

OLD SHEBBEARIANS

From Harry Aspey

Little did I know that leads to the whereabouts of the descendants of a long dead Old Shebbearian lay not only in Australia but much closer to home in Buckland Filleigh.

For years I have been drawn to the haunting accounts of Norman Gullick's part in the ill-fated allied invasion of Gallipoli in 1915 and published in the Shebbearian magazine.

He was a pupil at the college from 1906 -10. A younger brother, Harold, was there at roughly the same time, only to die in battle in France in 1916. They hailed from Bristol.

What I was not aware of was that while at Shebbear, Norman was befriended by the Nethacott family of Chalhanger Farm, Buckland Filleigh, a friendship that was to continue for years through his daughter, Flora.

He was an early editor of the Shebbearian and described as one of its most "literary". Surviving the disaster of Gallipoli, despite typhoid and malaria, he was later wounded on the Western Front and after demobilisation became the Advertising Manager of The Times Literary Supplement.

He also had a long association with Sir Edmund Gosse, poet, critic and man of letters and collaborated in a book about his life and work.

Then in 1937, with the threat of another war looming, Norman emigrated to Australia with his wife Olga and Flora. From time to time small snippets of news about him appeared in the magazine, but after 1949, nothing.

At least two other Shebbearians went through the horrors of the campaign in the Dardanelles, including the redoubtable Rev James Penry Davey, the last Army Chaplain to be evacuated from the peninsular and who refused to leave until all the allied dead had been given proper burials.

In order to write about these brave men, I needed to trace Norman Gullick's descendants, if there were any, but could find no clues as to where they might be.

In almost a last effort I contacted the state library in New South Wales, eventually receiving the barest of details from his death certificate. He had died in 1952, aged only 60 - as much a victim of World War One as if he had been killed on the battlefield.

From what I learned I was able to contact his granddaughter, Elizabeth, in Canberra, via the Internet. Amazingly, she, too, was carrying out research on her grandfather. Much information has been exchanged since including delightful and evocative photographs from the 1930s.

Perhaps even more amazingly, her mother, Flora, had actually visited Chalhanger Farm in 1988, the year I delivered my 13 year-old son to board at Shebbear and had been in touch with Gertie Chapman (nee Nethacott) by that time living in Torrington, throughout the 1990s.

The significance of the dates 1931 and 1933 is that Norman



Harold Nethacott in 1933
at Chalhanger Farm



John Nethacott in 1931
at Chalhanger Farm



Flora Gullick in 1933
at Padden Farm



Gertie Chapman (nee Nethacott)
at Torrington in 1988

visited Shebbear and stayed at Chalhanger when President of the Old Shebbearians' Association and again two years later for headmaster John Rounsefell's last Speech Day.

He was very fond of the Nethacott family and at some point seriously considered taking up farming, partly possibly

as an escape from the memories of war.

Flora meanwhile celebrated her 87th birthday with friends in Melbourne on Boxing Day and sends her warmest best wishes to anyone in Buckland Filleigh who might remember her!

Harry Aspey's article on Old Shebbearians at Gallipoli will appear in the next edition of the Shebbearian.