**A Birmingham Pals Badge** by **Simon Wilson**

In the early days of the Great War, as we know, there was a great surge of patriotism, which manifested itself in several ways. There were 299,000 volunteers for military service in August 1914 and 463,000 in September. After that it tailed off dramatically and the authorities recognised that they couldn't rely on patriotic enthusiasm alone to produce the quantity and quality of recruits they needed. A number of recruitment strategies were used, including Pal's Battalions.

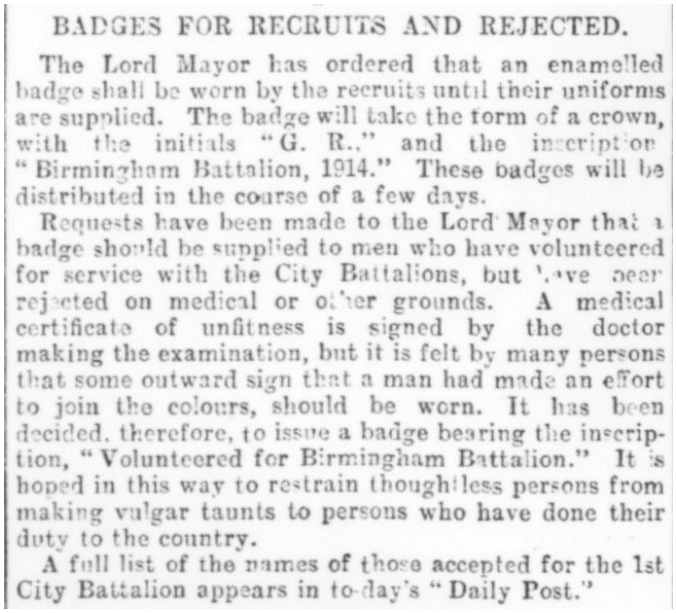
The thinking behind a Pals battalion, in the minds of the military, was that people would be more inclined to join up if they were with friends and people they had something in common with. This might be based on geographical, professional, or even class factors. There were eventually five Public Schools Pals Battalions, for instance. Sir Henry Rawlinson wrote from the War Office to a friend of his (a retired major, and active stockbroker) seeking his help in recruiting a battalion for the Royal Fusiliers, suggesting that many people working in the City "would be willing to enlist if they were assured that they would serve with their friends". These recruits became the first Pals Battalion - the 10th (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers (also known as the Stockbrokers Battalion). They even had their own numbering system, using the prefix STK with their army numbers.




Lord Derby announced he wanted to raise a battalion from the men of Liverpool. Within days, the city provided enough recruits to fill four battalions. Other towns and cities followed this lead. The subject of Pals battalions, is too large to cover here. For our purposes we just need to know that Birmingham recruited three city battalions (*left*), which became the 14th, 15th and 16th Battalions, Royal Warwickshire Regiment. They were raised in Birmingham by the Lord Mayor and a local committee, but after attestation remained living at home and wearing civilian clothes, as the Army did not have the capacity to accommodate, feed and clothe them. Discussion in the Birmingham newspapers revolved round recruiting men in top physical condition from non-manual occupations and the middle classes.

At the same time, the White Feather Campaign was organised by retired Admiral Penrose Fitzgerald and a group of 30 women, later augmented by many others, including Suffragettes, who suspended their campaign of civil disobedience to support the war effort. Their strategy to aid recruiting was to give out white feathers to young men of military age and shame them into enlisting. It was not universally popular and, as one MP pointed out, handing out a white feather "requires no courage on the woman's part, but merely a complete absence of modesty "

There were many men who were unfit, or unable to join up for other reasons. At least three awards of white feathers were implicated in suicides, though the most famous misdirected white feather was probably the one given to George Samson. He was badly wounded in April 1915 during the Gallipoli landings and was dressed in civilian clothes whilst travelling to a reception to celebrate the award of his VC when he was given a feather.



BADGES FOR RECRUITS AND REJECTED.

The Lord Mayor has ordered that an enamelled badge shall be worn by the recruits until their uniforms are supplied. The badge will take the form of a crown, with the initials "G. R.." and the inscription "Birmingham Battalion, 1914." These badges will be distributed in the course of a few days.

Requests have been made to the Lord Mayor that a badge should be supplied to men who have volunteered for service with the City Battalions, but have been rejected on medical or other grounds. A medical certificate of unfitness is signed by the doctor making the examination, but it is felt by many persons that some outward sign that a man had made an effort to join the colours, should be worn. It has been decided, therefore, to issue a badge bearing the inscription, "Volunteered for Birmingham Battalion." It is hoped in this way to restrain thoughtless persons from making vulgar taunts to persons who have done their duty to the country.

A full list of the names of those accepted for the 1st City Battalion appears in to-day's "Daily Post."

That was why the Birmingham Battalion badge was made, allowing volunteers to prove they had enlisted, even though they may have been living at home and wearing civilian clothing as they waited to be called up. A number of other towns, such as Bradford and Bristol, also provided badges, and the Silver War Badge was later provided to prove men were not avoiding service. It was even suggested that there should be a badge for men who had attempted to enlist but had been turned down. This does not seem to have been acted on in the UK, though in Australia rejected volunteers organised themselves and wore badges to show they had tried, but failed, to join up.

The badges for the first two Birmingham battalions were presented at a parade at the Drill Hall on 19 September. That was the day that recruiting for the 2nd Battalion closed. The 3rd Battalion would get their badges later.

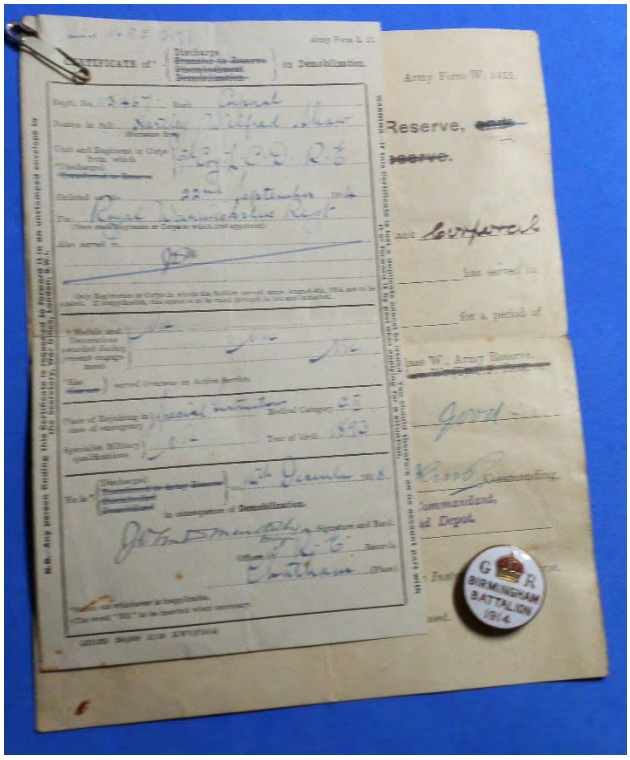
The badge (*below*), is 25mm in diameter and made of brass. It has a white enamel background and the crown has red enamel details. There are two patterns, with slightly different backs. The badges made by Dingley, had W. J. DINGLEY B'HAM on the reverse of the disc and DINGLEY B'HAM on the buttonhole fitting. The badges made by Sale have nothing on the reverse of the disc and H. B. SALE Ltd B'HAM stamped on the fitting, which is smaller and more rounded than the fitting of the Dingley badge. There were 1,107 men in the 16th Battalion when it went into training camp, which suggests that about 3,300 of these badges were made. One wearer of this badge was 16/1020 Pte Hilary Tolkien, brother of the author J. R. R. Tolkien. He served in the third battalion as a stretcher bearer.







I bought this example from an antique shop in the West Midlands about 30 years ago. It is a Sale example and has a name scratched on the back – W.S. Hartley. It came with two pieces of paperwork (*next page*) – a Certificate of Discharge and another for Transfer to Army Reserve W. Wilfred Shaw




Hartley enlisted on 22 September 1914 in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and was discharged to Class W Reserve on 19 June 1917 after serving for 1,000 days. His final discharge was on 14 December 1918 when he was discharged from the 9th Company L. C. D. R. E. with a medical category CII and rank of Corporal.

Having searched for the abbreviation I could not find a suggestion for the meaning of L. C. D. but thanks to David Gray, I now know it is London Command Depot and that Command depots were part of the recovery process for soldiers who were too well for convalescent camps and not yet ready to return to their units. There appear to have been two for the London District – one at Seaham (later Shoreham) which accommodated soldiers from the Guards and London Territorials, and one at Thetford which housed other troops of the London District and Royal Engineers. This would tie in with Thetford being named on his discharge to Class W Reserve and the officer who signed the discharge being described as "Commandant, Command Depot" (something I didn't originally pick up on). Thanks to David for providing this part of the story.

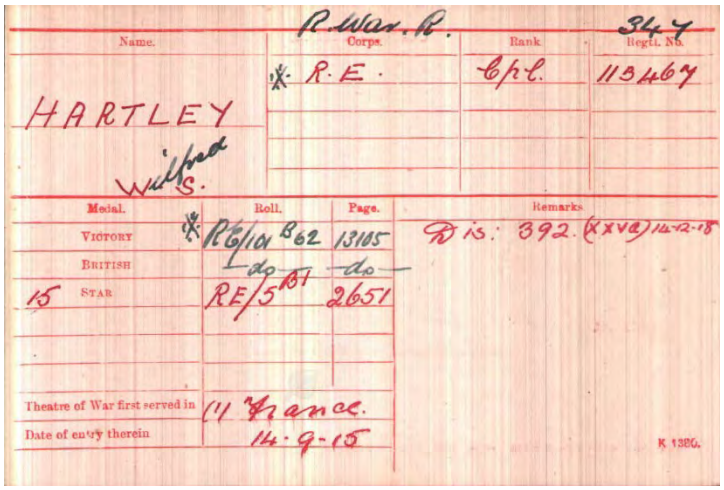
Medical Categories are easier as they are listed online – C II means a man was judged fit for garrison duties at home (being able to walk 5 miles and see and hear well enough for ordinary purposes). If he was fit enough to march 5 miles, rather than walk, and could fire a rifle (with glasses) and hear well, he would have been C I.

The W Reserve (and its Territorial counterpart the W(T) Reserve) was formed by Army Order 203/16 and was for "*all soldiers whose services are deemed to be more valuable to the country in civil than in military employment*." The initial intention was to send home 1,000 men aged over 35 to the jobs currently filled by younger men, who could then be used in the front line. It eventually grew to include more than 1,000 men.

So, from the two pieces of paper accompanying the badge, we already have quite a lot of information, time now, to look for other records.

The 1911 Census shows that he was an Apprentice Dentist, the son of a retired Methodist Minister and living in Sutton Coldfield. The 1921 Census lists him as still living with his parents and his employment as "invalided from Army". He is living in Bournemouth, a fact confirmed by his pension documents, which show him being paid 18/- a week into the 1920s.

Some of his papers have survived. They are mainly medical in nature. He enlisted into the 16th Royal Warwickshire Regiment on 22.9.1914, which we knew. His original number was 16/347, he was 5' 5 ¼" and weighed 115¼ lb. He was discharged as number 113467 of the Royal Engineers on 14.12.18.


R. War. R. 347
Name. Corps. Rank. Regtl. No.
HARTLEY Wilfred S. R.E. Cpl. 113467
Medal. Roll. Page. Remarks.
VICTORY WO/10/B62 13105 Pd is: 392. (XXVa) 12-2-18
BRITISH do do
15 STAR RE/5/B1 2651
Theatre of War first served in (1) France.
Date of entry therein 14.9.15
K 1380.

He went to France on 14 September 1915, which suggests he was already in the Royal Engineers by this time – the 16th Battalion did not land in France until 21 November. He had two minor breakdowns during his time in France but had no time in hospital apart from a month with flu. In 1917 he returned to the UK on leave where he contracted laryngitis and spent 10 weeks in Birmingham Hospital. He was released to Class W, as he had palpitations and faintness and worked as a dental volunteer in the hospital for three months before restarting his dental studies at Birmingham University. He had another breakdown in October, and was admitted to a neurological hospital in Tooting. He was noted in March 1920 as having been in treatment "ever since" and was diagnosed as having neurasthenia (shell shock) and being a "hysterical hypochondriac".

(*Medal Index card above*). There is very little else to be found about him – he disappears from records in 1921 and leaves no trace until 1963 when he seems to have died in Harrogate.

To summarise his service, he joined up as an early volunteer, where he seems to have been a useful soldier, as he was a Corporal when transferred to the RE with a number of other infantry NCOs. He spent two years in France in conditions we can't possibly imagine and ended up in hospital with shell shock, which persisted for some years after the war. He then faded into obscurity. His memory is only with us today because a badge and two pieces of paper turned up in an antique shop. It is, I suspect, a more common story than we realise.