

## The Manchester Regiment 'Men Behind the Medals' project Michelle Hall, Curator

'The Men Behind the Medals' was an ambitious project to research all soldiers that had been awarded medals held in the Manchester Regiment collections. Phase one of this project ran between November 2011 and December 2013 and included 786 soldiers and 2200 medals. A grant of over £50k was awarded by the Esmee Fairbairn Collections Fund (now the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation) to support this undertaking. This included the employment of a full-time researcher, the development and production of a website to host the information, professional photographs of the medals and a hard copy of the website information in catalogue form. The resulting website is a rich resource of information for a range of people especially those researching family history or with an interest in the regiment. The medals cover a range of conflicts from the Crimea, the Boer War, two World Wars and National Service.



Museum of the Manchester Regiment  
The Men Behind the Medals

The Museum About the project

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A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

### Mark Fisher

Mark was born in 1884 in Bath, Somerset. His father was called Alfred and his mother was Sarah. He had 2 older brothers: Alfred and George, and a younger brother called Albert.

In 1891 the family lived at 2 Edward's Place in Bath. Alfred worked as a labourer for a mason. Ten years later the family had broken up. Mark and Albert were living with Harry Osborne and his family at 6 Highway Buildings in Bath. Mark worked as an errand boy.

Between then and 1914 Mark moved to the Manchester area. By the time the First World War broke out in August he had enough of a connection to the city to want to join the 8th City Battalion that was being formed by its workers. He enlisted on the 30th December 1914 and was given the service number 22248. This unit became the 23rd Battalion of the Manchester Regiment and Mark was assigned to XII Platoon in C Company.

Mark and the 23rd Battalion arrived in France during January 1916. We don't know much about what he did during his time in France. The 23rd Battalion served in the Somme Offensive between July and November 1916, seeing combat at Guillemont, Trones Wood and Morlancourt. They also fought around Arras during October.



Photograph of Mark in Tameside  
Local Studies and Archives  
Centre. Reference: MR3/17/182

Example of a page from the Men Behind the Medals website

The first phase of the project included a range of soldiers' stories such as those of VC winner Wilfrith Elstob VC, DSO, MC, Frederick Finucane the youngest soldier ever thought to have joined the Regiment aged 15, and the Vicar of Christ Church Ashton-under-Lyne Canon Alan Johnson MC who had a local school named after him.

In 2015 the Museum of the Manchester Regiment, housed in Ashton Town Hall, closed for refurbishment work on the building and the collections went into storage. This is still the situation. With this in mind it was even more important to create access to the collections in as many ways as possible, including online resources.

When the current curators began work with the collections in 2017 and 2018 respectively there was a list of new medals waiting to be added to the website. As it is hosted externally the website providers have to be paid and this resulted in a new grant application to AMOT in 2020 to add a further 80 soldiers' stories and medals to the website. The amount applied for was a more modest £2,500 to pay a researcher for 8 days' work, have the medals professionally photographed and pay the website hosts (MODES) to upload the information. The application was successful but the subsequent pandemic and working from home brought its own issues



*Photograph of Wilfrith in Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre. Reference: MR4/23/91/81*



*(L to R) Victoria Cross; Distinguished Service Order; Military Cross; 1914-15 Star; British War Medal; Allied Victory Medal with 'Mentioned in Despatches' oak leaves*

in terms of managing the researcher remotely and his ability to access museum records and archival material.

The medals included cover a range of time periods, from Ensign James Hulton Clutterbuck's Crimea medal, an American bronze star medal



*Crimea Medal with 'Sebastopol', 'Inkermann', 'Balaklava' and 'Alma' clasps. Framed with portrait by Edward Hayes, 1854.*

awarded to Lieutenant Cyril Pears during WWII and a scrapbook containing medals and other material relating to Private Donald Murray's National Service.

The pandemic caused inevitable delays getting the project completed and all of the new material went live in December 2021. This also included a number of amendments to the records flagged up in the years since 2013, including additional information sent by soldiers' relatives and researchers.

## **The Benefits**

The benefits of this project are huge. There is the obvious result of an extensive resource for those interested in the subject matter. The website is well used with nearly 17,500 hits since the additional

information was added in December 2021. For museum staff, professional photographs and additional research are invaluable for collections enquiries and displays and exhibitions at Portland Basin Museum, as well as looking forward to the future Manchester Regiment Museum. The website has also resulted in relatives contacting the museum to provide additional information about soldiers listed or to amend existing text. This helps to improve collections records and enhance collections knowledge. Hopefully it also provides reassurance to our users and stakeholders that despite not having a physical museum we are working hard to create access to the collections and raise their profile.

### **Further Development**

We have ideas about how to develop the website with the current format being 10 years old. The soldiers are listed alphabetically but we would like different search functions enabled, such as by conflict. Many of the soldiers featured have other items in the collections and it would be wonderful to include images and detail of these as well as archive items relating to them where relevant. The ultimate hope is that the information is in a form where the curators can add new medal sets to a website as they enter the collections rather than having to rely on grant funding. This would mean that information could be added more quickly and any amendments we are alerted to could be done speedily. However this will require a lot of thought and another large funding bid but it is definitely on our 'to do' list!!

To begin your own search of the Men Behind the Medals website, click on the link below.

<http://www.themenbehindthemedals.org.uk>