of the generation that served Great Britain in the dark days of 1914. An identity that has been so mis-interpreted and mis-represented over the decades until more recently, with more accurate, thoughtful and less partisan research, publications, television and film works now coming forward.

As well as being the first ever material culture anthropological analysis of the PMGB and other First World War CRMBs, this thesis has created and deployed a status, contents and accompaniments classification system that others can use and refine in the future. A fitting tribute to all those soldiers in the ‘King’s Uniform’ on Christmas Day 1914, surviving in the muddy trenches and shell holes amongst the death and destruction of the Western Front, opening their ‘Gift from a Princess’. 
Endnotes

1 The author’s association with these unfolding events included an ongoing programme of displays and exhibitions at the Priest’s House Museum around different aspects of the war and an invitation to join two project committees’ in Hampshire, both with long-term goals around lasting remembrance. The first was the Romsey Warhorse Statue, a project that saw the funding, design, sculpting and erecting of a bronze resin statue of a horse and handler to commemorate the role of the town of Romsey in Hampshire as the location of a major equine re-mount camp. The statue by the artist Amy Goodman was unveiled by the Princess Royal on 3 July 2015. The authors’ role was as a military consultant.

The second project was as an advisor to the ‘Winchester’s Story’ group. This was a loose association of projects based around the city of Winchester in Hampshire and was created to both co-ordinate resources and ensure minimal cross-over or ‘treading on toes’ with around 10 different events from small scale exhibitions to city and even county wide events. The project lead was Lieutenant General Sir Christopher Wallace (1943-2016). The ‘Winchester’s Story’ project also led to the author being asked to consult with the sculptor Simon Smith to provide 1908 pattern webbing kit for the ‘A Promise Honoured’ Memorial Bench in Winchester’s Castle Yard. The Portland stone sculpture represents a Great Western Railway bench which has a soldier’s kit piled on one end, inviting the viewer to speculate as to where the soldier has gone. It was unveiled in 2014.

2 This image was one of a set of two ‘Photogravure’ postcards from a collection called ‘Pals’ (Tanner, 2022:np). They were printed in Great Britain in 1917 by Raphael Tuck and Sons of Bishopsgate, London.

3 Each PMGB is numbered (PMGB 001 – 027). Most are stored in a clear plastic 0.75 litre ‘Really Useful Box (®). The artefacts are generally held in place by cut and shaped close cell polyethylene foam for protection and stability, particularly during transit during museum exhibition use. Each box has a label with the box number, PMGB number and a brief description of the contents. All the data pertaining to all of the boxes is held in a database that allows for comprehensive cross referencing.
The book was a collection of photographs taken by the Queen, an accomplished photographer, and was presented as a personal album with half of the images stuck onto black sugar paper, some irregularly placed as in ‘real life’. There were even sheets of tissue paper between the leaves of photographs. The images included intimate pictures of the Royal Family, Royal Household, and many heads of state and their families, including the ill-fated Romanoff children.

The internet auction website, eBay, prohibited the sale of knives and edged weapons in the UK and Ireland on 28 October 2014 (Lewis/eBayinc.com, 2014:np).

One such example was the mild steel tin filled with Fry’s Chocolate issued to members of the Australian Expeditionary Force by the ‘Australian War Contingent Association, London’ in early 1915. The box contained two blocks of Fry’s Chocolate and was issued in early 1915. It was most likely made by the manufacturing company of Barclay Fry, London.

Katrin Unterreiner (2015:84) quotes the writer Franz Joseph Rosenthal (1832-1915) as saying, ‘There is no other monarch who acts as a true father of his country by permitting even the poorest of his subjects to obtain an audience’. After the Emperor’s death on 21 November 1916 the badges for that Christmas had more festive designs such as Christmas Trees and Christmas Candles. It was a mark of Franz Joseph’s popularity with his people, especially the army, that almost the whole population of the city of Vienna came out to pay their respects at his funeral (Winkelhofer, 2008:229). There is also the issue around the use of the badges. They were only ever intended as a short-term souvenir. Worn over Christmas and then, perhaps, stored away as a keepsake.

During the time of this research project, the author has regularly observed the number of PMGBs without any ‘identities’ being offered for sale on the internet auction website eBay. Results, including those for accompaniments and replica items, rarely fall below 100 at any given time.

As part of the Transfer Viva from M. Phil. to PhD, the author arranged for a trial interview of one of the PMGB custodians identified from among the volunteer
members of staff working at the Priest’s House Museum, Wimborne, Dorset. The interview took place on 5 November 2015 in the museum library. Present were the interviewee, a lady called ‘S’, the author and the museum curator who had agreed to oversee the interview. The interview was audio-recorded and lasted 65 minutes. The pre-prepared questions around the original recipient were basic, who was he, what regiment did he serve in, what was his relationship with ‘S’ and was intended for background to the overall biography. Further questions arose during the interview as the story unfolded. The original recipient, her grandfather, had passed the PMGB onto her father. Her parents had divorced when ‘S’ was in her teens and her father moved into a tiny flat with few possessions. ‘S’ recalled seeing the PMGB during this time and, after her father died, it passed into her possession. As the interview progressed it became more evident that the PMGB was more important to ‘S’ as a reminder of her father rather than her grandfather. It accompanied him to his tiny ‘bachelor flat’ and was on view during her bitter-sweet visits to her much loved father and when he died, became part of her memories of him, not necessarily her grandfather. This was confirmed by the emotional pause from ‘S’ when asked who the PMGB reminded her of, grandfather or father? The tearful answer was both. The PMGB had acquired such a strong additional chapter to its biography, that as part of the memories around her father, that even talking in the context around her grandfather still brought vivid memories and emotions of her father.

This revelation about the existence of very powerful alternative or additional chapters to the biography of a PMGB enabled the author to construct questions to direct the current custodians to reveal these anthropological gems during the interviews.

The interview was conducted before any ethics clearance was obtained as it was not clear at this stage what information may arise from the questions asked and so it is not included in the final thesis but still remains important in the direction and structure the author adopted for future interviews.

A session held in York during September 2019 illustrates this. The three-day trip cost over £500 in travel and hotel expenses. It was hosted by York Castle Museum and despite a BBC radio interview with the author and publicity generated by the museum prior to the event, only two people came for interview. Neither were in possession of a relatives’ PMGB and were motivated by the historical significance of
the object rather than any personal memory attachments. Any further planned events were abandoned.

11 Interviewees’ were mostly from the UK but 2 were based in France and 1 was from Canada. One of the interviewee’s was profoundly deaf and so a series of written questions with a similarly written number of follow-up questions based on the responses was used.

12 The ethics element of the interviews was achieved by placing all the required ethical and procedural notifications in the response email to those people who had expressed a wish to participate in the research. Dates and times were offered to these people and their emailed responses constituted implicit acceptance of the consent terms and conditions (copies of the information and consent sheets for both face-to-face and virtual interviews are held by the author on the university’s Onedrive).

13 The book *Princess Mary, Viscountess Lascelles*, by Evelyn Graham was published in 1925 by Hutchinson & Co. of Paternoster Row, London, and appears to have been written by more of a ‘super-fan’ rather than an official biographer. The book has inaccuracies around the PMGB, the most significant being the date of 1915 given twice as for the year of the first formulation of a Christmas gift idea by Princess Mary and for the inaugural meeting of the Gift Fund (ibid:69). The correct year was 1914.

14 This letter written by George Lascelles (1923-2011) 7th Earl of Harewood to a Mr Robin Piguet dated 6 July 1982 where he states regarding his mother, Princess Mary, that ‘no book has ever been written about her’ (letter now in author’s collection).

15 The author has four photographs of other companies from the 7th London taken by the same photographer at the same time as Smith’s image. All have postcard backs, three have been written on and sent to relatives and friends. The postmarks on two can be clearly seen as 10 and 12 October 1914.
‘Un-starred’ refers to those soldiers who were not eligible to receive either the 1914 or 1914-15 Star service medal.


The navy numbered 136,500 at peacetime strength with a further 28,000 in the Fleet Reserve and 30,000 in the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) and Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) (ibid). The army of New Zealand had a permanent peacetime strength of 578 but had 25,902 reserves in the New Zealand Territorial Force (Dominion of New Zealand, 2015, page 2, para 4). Similarly, other member states of the then British Empire had standing armies.

This is the Imperial paper size ‘Crown Octavo’

Office of National Statistics, a division of Her Majesty’s UK Government.

£135,713 6s 5d – General Donations
£6,822 11s 4d – Collections by Mayors or Mayoresses
£4,399 10s 5d – Church Collections
£6,252 2s 2d – School Collections
£1,898 – Employee Collections (Workplace)
£1,748 10s 1d – Card Collections
£4,017 19s 3d – Flag Days and Public Collections
£2,269 4s 11d – From Entertainments and Concerts
£95 7s 11d – Fund Specific Collection Boxes
Balance from interest earned on deposits (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005:9).

Queen Mary, Princess Mary’s mother, published a similar book of collected works and coloured plates on 8 December 1915 with the proceeds of sales going ‘In Aid of Queen Mary’s Convalescent Hospitals for Soldiers and Sailors who Have Lost Their Limbs in the War’ (Stoddard/Guardian.com, 2015:np).
Ferrocerium was invented in 1903 by Austrian scientist Carl Auer von Welsbach (1858-1929). It is a synthetic alloy that was inexpensive to make that produces very hot, bright sparks when struck (Wilson & Co/Sharrowmills.com, 2020:np).

Sterling Silver is made up from 92.5% Silver (Ag) and 7.5% Copper (Cu) whilst Nickel Silver has no Silver content at all, being a mix of 60% Copper (Cu), 20% Nickel (Ni) and 20% Zinc (Zn) (Smythe Jewellery, 2016).

Poll taken on Sunday, 17 February 2019, using ‘mary tin’, ‘tin ww1’ and ‘mary ww1’ as search filters. The search was limited to ‘UK only’ which also allows overseas items from sellers willing to ship to the UK.

The 2012 version of Sister Appleton’s diary starts from late 1915 and the forward acknowledges missing pages from 1914. The anonymous volume from 1915 published by Blackwood’s has a very similar title, is about an Army Nursing Sister with South African War service and has an almost identical writing style, leading to the very reasonable assumption that it is the ‘missing’ part of Edith’s diary.

In 1882, Lady Wolverton formed a small sewing guild to provide garments for the needy. The ‘London Needlework Guild’ grew and attracted the attention, and eventually patronage of Princess Mary of Teck (Moore/bdghs.org.uk, 2016: np). Princess Mary was Queen Mary’s mother. After the death of Mary of Teck in 1897 Princess, later Queen, Mary took over the patronage of the guild. The guild was renamed ‘Queen Mary’s Needlework Guild’ on 8 August 1914 (ibid). Queen Mary placed an order with the Guild for 75,000 body (money) belts to be given to the troops as Christmas gifts (ibid). She also encouraged members of the Guild to purchase and donate other gifts at the same time. In total, 300,000 body belts and 300,000 pairs of warm woollen socks were required by the Queen’s Committee according to the ‘Oxfordshire Weekly News’ of Wednesday 21 October 1914 (Findmypast.co.uk Newspaper Archive, 2019:np).

AWWRF – American Women’s War Relief Fund of Paignton, Devon, England. Society set up in 1914 by a group of American women married to British men to support the war effort. This scarf is made with fine quality wool and has been made
with considerable skill (Lesley Spencer, Pers.Com, 2019). The knitting stitch used is Mock English Rib and the scarf would have taken around two full days to knit (Lesley Spencer, Pers.Com. 2019).

29 Archer stated that during 1916 when the pressure on the postal service between Great Britain and the Western Front was used so much that it was close to collapse, the Gift Fund assigned PMGBs due for issue to soldiers from the London Regiment, at this time the largest regiment in the British Army with 82 battalions in 1915 (Baker/longlongtrail.com, 2020b:np), to the committee of the London Regiments Comforts Fund for distribution.

30 The ‘fumsup’ or ‘thumbs-up’ charm was a popular good luck symbol dating back to the gladiators of ancient Rome and was used during both the World Wars. Made of brass or silver, and occasionally, gold, the figure represented an infant with a raised thumb in a gesture of good luck. The head of the figure was made of hardwood, usually ebony, also allowing a gesture of good luck and safekeeping for the soldier by the process of ‘touching wood’. Another popular charm was of a figure with a large wooden head that encouraged the user to also ‘touch wood’ for luck (Sandysvintagecharms.com, 2020:np).

31 This sub section has been created to record any evidence, if any, of objects being placed in a PMGB for a much darker purpose than ‘souveniring’. This was war time and both the Western Alliance, and the Central Powers had used propaganda to portray the other as monsters thus creating an atmosphere of revenge. Could that bullet casing be a souvenir of a soldiers first ‘kill’?

32 War Service Badge. Initiated in September 1916, these sterling silver badges were numbered to an individual soldier whose wounds had been severe enough for him to be discharged from military service. As well as showing that he had ‘done his bit’ it also prevented abuse from people when seeing a man of military service age not in uniform (Doyle, 2008:150).

33 Medals replaced during the lifetime of the soldier due to fire or theft and issued by the Ministry of Defence Medals Office (MODMO).
These three categories of Weight (empty), Edge Design, ‘Christmas 1914’ Font and number of Laurel Leaves framing Princess Mary’s head have not been fully presented and analysed in the body of the research because the number being studied here is relatively small. Also, the reasons behind the differences of weight and design may be attributed to the quality of brass used, or different manufacturers being responsible for different lots of PMGBs or even different phases of production. Without official records or data as to why these differences are present, any in-depth analysis would be inconclusive. These three categories of the overall PMGB classification would be useful for further analysis should further empirical evidence around production and dates of production present themselves in the future.

The Military Medal was instituted by a Royal Warrant in March of 1916. It was given to all non-commissioned ranks, men and women, for ‘individual or associated acts of bravery’ (Warrington, 2014:vi). The award was designed to keep the prestige of the higher Distinguished Conduct Medal intact. Recipients had the details of their awards published in the London Gazette.

In 1916 alone over 7.5 million items of post were received by British soldiers per week with around 5 million letters being sent home. Many of the letters going home were Field Service Postcards (greatwarlondon.wordpress.com, 2017:np). If there was any writing other than the recipient’s address and the signature of the sender, the postcard would be destroyed.

On 7 May 1915, the German submarine, U20, torpedoed and sank the Cunard Passenger Liner Lusitania off the south coast of Ireland with 1,198 fatalities including 94 children. 128 of the casualties were American citizens (O’Sullivan 2014: 111). In August 1915, Karl Goetz, a Munich based medal maker, produced his ‘Opus 156 – The Sinking of the Lusitania’ (Jones, 1979:19). Many of Goetz’s medals were satirical (Kienast 1967:9) and this medal was designed to criticise Cunard for allowing passengers to travel on a ship carrying munitions at a time of war (O’Sullivan, 2014:165). Goetz got the date wrong and put ‘5 Mai’ (5 May) which led the British government to assume that the sinking was pre-planned. This apparent glorification of the loss of innocent life gave the British a perfect anti-German
propaganda opportunity. George Selfridge (1858-1947), owner of the famous London department store, was commissioned to make 2,500,000 copies with accompanying boxes and lurid text of the ‘atrocity’ (Preston, 2002:364). Monies raised by the sale of these copies went to British soldiers’ medical charities such as St. Dunstan’s and the British Red Cross.

Ebonizing, or Iron Staining, uses a chemical reaction between iron oxide and the natural tannins in wood to create a natural-looking black created in the fibres of the wood rather than a surface stain. It is very durable.

The adoption of the ogival design by Germany in 1905 altered both the ballistic performance and the terminal ballistics over the previous round headed bullets. The centre of gravity in the heavier tail of an ogival bullet would cause it to fly ‘tail-first’ if it were not for the spin generated by the rifling of the barrel from which it was fired keeping it on a ‘point-first’ trajectory. Upon entering a human body this stabilisation is lost, and the bullet starts to rotate around the lateral axis, colloquially known as ‘tumbling’, which can cause catastrophic internal damage (Cornish, 2015:np). Bullets tend to distort only if impacting on bone rather than soft tissue.

Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery (1887-1976), 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, known to his men and the public in general as ‘Monty’.

The ‘Honour Cross of the World War’, commonly known as the Hindenburg Cross (incorrectly), issued to veterans of the First World War between 1934 and 1944, was the only medal commemorating service during the conflict allowed to be worn on military uniforms by the Nazi’s (identifymedals.com, 2020: np).

Two miles from the town of Ypres (Ieper) in Belgium, the Ypres-Roulers railway crosses the Menin Road near a crossroads. German artillery was ranged onto this exact point making it arguably ‘the most dangerous place on earth’. Price (2020: np) notes; ‘it soon became standard practice for the infantry to make their way over the
perilous crossroads at the run and for cavalry to gallop. Even motor vehicles passed Hellfire Corner at speed'.

43 This bookcase was virtually identical to one owned by the authors’ grandparents, who were the same age and from the same generation as Herbert and all the other ‘original recipients’ identified in this chapter. It too also held ‘important’ books such as grammar and spelling dictionaries, the all-important ‘Kay’s’ mail order catalogue and a very outdated medical dictionary.

44 Soldiers serving in a theatre of war overseas during 1914 were entitled to the ‘1914 Star’ service medal (Duckers, 2011:8). Those in action around the Belgium town of Mons between 5 August and 22 November 1914 were entitled to wear a bar bearing those two dates, this became known as the ‘Mons Star’ (ibid:12). Soldiers serving in a theatre of war overseas after 31 December 1914 but before 31 December 1915 were entitled to the ‘1915 Star’ service medal (ibid:10).

45 The Menin Gate Memorial was designed by Sir Reginal Blomfield (1856-1942) with sculptures by Sir William Reid-Dick (1879-1961) and is located at the eastern exit of the medieval town of Ypres (Ieper) in Belgium (Northcott and Starr, 2019:24). Work began in 1923 and was completed in 1927. The Memorial is; ‘To the Armies of the British Empire who stood here from 1914 to 1918 and to those of their dead who have no known grave’ (ibid:25). There are 54,127 names commemorated (findagrave.com, 2020: np). It was officially opened by Field Marshal Lord Herbert Plummer (1857-1932) on Sunday, 24 July 1927. The ‘Last Post Ceremony’ began on 1 July 1928 as a way for the Belgium nation to pay their respects and gratitude to those who had fallen during the war and took place every day for four months (Northcott and Star, 2019:34). From 11 November 1929, the Last Post has been sounded every evening since, except during the German occupation of Belgium during the Second World War (ibid:35).

46 A number of factors have led to this conclusion about the PMGB not being that of ‘IF’s great uncle rather than his grandfather Fred. His grandmother would never name which brother, or even brothers’, had been killed. Even using the family tree as a basis for research, it would still not prove that, even if grandmothers brother had
been eligible for the PMGB, he had ever received one. Also if a PMGB from a brother had existed, the question arises as to if a young sibling would have been given the PMGB rather than the soldiers’ parents. Another compelling piece of evidence is that if she, ‘IF’ s grandmother, had been given the PMGB of her favourite brother as an important memento of his life, why did she not display it in some way rather than have it wrapped in newspaper and pushed to the back of a drawer as ‘IF’s mother recalls?

47 It is most likely that Samuel was transferred to the 14th shortly after joining the 1st in September 1914 as the 1st left for France in early November 1914 (Baker/longlongtrail.co.uk, 2020a: np) and he would not have completed his training.

48 Cigars do not keep well unless stored in a humidor and even then, generally only last around five years from the time of manufacture. After that they start to degrade and cannot be smoked (newair.com, 2020: np).

49 DCM – Distinguished Conduct Medal, awarded for gallantry in action during the ‘Retreat from Mons’ in Belgium in late 1914. MM – Military Medal, awarded for gallantry in action during the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

50 [Image has been filtered using Adobe® Photoshop® to improve clarity.

51 The 1908 Pattern British Army webbing had two packs that could be mounted on the yolk belt and straps (HMSO 1913/1986:3);

Side Pack (Haversack) – This was carried on the left side of the body and was attached to the soldiers webbing belt with two brass buckles. It was designed to hold spare clothing, emergency rations, personal hygiene items and personal effects.

Large Pack (Pack) – A much larger pack that was suspended on two brass buckles on the shoulders of the cross-belts and worn as a backpack. It held larger items of spare clothing, mess tins, drinking cup and personal items were carried in this pack. Also known as the ‘Marching Pack, it was expected
to be discarded and kept in the reserve trenches when the soldier went into forward positions.

52 Otosclerosis is where abnormal bone growth in the middle ear causes the inner-ear bones, malleus, incus and staples (hammer, anvil and stirrup), to stop allowing sound to travel through the ear. The result can be profound deafness.

53 The book was a collection of photographs taken by the Queen, an accomplished photographer, and was presented as a personal album with half of the images stuck onto black sugar paper, some irregularly placed as in ‘real life’. There were even sheets of tissue paper between the leaves of photographs. The images included intimate pictures of the Royal Family, Royal Household, and many heads of state and their families, including the ill-fated Romanoff children.

54 Halton’s had confidence in the quality of their products which led them to advertise their Honey and Milk Toffee, packed in a beehive shaped tin, as being:

You may with safety give your children Halton’s Toffees and Tablets. Their absolute purity is guaranteed, combining as they do a wholesome food-sweet [sic] and a most delicious Confection. (Orpie 2008, p 17).

Despite being smaller than their rivals, Halton’s product quality set them slightly apart and they remained popular. Maybe not for every-day mass-consumption but certainly a choice for those special treats and occasions in life such as birthdays and Christmas. This special quality is evident by what happened when the company was acquired in 1960 by the confectionary manufacturer Barrett and Co. of Wood Green, London. Halton’s continued being profitable until 1965 when Barrett’s were in turn acquired by Bassett’s. Bassett’s did not have enough specialised knowledge in the production of such quality toffee and so Halton’s was finally closed in 1970 (Plowright, 2004:np).

55 The seller, Hesuaiibus, is an antique dealer from Arras in Northern France who has, to date, only been active on eBay for forty transactions between September 2018 and December 2019.
The Enham Trust is a charity based near Andover, Hampshire, that supports disabled people ‘to live, work and enjoy life as independently as possible’ (Enham Trust, 2019:np). Set up between 1918 -1920 and officially opened in 1921, the 1000-acre site was the first ‘village centre’ establishment to cater for ‘the medical treatment and training of ex-servicemen suffering from the effects of amputations, neurasthenia and shell shock’ (ibid).

Around 210,000 Irishmen were in the British Army during the First World War with around 140,000 being volunteers (Jeffery, 2011:np). Although many Unionists from the counties of Ulster in the North were allies of the British, many Catholic Nationalists, who opposed German aggression towards small countries such as Belgium, were also volunteers. The harsh response by the British directly following the Easter Rising in 1916 placed an understandable strain on the loyalty of many Irish men and this tenuous assumption of hostility to the British Crown, even the seventeen-year-old Princess Mary, is the backdrop to this biography. The tin was created as an alternative for Irish soldiers not comfortable with receiving a symbol of their traditional ‘enemy’, the British establishment. This is not credible because the dates do not line up. Although some soldiers eligible for the PMGB would have received it on or around Christmas 1914 and the much larger ‘New Year’ issue of 1915, the Easter Rising was still over a year away. There was no need during 1914 – 1915 for an ‘Irish’ alternative tin.

A number of these tins have been offered for sale as an alternative especially made for officers. Once again this is untrue. The lack of Royal symbology, such as the head of Princess Mary, would go against the social position of the officer class of the British army. Also, and perhaps definitively, the officers had their own PMGBs engraved with their names and regiments on the inside of the lid as shown in the example to Brig. Gen. Eaton (PMGB 008). This practise was only stopped due to a shortage of skilled engravers.

George William Flinders was born in Doncaster, Yorkshire on 15 September 1888 and is first listed in the Royal Navy on 18 June 1907. He served as an Able Seaman
aboard HMS Kent between 3 October 1914 and 14 June 1915 (The National Archives, 2003:np). He left the navy in 1924 having been awarded a long service and good conduct medal. A Monmouth Class heavy cruiser and the ninth ship to bear the name ‘Kent’, it was built in 1901 (Paine, 2017:np).

60 On 7 December 1909 Belgium-born chemist, Leo Baekeland, filed a patent with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for a ‘Method of making insoluble products of phenol and formaldehyde’ which led to the first hard, compact, insoluble and infusible synthetic plastic (Waring/sciencemuseum.org, 2017:np), named ‘Bakelite’.

61 Made from flour, salt and water, this 3” (7.62cm) square had been a staple of British army rations since before the Napoleonic Wars. Hard, because it was very hard when dry and tack, British navy slang for ‘food’, if kept dry could be stored for years. Easy to transport and relatively easy to consume once it had been softened with water and turned into a form of porridge. The biscuits were never intended to be consumed dry; they were much too hard. The favoured method was to either soak them in water, often for several days, or smash them up into fragments with an entrenching tool and then mix with tinned corned or ‘bully’ beef to make an acceptable stew (Weeks, 2009:17).

62 The Medal Index Cards (Ancestry, 1997-2020:np) list him as being eligible for the Territorial Force War Medal (TFWM), an award given to regular soldiers volunteering for overseas active service from August 1914. The TFWM was awarded instead of the 1914 Star and is a rare award with less than 34,000 issued. None of the other ‘Metcalfe’s’ were in action before the newspaper date of 16 January 1915.

63 The soldier commemorated with the poppy in Figure 8.23 was Private 28688 Miles Monnes Mackintosh of the Highland Light Infantry who was killed on 1 September 1916.

64 The identity of Rifleman ‘Y’ has been withheld as the family are adamant that the image is of him even though it cannot be.
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Appendix 1

PMGB Biographies

This Appendix lists all the individual biographies of the PMGBs from the author’s collection used during this research.

Table 1 shows all the comparative data so far gathered or observed.

PMGB Number – Used by the author to catalogue and identify each PMGB as it came into his private collection and for all others from museums, other private collectors or people interviewed as part of this project (marked ‘i’ after the number).

Original Recipient – marked ‘Unknown’ if the original recipient is unknown.

Associated Names – Familial relationship stated in brackets or ‘cust’ for current custodian.

The categories and classifications of the PMGBs, their contents and accompaniments, that have been used during this research were set out in Chapter 3 and are repeated as follows for convenience when viewing Table 1:

Category 1: PMGB status

This category concerns the presence or absence of the PMGB itself,

1A – Original PMGB present with contents (W), without contents (O).

1B – Original PMGB not present but issue contents or accompaniments present. Original PMGB replaced (R).

1C – Current owner is family members (1Ci), author of this research (1Cii), private military memorabilia collector (1Ciii) or museum collections (1Civ) and ‘other’ (1Cv).

1D – Damaged. Obvious Combat/conflict Damage (1Di), Wear-and-tear, oxidation (1Dii).

1E – Engraved, either in the ‘1914’ cartouche or elsewhere on the PMGB by the soldier himself (1Ei) or if a PMGB Fund engraved inner lid issued to officers (1Eii).
1F – Replacement PMGB. If replaced, by whom, original recipient (1Fi) or family (1Fii)?

Category 2: Original issued Contents and Accompaniments

2B – Cardboard lining.
2C – Christmas card. 1914 issue (2Ci), 1915 New Year version (2Cii).
2D – Christmas card envelope, present (2Dp) or absent (2Da).
2E – Photograph of Princess Mary, present (2Ep) or absent (2Ea).
2F – Smoking pipe, present (2Fp) or absent (2Fa).
2G – Cigarettes – full packet (2GF), partially full packet (2GPF), wrapper only (2GW), cigarettes only (2GC).
2H – Tobacco – full pack (2HFP), partially full pack (2HPF), wrapper only (2HW).
2I – Writing Case – with contents (2IWC), case only, no contents (2I NC).
2J – Alternatives such as acid drop sweets, spice tin, chocolate and sugar sweets.
2K – Original Cardboard Packing Box (or remains of).
2L – Asprey Flint and Tinder Lighter.
2M – Commercial, charitable group or institutional acknowledgement cards.
2N – Identified Substitutes.

Category 3; Contents added to the PMGB after issue either by the soldier, his immediate family or his descendants during the war 1914-18

3A – Private correspondence, letters and postcards, received by the soldier.
3B – Private correspondence, letters and postcards, sent by the soldier.
3C – Photographs, of the soldier (S) or of others (O), framed (i) or un-framed
(ii).

3D – Official military or civil correspondence.

3E – Advertising ephemera not clearly identified as belonging in sub section 2M.

3F – Trinkets, souvenirs, good luck charms and keepsakes either sent from home (H), purchased by soldier overseas (O) or in the UK (U).

3G – Propaganda items.

3H – Religious items.

3I – Souvenirs of conflict.

3Ii – Souvenirs such as buttons, bullets, cartridge casings, shrapnel balls and shell fragments left in their original state, that have not been made into trench art.

3Iii – Objects associated with personal trauma suffered by the original recipient that have evidence of this trauma, such as field service postcards announcing ‘in hospital, wounded’ or the inclusion of a War Service Badge.

3J – Everyday objects other than those issued with the Gift.

3K – Trench Art.

Category 4 – Military memorabilia added by the soldier post-war, 1919 onwards

4A – Service and gallantry medals, medal ribbons, buttons, cap, collar and shoulder badges.

4B – Old Comrades Association badges. Photographs, correspondence and other objects and ephemera, including trench art items, associated with former comrades in arms, regimental associations and life beyond the army.

4C – Other, including non-war related items.

Category 5 – Commemoration and remembrance 1920’s – now.

5A – Original recipient killed or died whilst on active service and all contents
have been placed in the PMGB by family or next of kin.

5B – Contents present that have been placed into the PMGB by the original recipient (5Bi), but later additions placed there by his family after his death (5Bii).

5C – Historically correct contents placed into empty PMGB by either the soldiers’ family as a mark of remembrance or respect, or the current owner to represent accuracy from a collecting perspective.

The following Categories are offered for general information only as these is not empirical evidence to link their characteristics to any specific production stream for the PMGB, either by date or manufacturer. These categories, and their sub-classifications, may be used and deployed later as knowledge grows and the relevant date/manufacturer data becomes available.

Category 6 – Weight (Empty)

Weight will only be given if the PMGB is intact with no holes. The differences in weight will be used as an indicator to the changes in base metal and strip brass used that occurred as supplies, particularly of brass, became challenging.

If a PMGB has holes or sections missing, the entry will also state (RM) for ‘Reduced Mass’ after the weight.

Category 7 – Base Edge Design

This category will record which style of base was used in the PMGB being recorded. If sufficient dating evidence is present this may help to indicate if there was a change in design over time or if the hypothesis put forward in Chapter 3 about the possibility of multiple manufacturers being involved in the construction of the finished brass box. SM is used if the edge is smooth and ST is used if the edge is stepped.

Category 8 – ‘Christmas 1914’ Font and Laurel Leaves around head

Evans (2014:14) notes three distinct styles used for the ‘Christmas 1914’ used in the lozenge below the head of Princess Mary;
Other distinct design differences were noted by Evans (2014:11-15). These differences are:

- Three different styles of the Princess’s head, including significant changes to her hair above her face.
- Three distinctly different five leaf flowers in the circles joining the top and bottom halves of the Laurel Leaf wreath around the head of Princess Mary.

These noted differences have been difficult to identify in many instances as the mechanical wearing down of the soft brass strip has made many of the surface features indistinct.

Notes – Annotated ‘Yes’ if additional notes or observations have been made. Full notes are in the individual biographies that follow Table 1.

Photographs – Also within the individual biographies

Table 1 is intended to be a quick visualisation for as many of the identifiable characteristics so far encountered when analysing and examining PMGBs’, either those from persons being interviewed or those encountered during museum interactions.

Individual Biographies

These allow for the recording of individual characteristics that someway have an effect or impact on the biography of the PMGB being recorded. These are by their...
very nature more qualitative than quantitative and can offer clues to the lifecycle of the PMGB.

ADDITIONAL KEY;

N/A – Not Applicable
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PMGB Number</th>
<th>Original Recipient</th>
<th>Associated Names</th>
<th>Category 1</th>
<th>Category 2</th>
<th>Category 3</th>
<th>Category 4</th>
<th>Category 5</th>
<th>Category 6</th>
<th>Category 7</th>
<th>Category 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001</td>
<td>Harold Haigh MM</td>
<td>Winifred Haigh</td>
<td>1AW, 1Cii</td>
<td>2Ci,</td>
<td>3HSii, 3Hii</td>
<td>4A, 4B</td>
<td>5Bi</td>
<td>142g</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>FS 18/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002</td>
<td>Ernest Haslam</td>
<td>Alice Wright</td>
<td>1AW, 1Cii</td>
<td>2Ci, 2D,</td>
<td>3B, 3D, 3E, 3H, 3I.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5A</td>
<td>136g</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>FS 18/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Donald Manson</td>
<td>John &amp; Barbara</td>
<td>1Aw, 1Cii</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3D, 3li, 3lii, 3J</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5A</td>
<td>129g</td>
<td>SM</td>
<td>LF 18/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004</td>
<td>William Cutting RE</td>
<td>Kezia Eldret</td>
<td>1AW, 1Cii</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3I, 3Fiii, 3J</td>
<td>4A</td>
<td>5A</td>
<td>137g</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>FS 18/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3li</td>
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<td>SF 18/18</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>J Carpenter</td>
<td>‘Lizzie’</td>
<td>1AW, 1Cii</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3COii, 3Li</td>
<td>4C</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>133g</td>
<td>ST</td>
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<td>N/a</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>N/a</td>
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<tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>1AO, 1Cii</td>
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<td>3J</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>135g</td>
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<td>1AC, 1Cii</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>4A</td>
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<td>128g</td>
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<td>2ANST, 2B</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>ST</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>134g</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>FS 18/18</td>
</tr>
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<td>2ASST, 2B</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>102g</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>FS 18/18</td>
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<td>SM</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>028</td>
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<td>Charles Berry</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1BR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>029</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rifleman 'Y'</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1AO</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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PMGB Analysis

PMGB 001 – Harold Haigh
Full biography and analysis Chapter 4 (p84-92).

PMGB 002 – Ernest Haslam
Full biography and analysis Chapter 4 (p92-100).

PMGB 003 – Donald Manson
Full biography and analysis Chapter 4 (p100-105).

PMGB 004 – William Cutting
Full biography and analysis Chapter 4 (p105-110).

PMGB 005 – Unknown
Bullet entry and exit holes, German bullet wrapped in a roll of gauze bandage.
Analysis and images Chapter 7 (p215-7).

PMGB 006 – Unknown (Royal Navy Reserve)
Locket with pin (Brooch), photo of Ryal Navy Reservist (Figure A1.1).
Additional brooch frame and detached pin.
Figure A1.1 PMGB 006 Locket pin brooch, Unknown RNR (Author ©).

PMGB 007 – J Carpenter

Contents: (Figure A1.2) Photograph of ‘Lizzie’ Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), Saxon uniform button, Gospel of St. Mark (WAAC issue 1918) and King Edward VIII coronation badge (1937).

The gospel has ‘J Carpenter’ written inside.

Figure A1.2 PMGB 007 ‘Lizzie’ and J Carpenter

PMGB 008 – Brig. Gen. E O Eaton

Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary Brigadier General) Edmund Octavius Eaton 3/10 Middlesex Regiment. PMGB engraved inside with official engraved message ‘from Princess Mary, 1915’. Image used Chapter 3 (p76).
Contents: 2 x slips of printed paper with Gen. Eaton’s army biography.

**PMGB 009 – Frank K Loyd, Royal Navy**

Contents: Typed paper glued onto inside of lid detailing brief biography (Figure A1.3). Loyd states in note that he received ‘Chocolate’ (singular), unsure if this is from another gift issued at the same time or he in fact was issued the ‘Nurse’ box.

![Figure A1.3 PMGB 009 Typed label, Frank K Loyd (Author ©).](image)

Contents: None.

**PMGB 010 – Unknown**

Entry and exit holes, German bullet. Analysis and image Chapter 7 (p214-5).

**PMGB 011**

Contained in cardboard box of original issue. Analysis Chapter 3 (p55).

**PMGB 012 – Unknown**

Evidence of gilding on embossed lid.

Contents: None.
PMGB 013 – Unknown
Contents: None.

PMGB 014 – Unknown
Contents: P1908 Brass Webbing Buckles, 2 x Large and 4 x Small.

PMGB 015 – Unknown
Contents: Bullet Pencil (2ANST) with Card Liner (2B).

PMGB 016 – Unknown
Contents: None.

PMGB 017 – Unknown
Contents: Bullet Pencil (2ASST) with card liner (2B).

PMGB 018 – Unknown
There is no part of the surface detail and body structure on PMGB 018 that is not damaged in some way or other.

   The lid is dented along each of the edges. The ‘Servia’ corner has a quite pronounced roll over the edge. The lid is heavily indented with examples of pinprick type indentations above the first ‘M’. Slightly to the right towards the ‘France’ lozenge is a raised dent that corresponds to a deep impact inside the lid.

   Sections of the base have corroded away in the two corners directly under ‘Japan’ and ‘Montenegro’. The damage under ‘Japan’ is more extensive at around 25mm long.
PMGB 019 – Unknown

Contents: Next of Kin issue card (3D), issued to next of kin from soldier in the London Regiment around 1916. Image used in Chapter 3 (p74).

PMGB 020 – Unknown

Contents: Trench Art items (3K), biography and analysis Chapter 8 (p203-4).

PMGB 021 – Unknown

Contents: 1915 New Year Cart (2Cii) and smoking pipe (2F).

PMGB 022 – Relic

Lid only. Found on Somme Battlefield. Analysis and image Chapter 7 (p221-2).

PMGB 023 – Unknown


PMGB 024 – Unknown

Worn smooth by excessive polishing. Analysis and image Chapter 7 (p231).

PMGB 025 – Unknown

Lid has been cut out and a clear Bakelite panel added. Conversion into a jewellery box is a possible trajectory. Feminised biography and feminising the object. Analysis and image Chapter 7 (p210-12).
**PMGB 026 – 1914-1920 Fake**

Analysis and image Chapter 7 (p232-3).

**PMGB 027 – 2014 Fake**

Fake of a Fake. Analysis and image Chapter 7 (p234-5).

**PMGB 028 – Charles Berry**

Object was not present for research – used in museum display.

**PMGB 029 – Rifleman ‘Y’**

Object was not present for research – used in museum display.
Appendix 2

Original 1914 Classes and Categories of PMGB Issue

This information, taken from the final report of the Gift Fund Committee published in 1920, not only sets out the timeline of Gift issue, soldiers and sailors at the front being prioritised, but also indicated what Gift accompaniments were intended to go to whom.

It would also appear from this information that members the Navy were never going to get the Asprey Lighter and had the substituted Bullet Pencil listed but the Army were still getting the Asprey Lighter despite the declining of the contract to produce the Lighters by Asprey themselves. It also appears that this report has been pieced together with different documents, from different stages of the Gift planning and just presented as a mere overview.

The distribution of Gifts was prioritised under the heading’s ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’.

A – The Navy and all troops serving at the Front (France).
B – All British, Colonial and Indian troops serving outside the British Isles but not at the Front.
C – All troops in the British Isles.

The Gift contents [accompaniments] were originally set out by the Executive Committee as follows;

Class A.

1. The Navy, including minesweepers and dockyard officials.

   Officers and Men. The embossed brass box, a pipe, an ounce of tobacco, a packet of twenty cigarettes, a bullet pencil case, a Christmas card and a picture of Her Royal Highness.

   Boys. The embossed brass box, a bullet pencil case and a Christmas card.
*Widows or Parents.* The embossed brass box and a Christmas card.

2. Troops at the Front (France).

*Officers and Men – Smokers.* The embossed brass box, a pipe, an ounce of tobacco, a packet of twenty cigarettes, a tinder lighter or one of the miscellaneous articles supplied in place thereof, a Christmas card and a picture of Her Royal Highness.

*Non-smokers.* The embossed brass box, a packet of acid tablets (sweets), a khaki writing case with notepaper and envelopes, a Christmas card and a picture of Her Royal Highness.

Indian Troops.

*Ghurkhas.* The embossed brass box, a pipe, an ounce of tobacco, a packet of twenty cigarettes, a tinder lighter or one of the miscellaneous articles supplied in place thereof, a Christmas card and a picture of Her Royal Highness.

*Sikhs.* The embossed brass box filled with sugar candy, a tin box of spices and a Christmas card.

*Other India Troops (including Muslims).* The embossed brass box, a packet of twenty cigarettes, sugar candy, a tin box of spices and a Christmas card.

*Bhistis (Regimental water carriers).* A tin box of spices and a Christmas card.

3. Men on leave or wounded.
*Officers and Men – Smokers.* The embossed brass box, a pipe, an ounce of tobacco, a packet of twenty cigarettes, a Christmas card and a picture of Her Royal Highness.

*Non-smokers.* The embossed brass box, a packet of sweets, a khaki writing case, a Christmas card and a picture of Her Royal Highness.

4. **Members of the French Mission.**

   *Officers and Men.* The embossed brass box, an ounce of tobacco, a packet of twenty cigarettes, a Christmas card and a picture of Her Royal Highness.

5. **Nurses at the Front (France).**

   The embossed brass box, a packet of chocolate and a Christmas card.

6. **Widows or Parents.**

   The embossed brass box and a Christmas.

7. **Prisoners of War or Interned Men.**

   Gifts under the classifications above but issued upon release.

   **Class B and C.**

   The contents were to be the same as those in the seven groups above with the Christmas card being replaced by the New Year card. (Devonshire et al, 1920/2005, pages 3-4).
Appendix 3

Further Transcribed Interviews

The appeal for persons having a PMGB with a biography, family or otherwise, led to twenty-one recorded interviews taking place. This was too much data to be included in Chapter 5 and the ‘surplus’ interviews are included in full here in this Appendix.

(The identifier numbers continue from Chapter 5)

14. PMGBs of ‘JH’, Battlefield Tour Guide

‘JH’ is based in the United Kingdom, but she conducts tours of the Western Front, Gallipoli, the Normandy Landings and Operation Market Garden, (the campaign around the Dutch town of Arnhem). The tours include the major battlefields of the Western Front including the Somme, Arras, Ypres (Ieper) with a special emphasis around the French town of Bullecourt, which was the subject of her master’s degree dissertation. ‘JH’ specialises in guided tours for Australian tourists, particularly when visiting the sites around the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. She has two PMGBs in her possession.

PMGB Status (1Civ). Contents: PMGB (14a) Original/Accompaniments; 1914 Card (2Ci), 2 packs of Cigarettes (2GF). PMGB (14b) Contents: Added by family/custodian; assemblage of battlefield relics, buttons and badges used as a handling collection (5C).

Both PMGBs were given to her as presents by friends who knew of her professional interest in the First World War. PMGB (14a) came with the 1914 Christmas card and two packets of cigarettes. This may have been because of exchange between two soldiers’, one a pipe smoker who did not want cigarettes, and the other who smoked cigarettes and did not need pipe tobacco. The 1914 Christmas card indicates an early issue of the PMGB. The PMGB is kept at home as part of ‘JH’’s militaria collection.
PMGB (14b) has a different role. It contains spent cartridges, shrapnel, buttons, a pair of identification discs, cap badges and an Australian collar badge. These are used with the PMGB as handling objects by tourists taking the battlefield tours (Figure A3.1).

![Figure A3.1 PMGB and Relics used on Battlefield Tours (Courtesy of ‘JH’ ©).](image)

‘JH’ feels strongly that being able to touch and feel something that was originally either from or associated with the men who served in these locations is essential in conveying tangible meanings of people and place. The PMGB and the objects inside are slightly worn and battered, nothing is ever polished, but they remain strong physical links to the past. They differ from the talismanic bullet-crucifix souvenir of Vincent Sabini (Saunders, 2003:133) in that, although authentic war souvenirs, they have been assembled post-war as examples of what a soldier may have put into a PMGB. Vincent Sabini’s crucifix was made from a German bullet that had wounded him at Messines in 1917 (ibid:133), like the bullet tiepin of Harold Haigh (PMGB 001 Chapter 4).

An interesting and poignant feature of these two PMGBs is that they were both purchased in France. Were they bartered by the soldiers with locals during the war or were they battlefield finds, having been dropped or lost when the soldier was killed or wounded? This raises an interesting issue when looking at the trajectory
through time of an object like the PMGB. If it is found in the United Kingdom, then there is a good probability that the soldier brought it home but when found in France or Flanders then the possibility of him being a casualty becomes more likely (see PMGB 022 Chapter 4).

‘JH’s partner is a former British army soldier who served in Iraq and Afghanistan more recently and recalls the ‘Square Stocking’ gift given to soldiers (see Item 8 S/COM Chapter 6). She was very impressed with the quality and usefulness of the contents of that gift. She noted that it contained items such as ‘wet-wipes’, perfect for soldiers serving in hot, dusty climates. ‘JH’ feels that the PMGB has been mirrored with the Square Stocking by having a similar intention of providing, not only useful gifts, but also letting soldiers know that they are still in people’s thoughts at Christmas even though they are far from home.

‘JH’s final recollection about the PMGB she uses on tour is that whenever she travels abroad it always sets off the scanners at customs. She not only has to declare the contents, but also must show the objects, especially the cartridges, to the customs officers (see Chapter 1, Value, Buying and Selling). These PMGBs, ‘owned’ by the same person has one being used on ‘active service’ in a military setting and the other at home as a keeper of memories.

15. **PMGB of John K, Royal Artillery and Royal Garrison Artillery**

John was a regular soldier, having joined the Royal Artillery in 1903, and served in France, Belgium, Palestine and Salonika. After being demobilised from the army in 1919, John returned to the family home in the village of Braunton, North Devon. He had several different jobs, including that of postman. ‘PN’, his great-grandson, recalls being told that veterans who had reached the rank of Sergeant would automatically qualify for the role of local postman after the war. John had reached this rank and so took the job. John suffered long periods of sickness during his life after the war and ‘PN’ believes it was because of either wounds or the dreadful experiences he endured. This process of viewing the First World War ‘through the prism of shell-shock’ (Leese, 2014:176) still motivates societies’ view of conflict, especially as it becomes ‘the first and most powerful expression of the destructive effects of industrial warfare’ (ibid). John died in 1951.
PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Added by family/custodian; 1971 newspaper article (5C).

The PMGB passed to John’s son, ‘PN’s grandfather, and ‘PN’ recalls seeing it on the mantlepiece along with other brass items. His grandparents had a lot of brass items, some decorative, some souvenirs, all of which were polished by grandmother once every two weeks. ‘PN’ recalls her doing this and vividly remembers that the whole house used to smell of ‘Brasso’ metal polish for days after. ‘PN’s grandfather, known to him as ‘Pappy’, gave him John’s PMGB and service medals in 1971. Pappy knew of ‘PN’s love of history and collecting and ‘PN' recalls that the brass box contained a newspaper clipping from 1971 telling the story of the PMGB. The clipping had been placed in the PMGB by Pappy for the avid ‘magpie’ that ‘PN’ was as a young child.

The PMGB is now in ‘PN’s study, still full of the old coins he collected as a child. It has not been polished for decades, not since the death of his grandmother, but still shows the wear from her previously regular cleaning of it. The object is a powerful link to ‘PN’s grandparents, especially ‘Pappy’, who he was very close to. The PMGB also contains John’s medals, one, the Territorial Efficiency Medal, having been replaced by ‘PN' as the original was lost, ‘PN' thinks that it may have been sold by one of his cousins. The wear on the object is also a link to the touch of his grandmother.

It is at this point that this biography takes an unexpected turn. ‘PN’ is adopted. John, his grandmother, his parents, even his beloved ‘Pappy’, are not part of his true bloodline. Yet there is still a strong bond with three generations of ‘PN’s adoptive family that he regards as his own. It is through this adopted bond that the history and legacy of John lives on through his PMGB and medals and has become part of ‘PN’s own life story and his own biography.

16. PMGB of John T, Royal Engineers

‘IH’ is the grandson of John T who joined the Royal Engineers as a railway engineer in 1914. John was sent to France on 23 October 1914, now with the rank of Corporal. Re received a battlefield commission to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant and
became a Railway Transport Officer. John’s family were yeoman farmers from the county of Buckinghamshire. The family owned their farm, they were not tenants and so, although not landed gentry, were comfortably off.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Original/Accompaniments; none. Added by soldier; none. Added by family/custodian; none.

At some stage during his time in the Royal Engineers, John made the acquaintance of someone, also serving in the Royal Engineers, from the Pilkington family, a major glass manufacturer based in St. Helens, Lancashire. He was given a job in sales at Pilkington after finishing his war service and retired in 1963, having reached the senior position of Sales Director within the company.

John is one of several PMGB recipients whose biographies have been studied for this research that have benefited from having extensive and informative family research having already done. ‘IH’ has fond memories of his grandfather who he recalls as living a very well-travelled and cosmopolitan life. John’s life of travelling, not only around the country but also occasionally around the globe, has fed into a family memory process that includes the PMGB. The PMGB was kept in a glass fronted display cabinet along with his medals and other items of family military memorabilia. Also present in the case was John’s wife’s collection of souvenir crested teaspoons.

These inexpensive objects were collected from every different place John or his wife, ‘IH’s grandmother, either visited with work or during family holidays. This became a regular family ritual; each trip would be ‘commemorated’ with a crested teaspoon which went into the same place as other signifiers of ‘IH’s grandparent’s life’s experiences. Crested teaspoons would, according to Belk (1995:63), fall into what he refers to as ‘type B, aesthetic collector’ (ibid) as opposed to ‘type A, taxonomic collector’. They are generally very different in size and made from different metals including silver, so could not be easily categorised except in a very broad sense. What they represented for ‘IH’s grandparents was a series of places visited, rather than the object itself. These objects also serve another purpose as they now act as memory markers for ‘IH’s recollections of his grandparents. They may also represent what Stewart (1993:70-103) refers to as the ‘Gigantic’, where a spoon from Paris could be used represent the whole of France. We may also
postulate that a PMGB could represent the entire First World War (Gigantic) or, as in this case, John (Miniature).

All these objects, including the PMGB, were backed up with a comprehensive photographic and written archive. Each teaspoon could be linked to numerous photographs taken at the place the spoon was purchased from. Similarly, with the PMGB, letters and photographs from John and his wider family’s war service were also kept, physical objects like medals in the display case and printed ephemera in filing cabinets.

‘IH’ inherited the display case with contents and the archive after his mother died. He has not only maintained the archive but has added to it over the years. This now includes the family commemorator and remembrance of four great uncles, all of whom were killed during the war.

The PMGB, as well as the crested spoons, are ‘IH’s physical and tangible link back to his grandparents, parents and wider family. They are now gone but not forgotten, and these objects, including John’s PMGB, ‘brings into focus the difference between objects as functional parts of the world and as special items by which to remember’ (Radley, 1990:56).

17. PMGB of Edward P, 4th Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment

‘JK’ is Edward’s great-nephew. Edward came from a large working-class family from Stamford, Lincolnshire. Both he and his older brother Jack, ‘JK’s’ grandfather, worked at the local brickworks. Jack had a serious accident, losing two fingers, which ‘JK’ thinks probably saved his life as he was exempt from military service.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Original/Accompaniments; Bullet Pencil (2A/NST). Added by soldier; Cigarette Card (3E). Added by family/custodian; None.

Edward was with the Lincolnshire Territorial before the war and joined the 4th Lincolns in 1914. His date of entry into France is unclear. His medal index card indicates that he was only entitled to the British War Medal and Victory Medal, not the 1914/15 Star, indicating that maybe 1916 was the date. At some time in 1916 he
was awarded a Silver War Badge (SWB), although the card entry notes this was removed from the official record. This means he was injured or wounded sufficiently badly enough to be honourably discharged from service and given the ‘For Services Rendered’ SWB. But instead of returning home, Edward enlisted with the Sherwood Forrester’s (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) and returned to Flanders. The Sherwood Forrester’s were a hard-working pioneer battalion and Edward’s former life in the brickworks would have given him the strength and stamina for the battalion, despite him only being 5’3 1/2” (161cm) tall. Edward was killed on 27 September 1917. ‘JK’ inherited his great uncles PMGB from his mother who had inherited it from her father, Edward’s brother Jack. The only remaining accompaniments inside the PMGB were the bullet pencil and single John Player’s cigarette card depicting a French Hussar. This puts the possible date of issue to 1915, perhaps even early 1916, as the pencil has the nickel tip rather than the silver one.

The PMGB was kept wrapped up in a piece of velvet in a draw and would only be brought out occasionally. ‘JK’ recalls as a young child being taken to Stamford’s War Memorial by his grandfather Jack and being shown Edward’s name. He also remembers seeing a framed Bronze Memorial Plaque (Death Penny) on the wall of his grandfather’s front room. Grandfather was proud of his brother and treated the PMGB with reverence. ‘JK’ noted that his grandmother, however, was not so disposed to it or any of the other memorabilia associated with the war. After finding some silk postcards sent home by Edward, Jack wanted to frame them and have them displayed. Grandmother refused. ‘JK’ is unsure why she would have felt so aggrieved towards the silk postcards or the PMGB and speculates that it may have been that her favourite brother, ‘JK’s great uncle, was killed in the war, but she would never talk about it. The PMGB became a trigger of bad memories. The differences in grief between grandmother and grandfather here is gendered and they ‘strike different poses’ (Winter, 2006: loc 1056).

The PMGB is now on display along with all the associated family memorabilia, military and the evidence of many happy travels abroad and ‘JK’ hopes that it will remain in the family for the future generation to appreciate the life and sacrifice of Edward.
The following interview is in the form of a question-and-answer session. The person being interviewed, ‘ML’, is deaf so telephone or streamed data gathering was not going to work. The author created a framework of questions based loosely around the structure of the other interviews held so far. The questions are italicised, and ML’s replies are below each question. Details in square brackets, [], have been added by the author.

18. PMGB of Walter T, 10th (Service) Battalion, Devonshire Regiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who was the original owner of the tin?</td>
<td>Walter T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your connection to him/her?</td>
<td>He was my grandfather on my father’s side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What regiment did he serve in?</td>
<td>Devonshire regiment [10th (Service) Battalion]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was his army number?</td>
<td>He seemed to have had had two, 13020 and 346005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did he join the army?</td>
<td>He joined up 21-10-1914, this was 2 weeks before his 17th birthday! (Born 04-11-1897) [Walter put his age as 19 years and 210 days on his Short Service Attestation Form. He joined in Exeter, five weeks]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
after his older brother Edward. They were both in the 10\textsuperscript{th}].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When did he go overseas?</td>
<td>I don't know but he received a '15 Silver Star and the Theatre of war is listed as France and the date of entry therein is 22-09-1915 [Walter entered France on the same day as his brother, Edward. 10\textsuperscript{th} was sent to Salonika November 1915.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did he die?</td>
<td>06-09-1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you know him/her?</td>
<td>Yes, I have very fond memories of a kind, gentle man. Often smoking a pipe and walking around the farm in his mole skin waist coat which as children he told us was made from real moles!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you remember how he interacted with the tin?</td>
<td>I don't recall seeing the box as a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the brass box go to anyone else after his death?</td>
<td>It passed to my father after his death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did they interact with it?</td>
<td>It was kept on the bookshelf with some other pieces of brass, a letter opener marked Ypres, and a shell case decorated with oakleaves and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
marked Ypres. Souvenirs of a later visit to France I believe.

*Did anyone else have the brass box before you?*

No, only Dad

*When and how did you receive it?*

I rescued it and a few other pieces after my Dad died in April 2015 and my sister was having a 'clear out'. So lucky I visited that day!!!

*Was there anything with it or inside it?*

No, it was empty

*Where is it kept in your home?*

I keep it on my bookshelves, with family photos.

*What do you think of when you look at it?*

I feel in awe at what those young men did, no more than children really, yet such a strong sense of duty and patriotism.

*How does it make you feel?*

I feel unhappy that I never spoke to Grandad about his experiences, 5 years of his young life. He was so badly injured in France that he was invalided out of the army in March 1919 with a pension. We never talked about that war as a family, Dad was in the second World war and it was just something that every family shared. We never realised then what an extraordinary thing they had all done. We only have a
few stories from my Dad
But also, happy memories, he was a wonderful grandad, always had a sweet or sixpence in his pockets for us.

Further information about Walter and his elder brother, Edward, who was in the same regiment as him and went to France and Salonika at the same time, prompted the following from ‘ML’;

WOW, that's amazing, thank you so much for this. We have known so little and not been able to find out much either.

Grandad (Walter) had two older brothers Edward, born 03.11.1893 (married May P in 1926 and died 1958) and Albert, born 29.12.1895. I'm afraid I don't know any more than that.

We knew Grandad was injured; the story goes that he was shot in the body when they went 'over the top' while his comraded got shot in the head as they were slower. His life was saved because there was an American doctor who was able to remove his spleen, which English doctors didn't know how to. No idea how much of that is true or gotten embellished over the years. And apparently, he used to say that traveling on a camel with his injuries to the hospital was the worst part!

There is also a story of when he was on patrol, he went around a corner and came face to face with a young German, they looked at each other and both backed off and pretended that they hadn’t seen each other. Don't know if this was in France or Salonika?

Again, thank you so much and if I can find out some more, I will pass it
on to you. I have found a stepsister to Walter who had 3 daughter and they might have further info?

Best Regards

Both these ‘conversations’ raised topics that deserve further analysis; the souvenirs from ‘Ypres’ which indicate a possible pilgrimage to the battlefields during the 1920s, the camel journey after being wounded and the encounter with the German soldier and ‘ML’s feelings of sadness about Walter’s experiences, all would have been useful and informative additions to the research data. Unfortunately, the time pressure, the Covid issue and family commitments of both ‘ML’ and the author made this very difficult to achieve.

19. PMGB of ‘Tommy’ D, 24th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps

‘DB’ is ‘Tommy’s’ grandson. Tommy joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1914 and spent the next three years in various training camps around the South West of England. He was sent to France in September 1917 as a stretcher bearer for the Worcestershire Regiment (Figure A3.2).

PMGB Status (1Fi). Contents: Original/Accompaniments; none. Bullet Added by soldier; none. Added by family/custodian; none.
On 27 May 1918, he was captured by the Germans and sent to the Prisoner of War camp at Langensalza, Thuringia, Germany. The British soldiers were sent out to work on local farms. There was little food, and the conditions were poor, Tommy weighed only six stone (38.1kg) when he returned home.

Although it was ‘DB’ who was interviewed for this research, the PMGB is his mother’s, Tom’s daughter. ‘DB’s mother is 89 and after having a bad fall now resides in a care home. The PMGB was one of the few items she insisted were retained when her own home was sold and her possessions either sold or distributed to the family. It sits on her television table alongside important family photographs in her very small room in the care home. She also has one of the ceramic poppy’s that were part of the ‘Blood Swept Land and Seas of Red’ installation from the Tower of London 2018.

Tommy died in 1974. The PMGB had been kept and religiously polished by his daughter, ‘DB’s mother, right up until she went into the care home.

Tommy was entitled to the PMGB but the object in the family’s possession was not issued to him. Whilst a prisoner of War in Germany, Tommy had bartered some food in exchange for the PMGB with another prisoner as he needed somewhere to keep his cigarettes. Maybe it was one of the other prisoners...
photographed with him during his captivity (Figure A3.3).

![Figure A3.3](image)

**Figure A3.3** Tommy (cross above head) with other British Prisoners of War 1918 (Courtesy of ‘DB’ ©).

Tommy had told the story of how he got the brass box to his mother, who in turn told it to ‘DB’ and his cousin, that a few days after the barter had taken place the Germans executed the other British prisoner. The reason why he was executed, or even his identity, are unknown.

This presents an intriguing biography for this PMGB. It is not the original issued to Tommy as it seems that he never received or claimed a PMGB, but this had remained with him until his death, when it passed on to his daughter.

The motivation behind keeping his executed comrades PMGB is unknown. Winter (2006:264) notes that there is substantial literature around the subject of ‘survivors guilt’ and this may have been the case here although it is unlikely Tommy would have known the other soldier’s fate when he bartered the PMGB. Like so many biographies encountered with the PMGB and other mementoes of conflict, the back stories were kept very close and private, rarely being told to anyone else with only the soldier himself knowing the full story. Perhaps this is why the very essence of memory and memorial is personal and fleeting rather than public and enduring.

### 20. PMGB of Robert D, Durham Light Infantry

‘OK’ is the youngest person so far interviewed for this research, although not the
youngest to have been made a custodian of a PMGB. As a recent university graduate she is about to embark on a career as a teacher. The original recipient of the PMGB was her great-great grandfather’s, Robert, from East Lancashire who served with the Durham Light Infantry.

PMGB Status (1Ci). Contents: Original/Accompaniments; none. Added by soldier; Silver War Badge (31ii), 2 x ‘sweetheart’ badges ((D4). Added by family/custodian; None.

Robert served in Egypt, France and Flanders, before being wounded. He was entitled to wear a Silver War Badge and was finally discharged from the army in 1919. His PMGB passed to his daughter, ‘OK’s grandmother, then to her son, ‘OK’s father, before coming to ‘OK’ herself. She recalls the PMGB as being part of a large collection of military related family memorabilia. The PMGB contains a cigarette lighter, two ‘sweetheart’ broaches, one Durham Light Infantry and the other East Lancashire Regiment, and Robert’s Silver War Badge. No photographs exist of Robert in uniform but ‘OK’ has an image of him as a young child and one taken much later in his life along with his wife.

‘OK’ has actively sought further information about Robert from various military museums and archives to expand her knowledge of his military service and to try and find a photograph of him taken during the First World War. She views the PMGB as not only a physical reminder of her own family, but also representative of all the young men who went to war but did not return home. ‘OK’ has also been moved by the plight of some of the returning soldiers who were forced to sell their medals to feed their families during the 1920s.

Robert’s service medals were stolen from ‘OK’s grandmothers’ flat some years ago, but she has obtained some modern replacements that reside in the PMGB. The intention is to keep and pass on the stories, archive and memorabilia eventually to her own children, thus keeping Robert’s memory alive.

21. PMGB of ‘Robert’ or ‘Willy’?

‘AT’ has two PMGB’s in his possession. One, acquired from an internet auction
‘website some twenty years ago, that is used as a handling object for visitors during trips to First World War battlefields where ‘AT’ works as a guide (Figure A3.4). The PMGB contains a spent .303 cartridge, examples of metal and fibre identity tags, a ‘trench’ lighter and a 1916 dated officer’s trench whistle. The other has been with his family for decades but there is some confusion as to who originally owned it.

**Figure A3.4** PMGB and relic contents used by ‘AT’ during Battlefield Tours (Courtesy of ‘AT’ ©).

Robert, ‘AT’s paternal grandfather, was one of the last people in Lancashire to be attested under the Derby Scheme, a process whereby men could agree to military service but continue their civilian occupations until required, in December 1915. People who had attested to the Derby Scheme wore an armband with a crown on it to show they had volunteered for active service. Robert eventually joined the 8th Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment on 11 May 1916 and entered the trenches at Arras on Christmas Day 1916. He was not ‘in the King’s uniform on Christmas Day 1914’ and so was not eligible to receive the Gift.

Robert died when ‘AT’ was ten years old and, although he has fond memories of his grandfather and was saw the evidence of bullet wounds to his arms, evidence of the embodiment of many who suffered such wounds during the war (Bourke, 1996:15). ‘AT’ remembers the PMGB as always being there in his home but again, never asked his grandfather about it.

Another possible family contender for the Gift was Willy Fox, Royal Army Medical Corps, ‘AT’s maternal grandfather but there is no conclusive evidence for
this being the case. It could have even been purchased as a brass collectible without any family collection at all. ‘AT’ recalls that his mother was an avid collector of brass objects and would polish all of them at least once a week. He can still remember the smell of ‘Brasso’ metal polish. The ritualistic cleaning of metal objects associated with conflict is acknowledged as being a possible part of a healing or remembrance process (Saunders 2004:15) but given that ‘AT’ s mother applied the same rigor to cleaning all the other brass items, including simple horse brasses, could this perhaps have been nothing more than ordinary household cleaning? The PMGB may have been collected simply because of the artistic merit of the object.

Although the provenance of the PMGB is questionable given the lack of definitive family information available, ‘AT’ still feels an affinity with the object. There were family members who served during the war and it could have come to them, either issued or gifted, at some time in the distant past. The PMGB has resided with ‘AT’s family for so long that it has become part of his biography and will stay so into the future.
Packaging and Identity

The relationship of wrapping/packaging and identity impacts directly on the Bronze Memorial Plaque or ‘Death Penny’ that was given to the next of kin as an individual token of gratitude for their sacrifice. ‘Death Pennies’ became the focus, along with service medals, photographs and even PMGBs, of private shrines. Even the regular polishing of the bronze became a comforting and therapeutic ‘ritual of remembrance’ (Saunders, 2004:15).

As time passes and those close relatives pass on, the identity of the plaque can be lost. There is still a name but nothing else to differentiate the identity behind it. The plaque (complete with packaging) in Figure A4.1 is named to Herbert Edward Wright but, according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission two men with that name died during the war, one served with the Rifle Brigade and the other with 2/4 Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. One died on 1 September 1918 aged 21 years and the other on 22 August 1917. The soldier from the Rifle Brigade was from Didsbury, Manchester, the other from Streatham, London. The question here is which Herbert Edward Wright is this plaque commemorating?

Figure A4.1 Bronze Memorial Plaque, Herbert Edward Wright (Author ©).
Figure A4.2 gives the answer, thanks to the fortuitous survival of the packaging, the address label is still present. The plaque was sent to Mr E Wright, 141 Mitcham Lane, Streatham, S.W. 1[?]. This was the memorial plaque for Private 200270 Herbert Edward Wright 2/4 Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. Without the packaging addressed to his father, also Edward, this would have been impossible to confirm.

![Image of address label](image)

**Figure A4.2 Original address label for Plaque (Author ©).**

The circular bronze memorial plaque was first placed in an envelope with a hand-written six-digit number on it and a ‘covering letter’ bearing a facsimile of King George V’s signature. This was in turn placed in a stiff cardboard case with the top triangular flaps opening like a flower. Also added was an acknowledgement slip for the recipient to fill in and send back to the issuer. This was all then placed in a slightly larger square envelope and sent out to the next of kin. The now typed address label also contained a typed version of the six-digit number, in this case 412816. This number probably corresponds to the list held by the issuing Memorial Plaque Factory at Acton but, as no official records can be found, this is only an assumption.

This packaging’s survival has a poignant irony about it, as it was never removed – the ‘Death Penny’ package was never fully opened and discarded. It did
not become part of the commemoration and remembrance process for the Wright family, more likely it was another symbol that further compounded their grief at losing a much-loved son and brother, an object which ‘languished, overlooked in drawers and cupboards’ (Dunne, 2012:6). Another irony here is that this act of grief by the family in rejecting the memorial plaque has allowed it to retain its real identity and so therefore the identity of Herbert.