



Local History Collection

26 - The story of Corporal Charles Eggleton

Spring 2025

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Corporal Charles Eggleton

1st Battalion Princess Charlotte of Wales's Royal Berkshire Regiment



The late Corpl. C. EGGLETON, Braywood
(champion light-weight boxer in India for three years).
Died of wounds.

Charles Eggleton was born in 1885 to Charles (a domestic gardener) and Amelia Eggleton of 4 Belle Vale Cottages, Coningsby Lane, Fifield. It is very likely that he attended Braywood First School for his education and by the age of 16 he was working with his father as a domestic assistant gardener, still living at home with his parents and two younger sisters Elizabeth and Edith.

In early 1903, aged 18, Charles enlisted in the 1st Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment as a private and spent 1903 to 1905 training and serving in the UK and Ireland. Then in 1905 the 1st Battalion went to India as part of the British Army's routine deployments to maintain stability in the British Empire and possibly to relieve or join the 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment.

Whilst in India, Charles was the army lightweight boxing champion for 3 consecutive years and a member of the winning 1909 Sirhind Brigade Boxing Team. Charles eventually became the Regimental Boxing Instructor.

Boxing was a common sport in the British Army in the early 1900's, especially in India. It was considered a 'school of manhood' to build fitness, morale, team spirit and unity. In many regiments it was compulsory to box, even in the hot, dry climate and commanders organised boxing matches in the afternoon against other platoons. It was considered that the sport helped soldiers prepare for battle.

Charles was still serving in India in 1911 and came back to the UK sometime before Summer 1914 as part of the 1st Battalion and took some time off from the army on furlough, pending discharge.

At this time there was a Hippodrome in Maidenhead built in 1910 by George Gude. The Hippodrome Picture Theatre with 1,500 seats was tucked away down by Chapel Arches on the floodplain, The Hippodrome held a variety of different types of performances including Drama, Opera, Boxing matches, etc.

On Wednesday 22nd July 1914 a boxing match was held at the Hippodrome between Charles Eggleton (at that time Lightweight Boxing Champion of Berks, Bucks, Hants and Oxon) versus Bill England (also lightweight Champion of Berks, Bucks, Hants, Oxon and upcoming lightweight Champion of England). It was advertised as the 'Star' turn in a series of boxing matches.

No Contest has aroused the interest, nor has the demand for tickets at such an early date been so great, as for this contest.

Bill England

Versus

Pte. C. Eggleton (Royal Berks)

Challenger

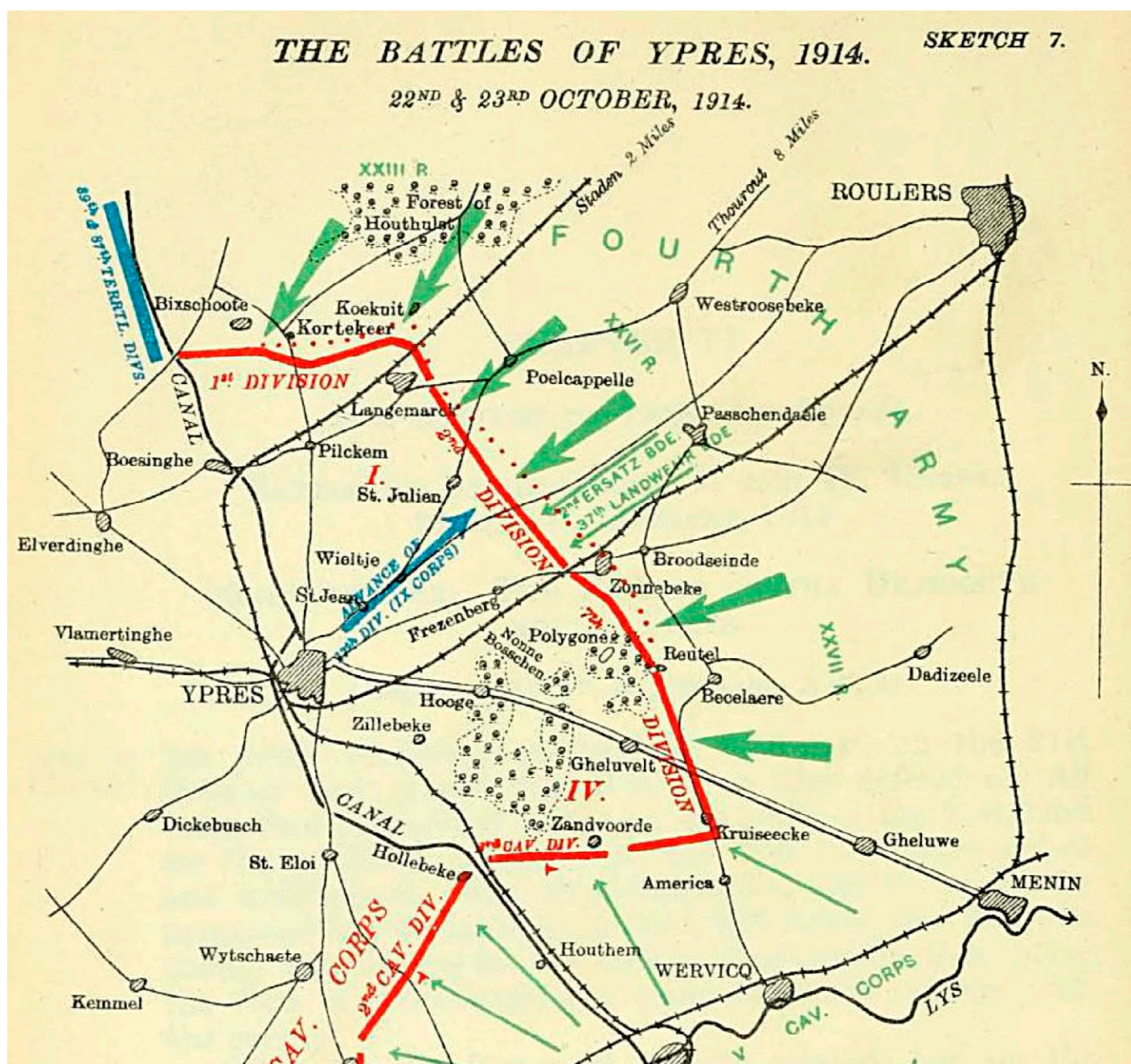
The programme was said to be the 'most expensive ever staged here'. The match began at 10pm and was the last event in the programme. The match was awarded to Eggleton in the 6th round. The competitors shook hands, Bill England was exhausted and retired to the dressing room and collapsed. He became unconscious and in a critical condition. Sadly Bill England died the following morning in hospital with a fractured skull.

There was a possibility of charging Eggleton with manslaughter but at a 7 hour Coroner's inquiry held the following week the Jury's verdict was '*Accidentally killed by a blow on the temple inflicted by Charles Eggleton in a lawful boxing contest held at the Maidenhead Hippodrome, by reason whereof he fractured his skull and died at the Maidenhead Cottage Hospital*'.

Charles was back training with the 1st Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment on the 4th August at Aldershot and then preparing to sail to France as part of the 6th Brigade in the 2nd Division, following the outbreak of World War 1.

The Royal Berkshire Regiment were known as 'The Biscuit Boys' because the regimental depot, Brock Barracks was located in Reading not far from the Huntley and Palmer biscuit factory, who supplied biscuits to the British Army for many years.

Charles went on to fight in the 1st Battle of Mons and its subsequent retreat, his first major action was at the bridge on the Sambre, near Maroilles on 24/25th August and by September 7th the battalion had reached Le Poteau, a 236 mile march in 15 days. By mid-September after the Battle of the Marne and Aisne they settled into trench warfare at La Metz Farm and from 22nd October were involved in the 1st battle of Ypres.



On the 26th October 1914 the 1st Battalion faced heavy shelling and Charles was badly wounded in the head and was moved to the Allies' Hospital in Boulogne, France. He had previously written to his parents (now living at Down Place, Windsor Road following a spell living at Rosedale on the Fifield Road) about his experiences in the trenches.

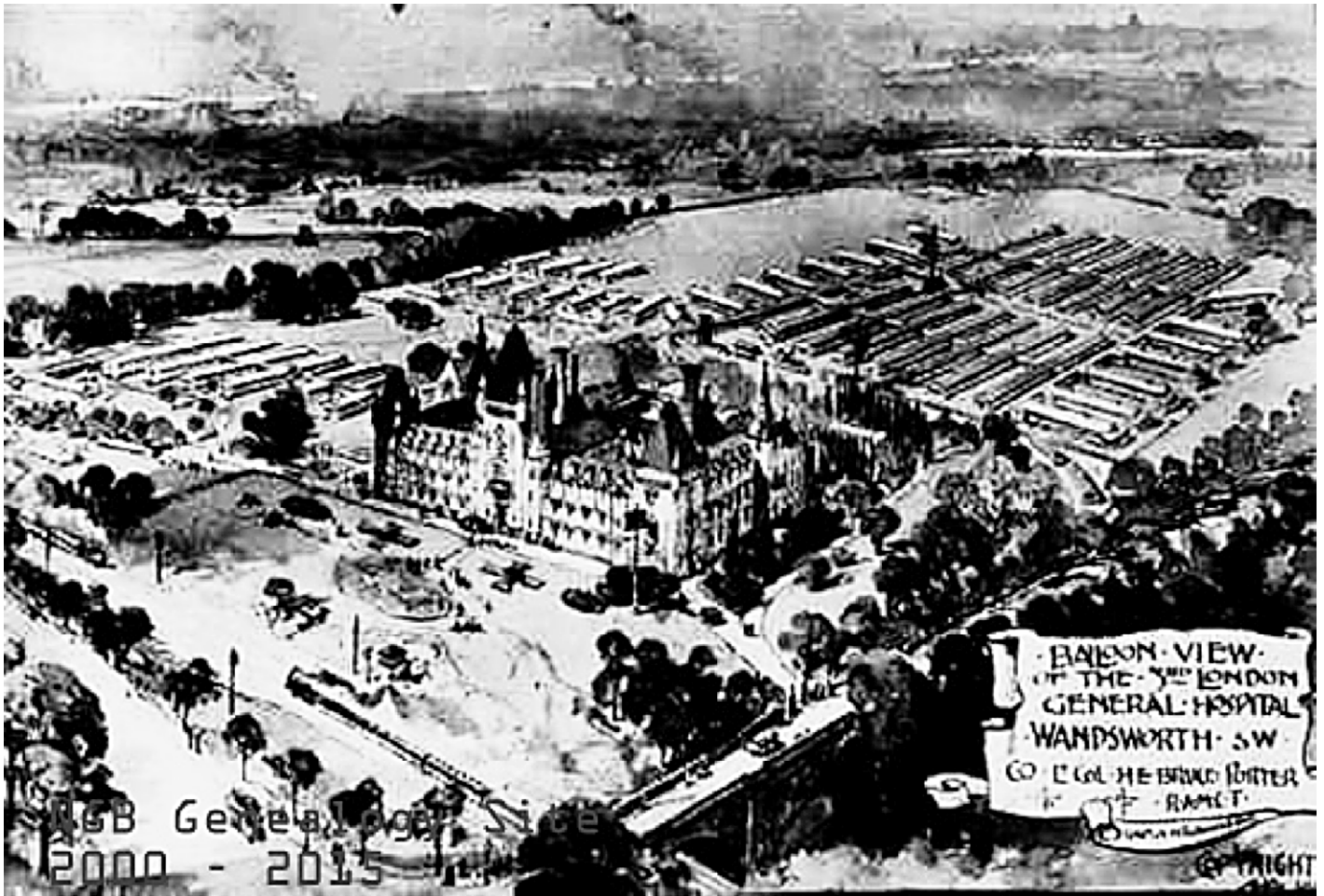
"We have been in the trenches for some time. We can't shift the devils from here. We hear the little Gurkhas are not far away. They are the boys for these hills.

I very much appreciate the cocoa Laura sent me and shall be glad if you will send me some occasionally. I have properly given 'neck oil' best and the boys say how well I look. A week ago our trench fell in on us. A good job it was on our feet. It caught three of us. We had a good laugh afterwards and when the boys heaved the big lumps off we had a 'Woodbine' before we got the remainder off".



The Royal Berkshire Regiment in the trenches, 1914

By 18th November 1914 Charles was being looked after at the Military London General Hospital, Wandsworth, for wounds received in action but sadly died on 6th February 1915.



Military London General Hospital, Wandsworth

Corpl. Charles Eggleton's funeral was held on Wednesday 10th February 1915 at Bray Cemetery (Windsor Road) and was attended by a large number of family and friends. The Coldstream Guards meet the coffin at the South Western railway in Windsor and the coffin was transported to Bray Cemetery by a gun-carriage. The Royal Berkshire Regt. was represented by Sergt. Denham from Portsmouth, who brought a wreath in a glass case from his comrades in the Regiment. Mr and Mrs Eggleton sincerely thanked all kind friends for the sympathy shown to them in their great loss, also those who sent wreaths.

Corporal Charles Eggleton was awarded the Victory, British and the 14 Star (with clasp) medals. He is remembered with Honour on both the Braywood Memorial Hall Plaque and the Bray Memorial stone.

Links to online background material - click on an image



Dashing White Sergeant - quick march of the Royal Berkshire infantry Regiment 1914



First Battle of the Aisne



First Battle of the Marne



First Battle of Ypres



Bray Cemetery, Windsor Road



Bray Memorial stone