

BULLETIN ISSUE NO. 9 – FEBRUARY 2024



Flash Harry - Sir Harold Malcolm Watts Sargent

Welcome

Ladies & Gents,

Welcome to this February edition of the *HistoryFare Bulletin* and I hope you are all well and settling into the new year. I do hope you enjoyed reading the January edition, sent a couple of few weeks ago and if you have any snippets of local history you would like including in future bulletins, please do send them in.

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to seeing you at a HistoryFare event soon.

Brian

Next Monthly Meeting

Our next monthly meeting will be on this **Thursday, 1st February 2024** at the Melton Mowbray Royal Air Forces Association Tornado Club, Asfordby Road, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0HR at 20:00Hrs.

We will be welcoming Colonel Howard Aran of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Central Texas Wing (UK Branch).

The talk will detail the history of the CAF warbird flying museum (world's largest flying museum), and details of the forthcoming European tour of C47 'That's All Brother' as part of the D-Day 80th Anniversary Celebrations.



The current talk schedule proposed for 2024 can be seen online via [HistoryFare Military Talks Programme - HistoryFare](#)

Admission Cost £3 Seats are to be reserved by email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com

Raffle



Many thanks to those of you who have supported the monthly raffles by donating prizes for use the draws, they have all been gratefully appreciated.

If you would like to donate prizes to future raffles, biscuits, chocolates, wine, beer etc are all acceptable proving they are in date! Books and partwork etc will also be accepted.

Social Media

Keep up To Date by following HistoryFare on the following social media sites:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MeltonHistoryFare>

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Website: <https://historyfare.co.uk/>

Email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com



Sir Harold Malcolm Watts Sargent

Sir Harold Malcolm Watts Sargent, better known as Malcolm Sargent and sometimes referred to as “the Casanova Conductor” or “Flash Harry”. His parents, Henry and Agnes, lived in Stamford in Lincolnshire, but he was born on the 29th April 1895 in Ashford, Kent while Agnes, his mother was visiting a friend there.

Malcom Sargent became an English conductor, organist and composer widely regarded as Britain's leading conductor of choral works.

His father, Henry, was chief clerk at a Stamford coal merchant but was also an amateur musician and local church organist. Before his marriage to Agnes, she had been the matron of the Stamford High School for Girls.

The young Malcolm Sargent won a scholarship to Stamford School, where he studied from 1907 to 1912. At the same time, he was preparing for the musical career that his father envisaged for him. He studied piano and organ, and joined the local amateur operatic society, making his stage debut in The Mikado at the age of 13. The following year saw him make his debut as a conductor when the regular conductor was unavailable.

On leaving school, Sargent was articled to Haydn Keeton, organist of Peterborough Cathedral, and was one of the last musicians to be trained in that traditional way. At the age of 16 he gained his diploma as Associate of the Royal College of Organists, and at 18 he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Music by the University of Durham.

In 1914, at the age of 19, he became the organist at St Mary’s Church in Melton Mowbray where the Canon Richard Blakeney presided. Canon Blakeney’s wife, Alice, was wealthy in her own right and she purchased Mowbray lodge in 1898 on Dalby Road. She was also a very dominant personality in the town, a lady who personified ‘Mrs Elton’ from Jane Austen’s novel Emma. Alice was the parson’s wife of independent means and one who considered herself a woman of taste. She constantly drove her husband to distraction and had a predilection for ‘adopting’ protégés. From the moment Sargent arrived in town, she made him her ‘pet’ and smoothed the way for his way in the community, becoming the leading light at her musical evenings.

Work with he St Mary’s choir was praiseworthy but it was his work with the organ that drew the crowds to Melton. Life as a well renowned organist gave him some satisfaction but not financially. Like many struggling organists, he taught to supplement his income, taking on the role of part time music master at the King Edward VII Grammar School in Melton Mowbray. He was appointed to teach two lessons per week for five guineas a term. His enthusiastic efforts saw a rapid improvement in the standard of choral singing at the school. He also took on a similar role at his old school Stamford Grammar.

He was young and dapper, and very popular especially with the girls, however, his relations with most of the staff was not so close as it soon became clear that although he was an excellent teacher, his sights were set on higher things.

War had been raging in Europe and across the world for over three years and this led to another and more troubling doubt. When he stood in front of the Melton Mowbray Choral Society on 4th April 1918 to direct Elgar's patriotic work, *The Banner of St George*, he must have wondered, as did others, why he was not out slaying dragons himself.

Why was this energetic and young man at home entertaining 'Mrs Elton' while so many of his contemporaries were dying on the battlefields?

Each week, men from the Melton Mowbray Choral Society as well as the local brass bands, left home for military service and many did not return. The Roll of Honour at Stamford Grammar School shows that fifty-five old boys and teachers died in the war.

Here at Melton's King Edward VII Grammar School, 95 Old Grammarians served in the Great War and eight made the ultimate sacrifice: John William Benskin, Leicestershire Regiment; Francis W Boyd Graves, Croix de Guerre, Section Sanitaire; William E Leadenham, Royal Garrison Artillery; Thomas William Peck, Leicestershire Regiment; John B Knowlton Preedy, London Regiment; Sidney Summerfield, Leicestershire Regiment; John Charles Wheatley, Notts & Derby Regiment; Charles James Wright, South Staffordshire Regiment.

Malcolm was actually enlisted for military service at Melton Mowbray on the 19th January 1916 and his age was recorded as 20 years and 271 days. His occupation was listed as an organist and his address as Manor House, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray.



The Manor House, Burton Street and the Blue Plaque

Even though he enlisted in January 1916, he wasn't actually mobilised until the 9th May 1918 when he was mobilised as Private Harold Malcom Sargent 99935, joining the 27th Battalion Durham Light Infantry at Herne Bay in Kent.

In 1915, soldiers unfit for service overseas from the DLI's 2nd and 3rd line Territorial Force battalions, were formed into the 23rd and 25th Provisional battalions. In January 1917, the 23rd Provisional Battalion in Durham was re-named the 26th Battalion DLI, whilst the 25th Provisional Battalion in Gateshead was re-named the 27th Battalion DLI. Neither of these new battalions, whose ranks by 1918 were filled with conscripts, served outside of England and little is known about their activities.

Could it be that a previous rugby injury to his shoulder had prevented him from joining up earlier

and this is the reason why he was posted to the 27th Bn DLI? Regardless of that, he was finally glad to be involved in the war effort, and it was rumoured that he was happy to go to escape the wrath of a local Policeman whose daughter he had seduced.



Private Sargent, (middle row, second from right) Durham Light Infantry 1918

The military camps in Kent, including Herne Bay, were 'stuffy, depressing and full of ill-assorted smells'. His mind was not occupied with thoughts of war, but food, clothes and drains! Coming from the Manor House at Melton to Herne Bay, he was not happy as a soldier, but he worked hard to please his Sergeant Major with immaculate appearance on the parade ground and he marched with the straightest of backs. His appearance soon earned him the nick name of 'Flash Harry' from his comrades and that would stick with him for the rest of his life.

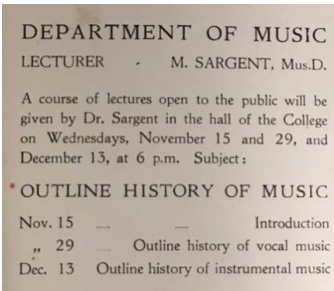
He became good friends with Private Wilfred Aris who was a teetotal Baptist preacher in his former civilian life. During training, the two men became inseparable and when recruits were needed to form a signals unit, both volunteered and were subsequently transferred to prep school at Broadstairs in Kent. Sargent's musical training helped him master Morse Code, and flag and heliograph mirror signals.

In 1918, Sargent displayed symptoms of a runny nose, fever and muscle pains along with breathing difficulties which in turn brought on pneumonia. He was quarantined in a single room along with 20 other individuals who were all suffering with the Spanish Influenza. He says that his recovery was helped by his mate Aris, who smuggled in an endless supply of lemons and oranges.

By the time he had returned to active duty in November 1918, the Armistice had been signed and people were being discharged from the military. Organists were classed as a low priority for discharge but university graduates planning to read for a post-graduate degree were 'category one' and given an early release. As he had already had an offer to read for a doctorate at Durham University as an external candidate, Malcolm was discharged from the Army within two months.

After leaving the Army, he returned to work at St Mary's Church and King Edward VII Grammar School. Although he was a part time tutor at KEVII, he was not listed on the Roll of Honour of Pupils and Masters who served during the Great War.

In 1921, he gained his Doctorate of Music and St Mary's Church gave him a rise in his salary to recognise this. His big break came when early in 1921 Sir Henry Wood visited the De Montfort Hall in Leicester with the Queen's Hall orchestra.



He was the first person to be appointed to the new Music department at Leicester University which was established in the first term of the first year (autumn 1921). Dr Sargent appears to have taught there for the first few years, resigning during the 1923-24 academic year. It was reported in the Leicester Mercury on 18 October 1921 that "The Department of Music would involve no charge at all upon the College. Dr. Sargent would offer courses on the piano and organ and in singing."

As it was his custom to commission a piece from a local composer, Wood invited Sargent to write a piece. Sargent did so – a tone poem, *An Impression on a Windy Day*, a seven-minute orchestral allegro impetuoso. He completed it too late for Wood to have enough time to learn it, and Wood called on him to conduct the first performance. Wood recognised not only the worth of the piece but also Sargent's talent as a conductor and gave him the chance to make his London debut, conducting the work at the Proms – the annual season of the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts – in the Queen's Hall on 11 October of the same year.

In January 1922, he played the part of Gervase Mallory in *The Romantic Age* performance in the King's Hall, sometimes called the Temperance Hall, on King Street.

In the 1920s Sargent became one of the best-known English conductors and in 1924, he left Melton Mowbray for London where he succeeded Boult as conductor of the Robert Mayer Concerts for Children from 1924 to 1939.



Tom Wilkinson and Malcolm Sargent

There is much more to tell about the life of Flash Harry, but for now, I'll finish off with his departure from Melton and save the later history for a later edition maybe.

Local War Medals

In 1901, it was decided that the Melton Mowbray Volunteers and members of the Active Service Yeomanry who served in the 1900 – 1901 Transvaal War in South Africa were to be rewarded with 'Local War Medals' in tangible recognition of their patriotism.



The Local War Medal awarded to Captain R G Muir

The medals, also known as the "Melton Mowbray Tribute Medal", were given to troopers who served during the war with the 65th Company Imperial Yeomanry. The 65th Company was the second unit of Imperial Yeomanry raised in Leicestershire.

It was initially commanded by Captain Walter A. Peake and recruitment for the 65th began on Wednesday, 21st February 1900. Unlike the 7th Company 4th Battalion, which was drawn primarily from existing members of Prince Albert's Own Leicestershire Yeomanry Cavalry, the 65th Company was made up almost entirely of new recruits with little or no military background, but frequently employed in some sort of equine trade.

Both the 7th and 65th Companies from Leicestershire were part of the First Contingent of Imperial Yeomanry that deployed to South Africa in early 1900.

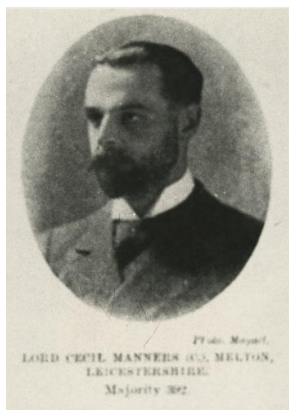
The following article from the Thursday, March 1st edition of The Leicester Daily Mercury newspaper summarized the effort: *“LEICESTERSHIRE IMPERIAL YEOMANRY Formation of a Second Company. When the first company of the Leicestershire Imperial Yeomanry was formed it was thought probable that a second detachment would be asked for, but permission to raise it was not given until last week. Immediately on receipt of the order from the War Office advertisements were inserted in the Press and bills posted on the various hoardings in Leicestershire and the surrounding counties, with the satisfactory result that considerably over one hundred men volunteered for service. They were enrolled at the St. George’s Mission-room, Peel-street, on Wednesday in last week and succeeding days, and there are now one hundred men billeted in the town who have been accepted for service subject to their satisfying the officers of their ability to ride and shoot well. The total number of men required is 116, and there will, apparently, be little difficulty in raising the number. As in the case of the first company, the men do not come from Leicestershire only, the counties of Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Middlesex and Sussex having each contributed its quota. The men selected are all of good physique, and the company will not, it is thought, be in any way inferior to that which has already gone to the front. All the men appear to ride well, many having a particularly good seat. The shooting tests will probably be carried out at the ranges at Trent. They are drilled daily at the Magazine, and are already getting into shape. All the officers have not yet been selected, but Colonel Peake (Leicestershire Yeomanry Cavalry) will be the captain in command, while Captain R. B. Muir, of Melton Mowbray, and Lieutenant F. A. Belville, Stoughton Grange, also of the Leicester Yeomanry Cavalry, will also hold commissions in the company. In addition to this detachment, a number of men are being trained to make good deficiencies in the company now in South Africa by illness or other causes. The War Office have ordered that ten percent of the number of men at the front shall be kept in training and sent to join the company at certain intervals, and there are therefore always about twenty fully trained troopers in Leicester. A detachment of twelve of these reserves are under orders to proceed to South Africa at once, and they will probably depart on Saturday.”*

The medals, were procured and supplied by Jewellers Messrs Bowley & Co of Cheapside/Market Square. The medals were made of silver and on the obverse depicted a ‘Mounted Yeoman and a Volunteer in front of the rolling veldt and the rising sun’. Around the edge are the words “Transvaal War in South Africa 1900-1901.”



Jewellers Messrs Bowley & Co

On the reverse side is the following inscription “Presented by the town of Melton Mowbray to [name] in recognition of his patriotism and valour in the Transvaal War as a [rank] in the [unit].”



Lord Cecil Manners MP for Melton & Leicestershire

On Wednesday 17th July 1901, a reception was held in town to welcome the members of the Imperial Yeomanry and Volunteers who went out from Melton Mowbray to South Africa. Following a service at St Mary’s Church, the parade with the band playing “Soldiers of the King” marched across the Market Place, along Sherrard Street, up Sage Cross Street, King Street, High Street and Leicester Road and into Egerton Park where a large marquee was erected for the banquet. At the ceremony, Lord Cecil Manners MP for Melton & Leicestershire presented certificates for medals to members of the Imperial Yeomanry and Volunteers.

Lord Cecil had himself also served in South Africa as War Correspondent for the Morning Post and was taken prisoner by the Boers near Johannesburg on 30th May 1900.

In total 27 medals were produced and the names of the recipients so far identified include: Captain R.B Muir, Sgt Guyde-Dickinson, Cpl William Sopp, L/Cpl J Naylor, Troopers A Palmer, G Kitchen, H Money, W Morris, B Shepherd, Patrick Nolan, R H Kirkby, A R Kirkby, C Davie, Morgan & Holloway and Ptes Bolton and Green. Medals would also be awarded to those who were not present at the ceremony.

Additionally, medals would also be awarded to the families of those who died fighting for their country in South Africa and these would be inscribed with the words "In Memoriam" at the bottom. Three names of deceased men were Bugler Peasgood of Oakham, Pte Baker of Kirby and Pte Baker of Melton.

Talks & Walking Tours

The next public history tour dates for 2024 are Friday 19th January and Saturday 17th February, both at 10:00Hrs. Tours are £5 per person and last approximately 2 hours. To book a place on one, just email meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com

I am also working on developing new tours for 2024, some relating to the general history of the town and another military history one, based on a particular theme, but more of that to come over the next few months. To keep up to date with future tour dates, keep an eye out on social media and my web page <https://historyfare.co.uk/historyfare-tours/>

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For more information, see my website: [HistoryFare Gift Vouchers - HistoryFare](#)

Till next time!

Please feel free to share this bulletin with whoever you think may be interested.

For any enquiries or to submit articles, please email Brian at meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com