LIEUTENANT GORDON MURIEL FLOWERDEW VC (1894-99)



Gordon Muriel Flowerdew was born in Billingford, Norfolk, England on 2 January 1885, the 12th of 15 children of a gentleman farmer and his wife. He was educated at Framlingham College, Suffolk along with all 9 of his brothers, which must be something of a record.

In 1903 Gordon emigrated to Canada, where he lived at Duck Lake, Saskatchewan; Queensbay, Kooteny Lake; and Wallachin, British Columbia. In 1914 he enlisted in the 31st British Columbia Horse, later transferring to Lord Strathcona's Horse. He rose quickly through the ranks and was commissioned as an officer in 1916. In January 1918 Flowerdew was given command of C Squadron, Lord Strathcona's Horse.



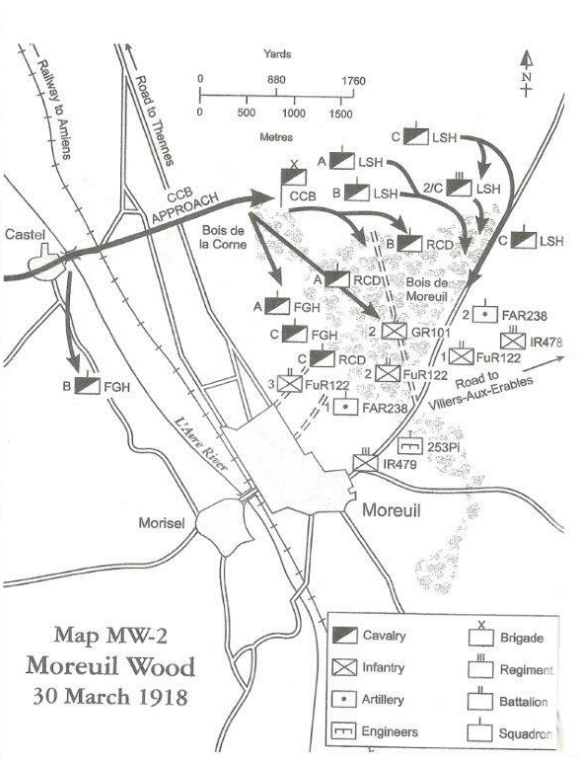
For most of the war, the Canadian Cavalry Corps was not involved in much direct fighting. The static nature of the warfare and general unsuitability of the environment for traditional cavalry operations militated against their use. Even when they did engage the enemy it was almost exclusively dismounted – effectively fighting as infantry.

When the Germans launched Operation Michael in the Spring of 1918, it was a last great effort to execute a decisive thrust between the French and British armies and, they believed, effectively win the war. They made rapid progress, advancing towards a key gap between Paris and Amiens, then an important railhead. The cavalry became a significant factor by virtue of their ability to move quickly to pressure points. In late March 1918, as the Germans approached Moreuil and threatened to cross the L'Avre River, the last natural barrier before Amiens, the Canadian Cavalry Corps, some 700-odd mounted troops including the men of Strathcona's Horse, along with a number of French units, was assigned the task of stopping them.

The Germans had occupied Moreuil Wood and a decision was made that they must be dislodged. The Canadians spent the night before the engagement in woods above Guyencourt (see picture left), some 10 kilometres from Moreuil, and moved out early in the morning. The detail of orders was changing constantly as they moved towards Moreuil, but the purpose never wavered: move the Germans out of the wood.



Once in the proximity of the wood, a number of dispositions were made and the majority of the cavalry were, once again, to be used dismounted. Flowerdew's squadron was selected to be the only one remaining mounted, and they were to position to drive into the north-east corner of the wood while others had moved on foot behind the defending forces. Owing to the nature of the terrain, the Squadron made their way round the north of the wood from the western corner, exploiting a small dip in the fields in an effort to remain undetected (they are the wave on the far right of the map). They were, however, seen, and unknown to them, defences



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were put in place to counter a possible mounted attack.



As the Squadron began its push directly into the northeast corner of the wood, they came over a small rise and were immediately observed and came under heavy fire. Flowerdew called the charge using the slightly unorthodox phrase 'It's a charge boys, it's a charge'. His bugler, riding close by him, was killed before the charge could be sounded, but charge they did. The gap between the mounted men and the opposing defensive line, which included a number of machine guns, was about 200 yards, and the action lasted about 30 seconds. The squadron suffered atrocious losses (more than half of the men in C Squadron were killed), and Flowerdew himself was almost immediately downed, fatally wounded. Accounts vary, but few, if any, made it to the woods.

Notwithstanding its apparent failure, the cavalry charge was deemed to have been instrumental in unnerving the defenders and the attacking forces succeeded in taking the wood. Although the Germans retook the territory on the following day, the impetus of their thrust was broken. The Allies held their line and Operation Michael ground to a halt. Later in the year the Germans were pushed back towards their eventual defeat.

Lieutenant Flowerdew died of wounds on the 31st March 1918 - Easter Day. The Squadron's charge, which resulted in its near destruction, was one of those moments on the battlefield when the immediate outcome of an extraordinary deed is not the central issue. The action becomes a catalyst for seismic shifts in momentum that eventually culminate in that elusive decisive effect.

His citation reads :

> For most conspicuous bravery and dash when in command of a squadron detailed for special service of a very important nature. On reaching the first objective, Lieutenant Flowerdew saw two lines of the enemy, each about sixty strong, with machine guns in the centre and flanks, one line about two hundred yards behind the other. Realizing the critical nature of the operation and how many depended upon it, Lieutenant Flowerdew ordered a troop under Lieutenant Harvey to dismount and carry out a special movement while he led the remaining three troops to the charge. The squadron (less one troop) passed over both lines, killing many of the enemy with the sword, and wheeling about galloped at them again. Although the squadron had then lost about 70 percent of its number, killed and wounded, from rifle and machine gun fire directed on it from the front and both flanks, the enemy broke and retired. The survivors then established themselves in a position, where later they were joined, after much hand-to-hand fighting, by Lieutenant Harvey's party. Lieutenant Flowerdew was dangerously wounded through both thighs during the operation, but continued to cheer on his men. There can be no doubt that this officer's great valour was the prime factor in the capture of the position.

It was thought that the cavalry charge led by Flowerdew was the last cavalry charge in military history, but see recent information from **Peter Gasgoine-Lockwood (R57-64)** later on in this piece.

He is buried at Namps-au-Val British Cemetery, eleven miles south west of Amiens, France. A simple wooden cross, which originally marked the resting place of Flowerdew, was brought from France in 1933 to hang in the College Chapel near the War Memorial. Note that on the cross he is referred to as Captain. It is believed that he was promoted after the action and before he died the following day.

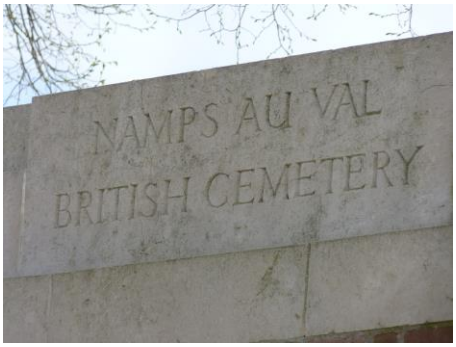






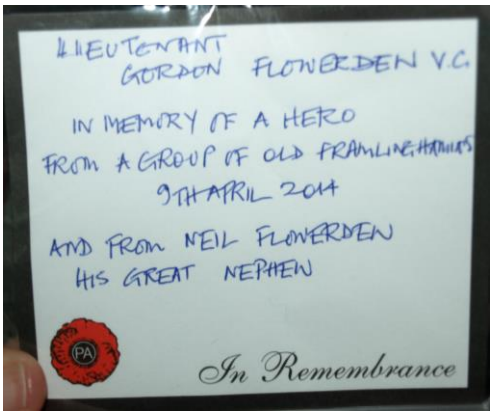
In 2014 a party of OFs and others, including Neil Flowerdew (Hon OF), went across to visit Moreuil Wood, his grave to retrace the events of 30 March 1918. Below are some of the photos taken at the cemetery, the special memorial just outside the wood and of the proud current owner of the wood.















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We are also indebted to Neil for some wonderful family photos.

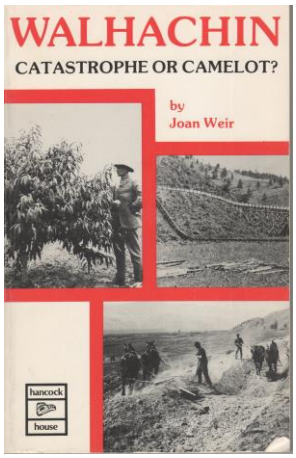
1890 – 12 of 15 with Gordon on right of rug – see close up at age of 4 with straw hat.





Walhatchin Hotel run by his sister Audrey and Gordon pictured with William Miller Higgs (Brother-in-law) and Audrey either side of him at Walhachin Post Office around 1912.







Finally a photo of the miniature VC presented to the family and held by Neil together with newspaper front page about the presentation of his VC to his mother and youngest brother Eric




DOMINION AROUSED BY SINKING OF CANADIAN HOSPITAL SHIP.

CANADIAN DAILY RECORD

THURSDAY, JULY 4, 1918.

THE KING HANDS V.C. TO MOTHER OF DEAD CAVALRY OFFICER.

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Interestingly, one of the earliest paintings (1919) by **Sir Alfred Munnings (1891-92)** was of the cavalry charge in which Flowerdew won his VC in 1918. A copy of this painting was presented to the College on 1 July 1991 by Lt Col Coupland of the Canadian High Commission. The original hangs in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. A nephew of Gordon Flowerdew, **Group Captain L.L. Flowerdew (33-35)**, represented the family. See bottom of article for further picture of this painting.



The following photos were taken from the Autumn 1994 OF Magazine, which contains details of a trip made to France to commemorate 50th anniversary.



General Sir Pat Howard Dobson and fellow travellers at Moreuil Wood where Flowerdew won his VC.

The full OF party: Neville Bromage, Peter Lloyd-Bostock, Alan Dods, Sir Pat and Fergus Dempster at Flowerdew's grave.



The following pictures were taken at the presentation ceremony held at the College on 3 February 2003.



If anyone wants to read a very detailed description of the battle in which Flowerdew so heroically died, I would recommend reading Captain J.R. Grodzinski's small book entitled "The Battle of Moreuil Wood", which you can read on-line at http://www.strathconas.ca/pdf_files/the_battle_of_moreuil_wood.pdf

Also see http://www.oldframlinghamian.com/article.php?story=2004052911320598 for further information on his VC being presented to the Imperial War Museum.

David Lebbell (K41-46) spotted that a new play has been written by Canadian playwright Stephen Massicote called "Mary's Wedding". The play is part love story, part history lesson and part a moving memorial to the human cost of war. One of the central characters is Flowerdew. The following review is taken from the Canadian Theatrical Encyclopaedia :-

Mary's Wedding by Stephen Massicotte was one of four mainstage productions premiered by playRites '02, Alberta Theatre Project's annual festival of new plays. It is a moving, lyrical two-hander, with a flexible use of dream-time that takes the action into a broad historical dimension in terms of a relationship between a young farmer and a recent English immigrant to Canada. It begins on the evening before Mary's wedding in 1920, and tracks back to show her first meeting with Charlie, their growing attraction, and his departure for the war. The war scenes are intercut with the love scenes, one dimension of time informing the other to suggest that Mary is

dreaming Charlie's horrific experiences in the trenches, just as he is dreaming his memory of her. Remembering their love is her way of saying goodbye, although this love will always inform her life.

The play opens with the young Charlie introducing himself candidly to the audience: "Hello, out there. Thank you for coming. Before we begin, there is something I have to tell you. Tonight is just a dream. I ask you to remember that. It begins at the end and ends at the beginning. There are sad parts. Don't let that stop you from dreaming it too." He in effect invites the audience to participate in his story, as it intersects with that of Mary. They meet during a thunderstorm, which anticipates the shell barrage that Charlie will endure during the war. The romantic proclivities of both are tested by reality: Charlie will indeed perform a "Charge of the Light Brigade" into death at Morieul Wood, and Mary will be tempted to perform the Lady of Shalott. Mary's Wedding does not succumb to sentiment, however. It shows how memory informs the present, and how it becomes a means of survival.

Charlie's relationship with his sergeant and mentor, Gordon Muriel Flowerdew, provides another means of survival. The role of Flowerdew is played by the actress who plays Mary, suggesting that Charlie's sweetheart informs even his interaction with other men. The character of Flowerdew is historically based: he was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for leading the last cavalry charge in military history. On March 30, 1918, Lord Strathcona's Horse played a critical role in one of the last German offense attempts of WWI and held back advancing enemy forces at Moreuil Wood in France. Nearly half the 100 men in the C Squadron were killed.

The play requires a simple but evocative set design that imagines the prairie landscape, a barn where the couple meets and where Mary remembers, and the trenches in which Charlie comes to terms with his role as a killer of other young men. The soundscape counterpoints the thunder which terrifies Mary, and the guns of war.

In his program note for the ATP premiere, Massicotte accounts for the origins of the play in a failed relationship:

So this was going to be a war play. However, I was in love when I wrote it and I thought it was more of a love to end all loves. This is not that love story but the more I loved her, the more Mary and Charlie loved each other. The more I longed to return to her, the more they longed to return to each other. So the war play became a love story. I wrote it to forget her and to get her back and to remember her and to let her go.

Mary's Wedding won the Alberta Playwriting Competition in 2000, and its evolution provides an insight into the way in which Canadian plays come to fruition: it was written with the assistance of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, performed at Workshop West's Springboards New Play Festival in Edmonton, workshopped at the 2001 Banff playRites Colony, and presented as a Platform Play at playRites in 2001. It evolved in yet more rehearsal rewrites under the watchful eyes of ATP dramaturg Vanessa Porteous and director Gina Wilkinson. It has since been produced across Canada in at least ten regional theatres, the National Arts Centre (directed by Marti Maraden), and in the United States, England, and Scotland.

I'm also indebted to **Howard Thistlewood (K66-73)** for providing a copy of the attached essay written by Stephen Hume, who is a journalist with the Vancover Sun. It's an interesting read on the affect war can have on a town and majors on Flowerdew's achievements
http://www.oldframlinghamian.com/article.php?story=20061204160820393

I'm also indebted to the author Stephen Hume for allowing us to show the essay on the website. This essay appears in his book "Bush Telegraph" which was published by Harbour Publishing, Maderia Park in 1999.

The photograph below was taken by the son of **Peter Scotchmer (R31-38)** of Peter's wife Grace, standing by the famous original painting of Flowerdew's Charge by **Sir Alfred Munnings (1891-92)**. The picture was taken in the vaults of the Canadian War Museum, where over 40 Munnings paintings are stored.



On Easter Sunday 2008, Brough Scott wrote a full page article in the Sunday Telegraph about his grandfather, his horse and the battle for Moreuil Wood. The following is an exchange of correspondence between **Jim Blythe (K48-54)** and Brough Scott :-

Dear Sir, The Mighty Warrior – 23.03.2008 – Brough Scott.

Brough Scott describes vividly the lot of the Cavalry Charger in WW1. It is not enviable. He mentions the last great cavalry charge at Moreuil Wood led by Lt. Gordon Muriel Flowerdew, of Lord Strathcona's Horse. Flowerdew enlisted as a private in 1914 and was commissioned in1916. Flowerdew commanded a squadron at the action to take Moreuil Wood, and he ordered one troop, under Lt. Fred. Harvey, V.C. (Harvey was already a V.C. from 1917) to dismount and deploy in a special movement, whilst Flowerdew led the other three troops in the charge. The enemy had two rows of machine guns at 200yards apart and a massive amount of carnage followed, men and horses decimated. It did however throw the enemy into disarray and was the turning point in halting the German Spring Offensive.

Harvey, meanwhile followed up with much hand to hand skirmishing, and came across the mortally wounded Flowerdew, shot through both thighs and life ebbing away. 'Carry on – we've won', were Flowerdew's last recorded words. General Seely promoted him to Captain in the field, and in April 1918 the V.C. was posthumously awarded for his gallantry.

Sir Alfred Munnings' picture of Warrior was one of 45 commissioned by the Canadian Government from the artist and I beg to offer that the finest of them all was of the Charge at Moreuil Wood, led by Lt. Flowerdew. Munnings was educated at Framlingham College and interestingly all ten sons of A.J.B.Flowerdew were also educated there. Munnings contemporary was the fifth, Edgar, Gordon was the eighth.

The Flowerdew V.C., along with two others (all won by pupils of the school in nineteen months) are in the Framlingham Cabinet at the Imperial War Museum.

Brough Scott spoke at a ceremony at the College when Flowerdew's medal was returned after a loan period at the Regimental Museum, in Calgary. A replica was presented to the Commanding Officer. A visit to either museum should be a must.

Jim Blythe O.F.

Reply from Brough Scott :-

Dear Jim,

Thanks for your interest in the piece I wrote last week.

I very much share your feelings about the horror of what happened that day. But I do think it is worth recording that the Munnings picture of the Flowerdew charge was painted from memory, Munnings had left the active group on Wednesday 27th March. It was also a wholly idealised version of what happened.

In fact, as detailed in pages 312 -318 of my book Galloper Jack (Macmillans 2003 – still available on Amazon!) the charge was a total wipe out because Flowerdew's squadron, detailed to encircle the wood down the eastern side, came up out of a dip to be greeted by rows of machine guns and small mortars drawn up ready for a rumoured tank attack coming down the road south west from Demuin. They never had a chance – Flowerdew was hit almost straightaway and only two people got through. The citation, written by my grandfather, about them galloping over the enemy guns, is just wishful thinking.

However Flowerdew did not die that day. He was moved some five miles west to a clearing station. Fred Harvey, who had been moved to the same place after being hit through the shoulder, saw him that evening and thought he might pull through. Sadly he didn't and died on the Monday.

A group including members of my family, of the Strathconas and Fred Harvey's nephew are going out this weekend to pay our respects on this 90th anniversary.

All the very best, Brough Scott

Follow up reply from Jim Blythe :-

Dear Brough, thank you so much for taking the time to contact me personally about my comments concerning your article. I did realise of course that Munnings did the painting of the charge from memory, but obviously if he had been withdrawn, it would have been artistic licence as well !! That of course ran through much of his work, painting what the observer wanted to see. He was a lovable rascal, and was particularly outspoken when elected as the President of the Royal Academy, in collaboration with, and no doubt egged by Winston Churchill, he slammed modern art. This was 46 years after he first had a picture accepted by the Academy.

Much of my information about Flowerdew's VC was extracted from the citation in the Gazette, and once again if I had given a little more thought it would have been apparent that your Grandfather provided this. In this respect Jack and Munnings had much in common !!

Thank you once again for resurrecting the whole story. Heroes, men and beasts, do not receive enough attention in this day and age. One for all and all for one has been replaced by all for me. I have the book you wrote and I shall get another copy and give it to the College library for posterity. If you had already done so then mine can be a back-up.

I hope you have a most successful and fulfilling weekend and will look for a sequel to last Sunday's article in the ST at a future date. Jim Blythe.

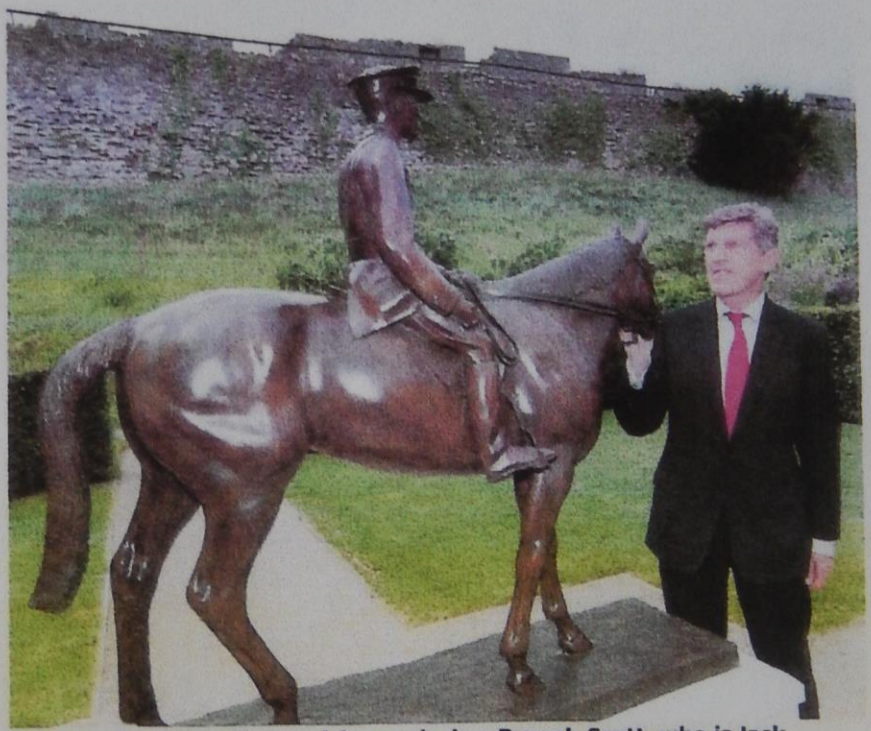
At the top of the next page is a related article spotted by Bill Collard in 2014 'Britain at War' magazine.

Carisbrooke Statue Depicts 'Warrior'

A STATUE of Warrior, "the real War Horse", is to be displayed at Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight, reports Geoff Simpson.

Foaled on the Isle of Wight in 1908, Warrior served on the Western Front throughout the First World War as the mount of Major General Jack Seely (1858-1947). Among many other engagements, he took part in the charge on 30 March 1918, which forced the Germans to concede Moreuil Wood, a position commanding the Arve river bank in France. During the fighting, Norfolk-born Lieutenant Gordon Flowerdew of the Canadian regiment, Lord Strathcona's Horse, earned a posthumous Victoria Cross. The action at Moreuil Wood played a significant part in halting the German Spring Offensive. It was depicted in a painting by Alfred Munnings, who went on to depict Warrior in further paintings.

Warrior returned to the Isle of Wight with his owner and was ridden for many years by Jack Seely. In 1934 Seely published a book, *My Horse Warrior*. Warrior died aged 33 in 1941. The (London) *Evening Standard* reported his passing under the headline, "Horse the Germans Could Not Kill".



The broadcaster, author and former jockey Brough Scott, who is Jack Seely's grandson, is pictured here with the statue.

In 1912 Seely became Secretary of State for War. He also served on the Committee of Imperial Defence. He believed that conflict with Germany was inevitable and was determined to prepare the Army for that eventuality. At the outbreak of war Seely was placed on the staff of General Sir John French and remained in France for much of the war.

Jack Seely became a temporary Brigadier-General in 1915, took command of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade and led it successfully in action. The Seely family has commissioned the statue of Warrior being ridden by Jack Seely. It has been loaned to English Heritage and accompanies the current Carisbrooke Castle Museum exhibition, "Men and Horses Go to War".

Peter Gasgoine-Lockwood (R57-64)has recently come across further information regarding the last cavalry charge in history. The following is a report on the seizing of the Crossings of the Dendre at Lessines on 11th November 1918 by Major General D E Cayley, Commanding 29th Division. The report was written on 13th November 1918 :-

*"Orders as to the importance of getting on as far as possible by **11.00 hours** and if possible, taking the crossings of the Dendre at Lessines by this hour, only reaching Brig General Freyberg, OC Advanced Guard, about **09.30 hours.** He immediately got 'A' Squadron 7th Dragoon Guards, attached to him, under way.*

*He accompanied them, and the Squadron moved as fast as possible (at a canter for most of the distance) towards Lessines. They arrived outside the town at about **10.45 hours** and were met by machine gun fire. It was decided to rush the place, which was immediately done, a few of the enemy being killed and 2 Officers and 98 Other Ranks being captured. The Squadron pushed on over the road bridges which were intact and established bridgeheads over the river, capturing two companies of the enemy on the East Bank, but as it was now after **11.00 hours** these were allowed to march out, after a request by the Commander that they should receive protection against the inhabitants. This was refused unless they laid down their arms and surrendered. They decided to march out.*

Considerable difficulty was experienced in Lessines in protecting the prisoners captured in the town from the fury of the people.

*That the important road crossings over the Dendre were seized by **11.00 hours** was entirely due to the energy of Brig General Freyberg, and to the dash and leadership of 'A' Squadron 7th Dragoon Guards, under the Command of Major Chappell"*

Chris Bellamy (G54-64) happened to be staying at some self-catering accommodation in Norfolk when he found the owner, Rachael Anderson, was the great niece of Gordon Flowerdew. Her grandfather was Gordon's oldest brother **George (1883-85)**. She has recently discovered a very interesting letter (with transcript) written by Gordon Flowerdew on 14 December 1917 to his brother George. Sadly the actual letter is too faint to include but the transcript reads as follows and gives another insight into his life at the time. Our thanks to Rachael for providing to Chris.

My dear George and Hannah

14 December 1917

Just a line wishing you all a very happy Christmas, if it is possible with all the present day problems to contend with. Both Eric and I should be in England shortly and our leave is 14 days instead of ten.

The frosty weather has been a godsend, anything as long as it is dry not rain. I enclose a cheque for £1- to be divided amongst the children. We are miles from any shopping point here. I'm afraid the outlook doesn't look rosy - perhaps it would be better for people to keep their eyes on their work and leave the newspapers alone.

Haven't seen anything about the shooting arrangements this year.

There is very little news one can write about - we keep on, some get killed, some wounded and some go sick and others hang around.

Mother seems to keep fit. I hope all the family are well and flourishing.

Best love to you all

Your affectionate brother

Gordon

Its fascinating to see that he had his chequebook with him. Rachael says her mother was one of 4 children to share £1.

In January 2016, **Neil Flowerdew (Hon OF)** provided transcripts of the following letters written by Gordon to Isa and the report of the interview with Aunt Ella. The two letters are transcribed from photocopies of the originals.

The first one also appears in abbreviated form on P 92 of '*Catastrophe or Camelot'*, a pamphlet recording the history of a settlement near Vancouver which was publicised in the late 1890s as ideal for fruit farming – it attracted an interesting group of English emigrants. Sadly, it collapsed completely due to men leaving for the war and unsuitability as a fruit growing site (there was no reliable water to hand!)

The following people are mentioned and recorded among the residents of Walhachin in 1914 in that book – the link is used to illustrate that, especially in their early days in France, there was quite regular contact with others from the Walhachin community.

Miss I N Twining (possibly 'Isa'?)
Gordon Flowerdew
Eric Flowerdew
A Kinch
L Blair
B Parkin (Ben)
W S Tennant
G Calder (possibly George)
T E Hollerton
A L Green
W P Knatchbull
Eric Wilkinson
Louis Pajet
Capt R E Pajet
Basil Loyd
M A Gruen
J L Melkuish
(there are several who may be the 'Robert' referred to)

Walhachin was recorded as having the highest enlistment percentage of any 'city' in Canada - 43 men left in the first month (p 87)

May 24th is significant because it was Empire Day (p40 & p41).

The letter dated Jun 1915 would have been written about 6 to 8 weeks after the Regt went out to France as infantry – the horses followed some time later. The Jul 1916 letter is a harsher read – the pseudo glamour had faded.

Jun 30 1915 *Somewhere in Belgium*

Dear Isa,

Many thanks for your letter and cigarettes. They arrived at a critical moment we were just going to move to the trenches again and none of us had any smokes - so they will be enjoyed. We either all have parcels at once at or no one has any at all. And its much the same with the fighting.

Its either hells a popping or just as peaceful as sitting on the river bank at Walhachin.

Your Gala Day was a great success in spite of rainy weather - our 24th May was quite different - we were in the reserve trenches at Festibert the day before Mr Tennant was killed and we were heavily shelled on and off all day, is fact quite the most exciting 24th any of us had spent (a man has just gone by walking his head all bandaged he had been hit in the eye by a piece of an explosive bullet) which by the way is banned or was banned by international agreement - This country has been occupied by small farmers so there are plenty of old stables etc where we sleep, if no stables we sleep on the meadows, we are in reserve just now, laying behind a hedge - I think I'm qualified now for a professional transfer, how we are going to settle down to work again I don't know.

Home correspondence schools are very useful, I take one myself 'commercial book-keeping' but did not tackle shorthand. They seen to be more easily understood than the masters at school could show you.

We saw Kinch, (Beb), Blair, Geo Calder and Ben Parkin, they were looking a bit worn out, they had had a very tough time. Kinch has since been wounded, now in England, but has nearly recovered -Arthur Green has been wounded in the legs by shrapnel. Mr Hollerton has joined a British field artillery and is at Cantebury. Miles Clarke also went into the artillery and is out here. We saw him about ten days ago. Louis Paget is also out here and his regiment is not far from here.

I heard from the Knatchbulls a few days ago. They are at Exeter he is in the Artillery - we still hope to get the horses back sometime in the future. Eric Wilkinson and I are in Mr Pajet's troop. Basil Loyd Rose(?) & Robert are in another troop of the same squadron, it was Mr Tenant's troop and Melkuish is a corporal in the machine gun section - Mike Gruen is in A squadron my brother[Eric Flowerdew] is in C squadron - and all still flourishing.

Basil and Eric ask me to thank you for the smokes which they are sharing [in]. I hope the weather has been decent since you started [camping] out. Basil and I are going to order a box of Walhachin apples to be sent out - the majority of fruit trees are pears but not ripe yet, they won't last long when they do get ripe. I enclose a couple of stamps, if Andrew is collecting they are parcel stamps or receipts stamps I don't know which, I think the latter - I guess he is still enthusiastic over chickens and boxing(?) I hope he bet his money on Willard in the last fight - hasn't your father decided to come home yet or will the war make him busier than ever - shall expect to hear you have started a shell manufacturing plant in Walhachin. We often talk of Walhachin and recall some of the many pleasant happenings - there have been lots of them.

I must finish now. My kindest regards to you all –

Sincerely yours,
Gordon

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Jul 21 1916

My dear Isa,

I have just got a new pad so will answer your very interesting letter. I'm sorry I forgot about the typewriter, I'm very glad you have been using it. I told Tom Edwards in a letter a few days ago - if you paid $12 to the church warden, if there is one, you can use the typewriter for as long as you like - I really don't want Jim to pay anything to me. It would probably be more satisfactory to you to pay something so we would get around the difficulty that way, I hope you will get all the use out of it that you can.

I think you are very sensible to take the course. They are usually very good and sound up to date.

I'm glad to hear your mother is better again and I hope this time the cure will be permanent. Andrew must be getting a giant; I expect he is getting a handful to keep in order. I expect you are all keen on the news. It is getting more interesting every day. From where we are we can ride up about one and a quarter hours and see everything. Officers are allowed up any time, in fact we are encouraged to go so that we know our way about when we go up for business.

There are thousands of guns and they are roaring all the time. The Germans are getting what they have been giving our men since the war began. Last night while we were having supper a shell burst about a quarter of a mile away, we don't know if it was from a gun or dropped from an aeroplane.

The work going on is wonderful. Gangs of men follow up the fighting men, picking up all the equipment ammunition tools bombs etc, another party burying all the dead, others making roads, filling in trenches or bridging them, others laying telephone wires and water pipes for drinking water then the big guns have shifted up - lorries following with ammunition, rations etc, its a tremendous affair and the wet weather has made it much more difficult.

I guess we all want the war to finish, and it looks to be in the last stage, but how long this stage lasts can't be seen yet. We see a great number of prisoners and they are a big strong looking lot of men.

The [……] visitor was rather interesting. I heard from Eric W and Basil Loyd. They were both fit. Basil is out here I have not seen his name in any list so I hope he is alright so far. Melkuish is in the gun section, I do not see him as often as I used. Roberts is in the same squadron as I am, also Shaw. Roberts is Sergeant and Shaw is Colour Sergeant. Jack Clarke is in B Squadron and is the same as ever. My brother is very fit, we all have steel helmets - we look a fierce lot.

Well I wish you best success with your course. My kindest regards to you all.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Flowerdew

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From 'The Scotsman' – 16 Nov 32

VC's WAR DIARY

Letters Treasured by His Sister

A PROPHETIC DREAM

In the quiet little Suffolk town of Sudbury, a woman sat last night with pride in her eyes turning over the faded leaves of diaries and letters, and re-living, as she read them, the tumultuous days of the war.

She was Miss Eleanor Flowerdew, sister of Lieutenant Gordon Muriel Flowerdew, the heroic young officer who died as he fulfilled his dream of winning the VC.

How he won it has been told by Major-General Seeley when he recounted the epic story of Lt Flowerdew's courage at the battle of Moreuil Ridge in 1918 – courage which was instrumental in winning the battle and, in Marshal Foch's words, *"possibly deflected the whole course of history"*

THE KING'S LETTER

His VC is now in his sister's keeping, as is a message signed by the King, which says *"It is a matter of sincere regret to me that the death of Lieutenant Flowerdew, Lord Strathcona's Horse, deprived me of the pride of personally conferring upon him the Victoria Cross, the greatest of all rewards for valour and devotion to duty."*

The VC was presented to Lieutenant Flowerdew's mother, the wife of a Norfolk farmer, who died two years ago.

"Gordon was not killed on the spot", his sister told a press representative. "He was shot through both thighs, and one leg had to be amputated. That was on Good Friday, and he died on Easter Sunday. Lying in the clearing station out there so terribly wounded, he was able to be told just before he died that he had won the VC."

JOINED AS A PRIVATE

She smiled wistfully as she looked back to their childhood together. "Gordon was very determined," she said. "That perhaps was why he was such a naughty little boy sometimes. But it was that determination which carried him through on that terrible day. He was 33 when he died, and neither married nor engaged. His temperament may have been a little like Rupert Brooke' - he was philosophical, and tremendously absorbed in the things to which he gave himself. He gave his Whole soul to the war when he joined up immediately it began."

"There were fourteen of us - ten sons and four daughters. Gordon went to school at Framlingham College, Suffolk, and when he was 17 he went out to Canada on a farm, because he feared the English climate would give him pneumonia. He joined as a private, and rose quickly from the ranks. Four of his brothers fought in the South African War, and one was killed."

STORIES FHOM THE DIARY

The diaries and letters which his sister keeps are full of stories, which reveal Lt Flowerdew's courage and self-sacrificing nature.

"I was up last night" he writes casually, "taking the place of a sergeant who was going home on leave to England next day, and he did not want to take any chances of being hit. After nine months at the front I have decided that the English language has no superlative sufficient to describe our infantry."

"From somewhere in Belgium" comes this: "Doing night patrol. In striking at a German with an automatic, after failing to shoot him owing to the safety catch being on, I smashed a finger between the revolver and the steel hat of the German. Two Germans taken prisoner."

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Details are given of his training, and of the Somme battle of 1916, and in another place he writes: "Took part in Cambrai offensive. Helped to stay German surprise attack. Regiment did well and killed 100 Germans. Took trenches over, and helped to make raids on Prussian Guards. I was in charge of the right flank."

PITY FOR THE WOUNDED

He speaks of the "worst conceivable weather," and goes on "Sleeping on the ground these days has its drawbacks. The weather is rotten; it may be due to the bombardment, which is very heavy. We have seen some wounded German prisoners. They are mostly very young boys or oldish men, which is a favourable sign. It is not a nice sight to see the wounded coming down to the dressing stations. There must be a lot lying out in the rain."

"This war has got to be won, but not by talking. If you find anyone making speeches against the different departments and not working himself you may be safe in putting him down as absolutely no good. All these specialists who know what should be done and are not doing anything, you may be sure they have tried to get a good job and failed to fill the bill."

"This war is going to last a long time. England, just as much as Germany, has got a lot to learn before she will profit by it.

WHO IS TO BLAME?

"Is the Kaiser to blame? I consider the Kaiser is just as much the result of the *moral* of the nation during a number of years as the war itself. The Kaiser was born and raised under the budding spirit of Prussianism, with a natural desire for power."

Homely little notes creep into the young officer's letters, such as when he writes: "It rained hard this morning, and the water is over the top of my boots in many places. That butter you spoke of arrived safely".

"Our brigade holds the record for any cavalry brigade occupying front line trenches continuously."

Other observations on the war by the Lieutenant are:
"The Germane are now using a new gas which does not smell so bad, but is very deadly. Our respirators are quite good enough, only the danger is not realised at times because of the lack of smell."

"Both sides are shelling heavily, and there is now a continuous roar of shells, we supplying most of them."

FUTILE CRITICISM

"The futility of' criticism is impressed upon you when you actually see work going on, and you realise the labour of preparing and planning everything. If more people would realise what has been done, the things not done would not appear so large."

Lieutenant Flowerdew goes into minute detail of work in the trenches, explaining that after a successful attack enormous numbers of men have to be brought up to bury the dead, collect bombs, ammunition, and equipment from both sides, bridge trenches, build roads, and lay telephone lines, water mains, and railway tracks.

A SISTER'S DREAM

Miss Flowerdew has a beautiful picture of her brother leading that last fateful charge which won him renown.

"It is strange," she said, "that a week before he died, when he was out there I had a dream which in a way prepared me for his death. I dreamt that billowy white clouds were passing across the sky, and suddenly they opened, and between them a beautiful golden cloud appeared, and on it my brother Gordon lay - dead.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS - FRANCE

To mark the centenary of his death and posthumous VC both the Flowerdew Family and members of the Strathcona regiment visited Moreuil Wood in France for a reenactment of the charge and Norfolk for a special service at Billingford, the Flowerdew family home.

The recreation of the famous charge was led by the Strathcona Mounted Troop, led by Capt Sean Coughlan and Sgt Paul Kruhlak and involved 65 troops re-enacting the cavalry charge "it's a charge boys". They also paraded through the town of Moreuil and visited the Vimy War Memorial. You can watch an excellent video by **clicking here**.



CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS - Stone Laying Ceremony



On 30 March 1918 Lt Gordon Flowerdew, an Old Framlinghamian (1894-99, born in Billingford Hall (pictured right) in Norfolk in 1885, led a cavalry charge of a squadron of the Canadian volunteer regiment, Lord Strathcona's Horse, against two lines of German forces, with machine guns in the centre and flanks, at Moreuil Wood, near Amiens in north-west France.

The charge took the German position and held it briefly, at huge cost, with two thirds of the squadron dying or wounded. Lt Flowerdew was badly wounded in both thighs and died next day. One month later he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.



The UK Government as part of its First World War Centenary campaign, donated commemorative paving stones to be laid at the birth places of Victoria Cross recipients of the war. Three former pupils of Framlingham College won the highest honour valour in WWI. Two of them were at the college during the same five year period leading up to 1900. The commemorative stone for William Hewitt was laid at Copdock, Ipswich, on 17

September 2017. That for Gordon Flowerdew was laid on 10 April 2018 in the churchyard of the family church, St Leonard's at Billingford (pictured left).

The stone was laid by Her Majesty the Queen's representative in Norfolk, Lord Lieutenant Mr Richard Jewson, supported by the High Sheriff of Norfolk and the Scole Parish Council Chairman Graham Moore. The service of commemoration was led by Canon Rev Nigel Tufnell.



Local resident and PCC member Sue Redgrave organised the highly successful event which was attended by some hundred people. Gordon's great nephew Ray Flowerdew organised the exhibition in the church of photographs and diary entries.



Gordon Flowerdew was one of 15 siblings, most of whom produced progeny. The senior member of the family Peter West (pictured left) spoke, followed by Neil Flowerdew (Hon OF & pictured right) who had days before returned from organising a 40 strong Flowerdew family tour of the battlefield in France. A large number of those family members had met for the first time, a number coming from Canada, Zambia and the UK. Some 25 members of that tour attended the stone laying.



Major Al Wong, and two warrant officers, attended the stone laying, bearing the original VC which had been on loan to the regiment from the Society of Old Framlinghamians and which was being returned by Major Wong to its place in Imperial War Museum.

Wreaths were laid by Peter West on behalf of the family and by John Ellerby, president of the Society of Old



Framlinghamians. Other Old Framlinghamians in attendance included Chris Essex, Norman Porter, Michael Fuller, John Waugh, Colin Wigg, Alfred Wolton, Jim Blythe, Richard Sayer, Tony Martin, Malvern Tipping, Peter Metcalf, Michael Smy and Chris Bellamy.

Framlingham College was represented by Headmaster Paul Taylor and his wife Amanda, with Bob Skitch and Ashley [Smith??] from the College CCF.

Items pictured below on the stone are :- the original VC, the death penny, a miniature VC and photo and the gold fob watch worn by Gordon Flowerdew at the time of the charge and his death.





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Major Al Wong presented the College with a sabre that had been carried during the centennial commemoration of Lt Flowerdew's charge at the Battle of Moreuil Wood to highlight the relationship between the College and Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) regiment. It formed part of a trophy that is to be presented annually to the College Cadet who best demonstrates the most growth and improvement while completing the JNCO Cadet Course and whose endeavours have contributed to fostering esprit-de-corps within the CCF. The trophy was received by Paul Taylor.



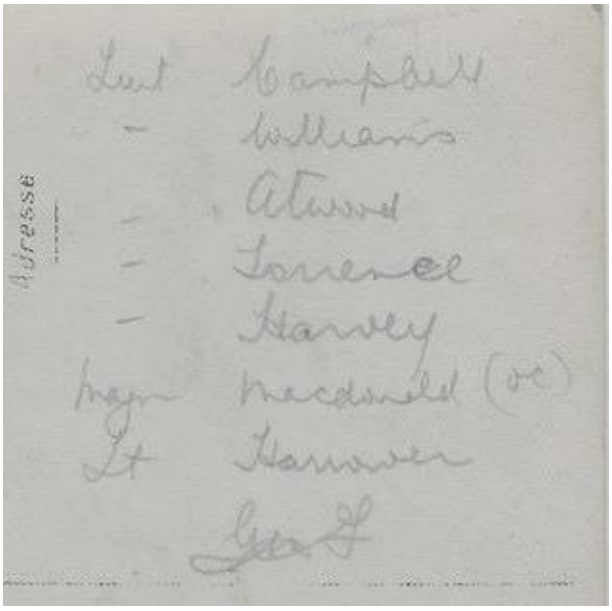


This is worth looking at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stNVh8-5xWw and you can see lots more photos via this link https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fnttnnm9vk3m0rl/AACl2l_O6cAKMJ4747KbQcGLa?dl=0

The Flowerdew family have supplied the following additional photos. The first one would appear to have been taken at the same time as the one at the start of this biography. The second is believed to have been taken while he was on officer training in France and according to the names on the back Gordon Flowerdew is on the far right.







The following press cutting (source unknown) makes fascinating reading and was provided to Bob Williams (Hon OF) by a relative of Gordon Flowerdew's John Chantry

Boy's Dream of the V.C.

WON AT COST OF HIS LIFE

ACT THAT MAY HAVE DEFLECTED HISTORY

Major-General Seely told a remarkable story of a young boy under his command who played a "wonderful part in the greatest battle in history" and was awarded the V.C. posthumously, when he spoke at a dinner of the Authors' Club last night.

The boy was Lieutenant Flowerdew, the Royal Canadians, son of an Eastern counties' parson, whose glorious part in the decisive battle at Murray Ridge during the last great German offensive in the closing months of the war "possibly deflected the whole course of history."

General Seely, who was in command of the Canadians in this battle, told the story in a choking voice, and when he finished he almost collapsed in his chair.

General Seely began by reading the diary of the boy, written in simple, almost boyish language. He called it "The Diary of a Gentleman at War."

"The Germans had won the War completely, definitely, and finally on March 30, 1918, but did not know it. I think when the true history of the War is recorded, and it very soon will be, everybody will agree that it is true."

"A TYPICAL ENGLISH BOY"

The diary was one of a fair-haired boy who played a part so decisive that if Marshal Foch's words were true it was quite possible that this gentle, dreamy boy did deflect the whole course of history.

He was of middle height, athletic, charming—a typical English boy who had joined up with the Royal Canadians. He went out with the first contingent and came under his command.

General Seely told how in a conversation with the youth he asked him if he would like to get the V.C. The boy replied: "That is my dream, but I shall never be brave enough to win it."

General Seely continued to read the diary until he reached March 26, when the boy wrote: "It was a glorious battle, I shall never forget it, but still I cannot get that V.C."

General Seely added with emotion: "That is the end of the diary. I cannot tell you anything more. But I can tell you what happened the very day after that. He was killed and got the V.C. But it was too late."

Describing a desperate hand-to-hand combat which took place in Murray Wood and the task which he had allotted to Lieutenant Flowerdew, General Seely added that in giving instructions he said to Flowerdew: "I know you will love to do it," and he replied, "Yes, sir. I shall love to do it, and I promise you I will not fail."

DESPERATE FIGHTING

"I looked at him and into the wood we went. As I galloped through I heard a terrific fusillade on the German side of the wood and my heart was heavy when I thought of my brave Flowerdew obviously going back in the middle of the German army."

After three-quarters of an hour of the most desperate hand-to-hand fighting he had ever encountered they captured the whole position.

"I ran forward and said to a corporal, 'Tell me what happened to Flowerdew.' He said, 'Oh, sir, we should not have won without him.' I said to him, 'Tell me what happened.' He said, 'Lieutenant Flowerdew galloped a hundred yards in front of us, and, waving his sword, told us to come on.'

"We went on; the Germans were advancing in single file. The moment they saw us they turned and fired. We killed a great many of them, but when we got through the far side Lieutenant Flowerdew said: 'Come back again my lads.'

"Lieutenant Flowerdew gave another great shout, and we galloped after him. A German stood up and shot him through both thighs. Another German shot him through the chest, and his horse rolling beneath him. He shouted out as he fell dying so loudly that all could hear: 'Carry on, boys; we have won.'"

General Seely added: "Flowerdew was dead, but he received the V.C., which he had dreamed of in his diary. Alas, it could not be presented to him; it was presented to his sister."

In the words of the official record: "There can be no doubt that this officer's great valour was the prime factor in the capture of the position."

Machine-guns were everywhere, and a commentator, describing Lieut. Flowerdew's charge of the German lines, states: "It was the charge of the Light Brigade again on a smaller scale."

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