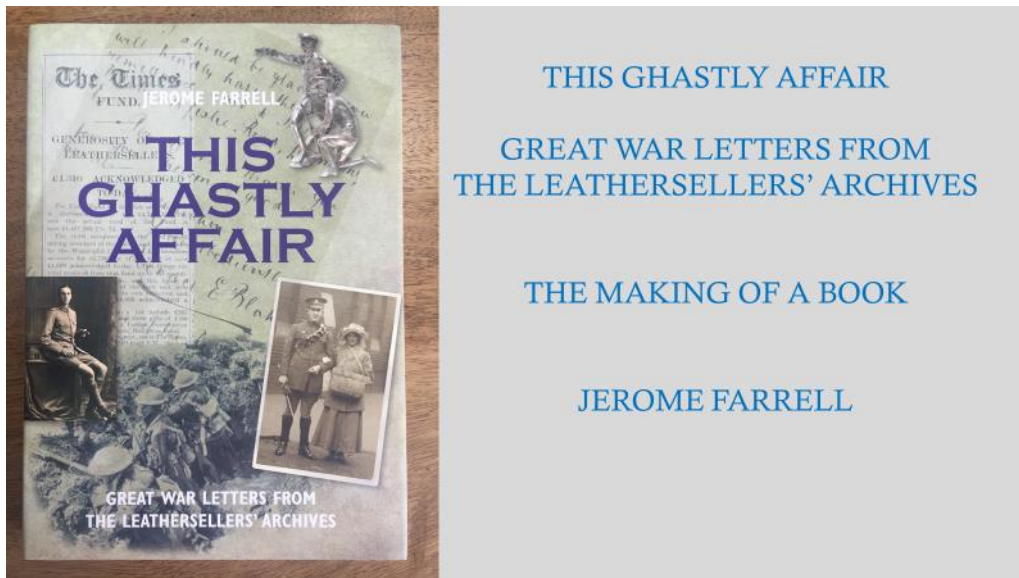


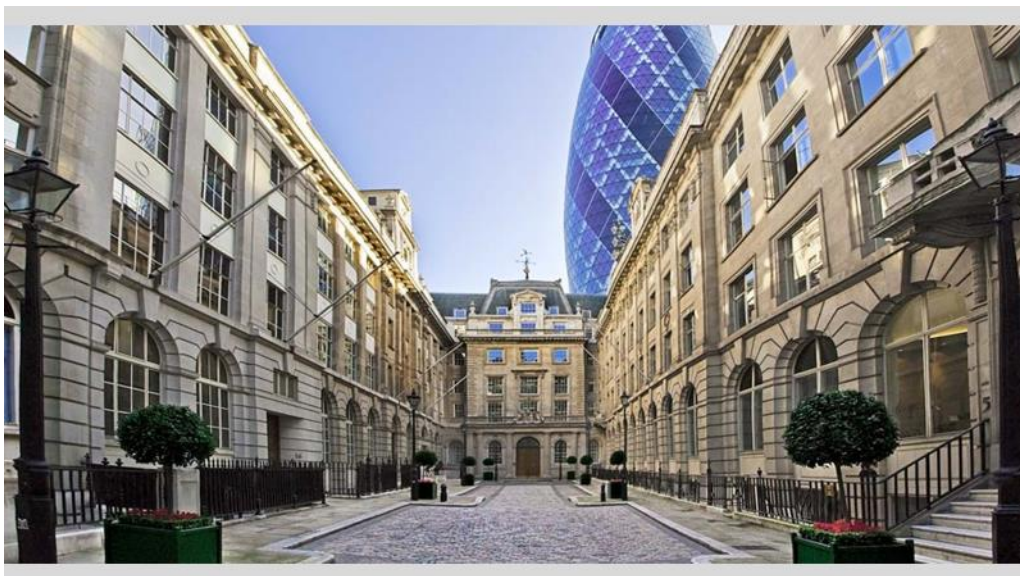
# Mill Hill Park Residents' Association AGM, 19 July 2017

## Presentation by Jerome Farrell



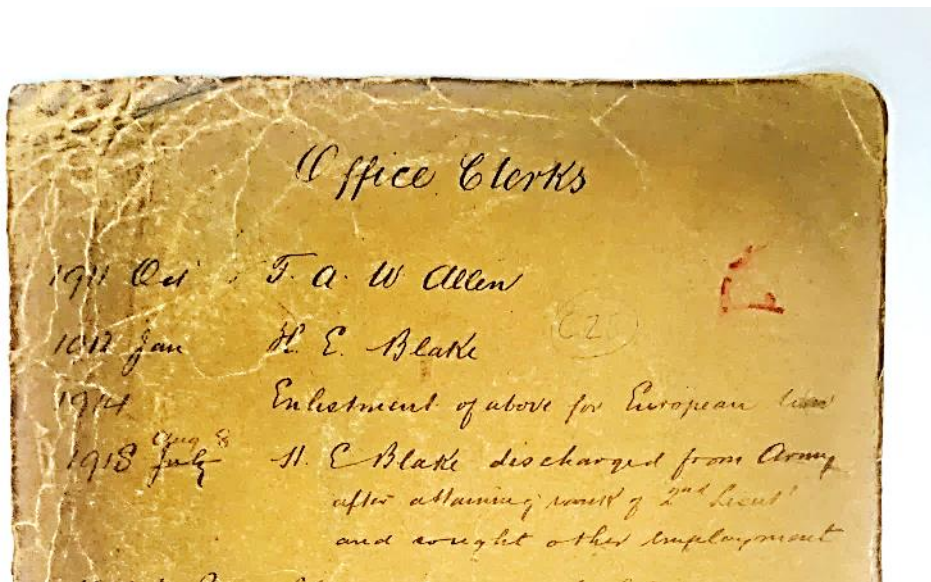
I am an archivist and historian. I work as the Archivist for the Leathersellers' Company, one of London's old Livery Companies.

## Leathersellers' Hall



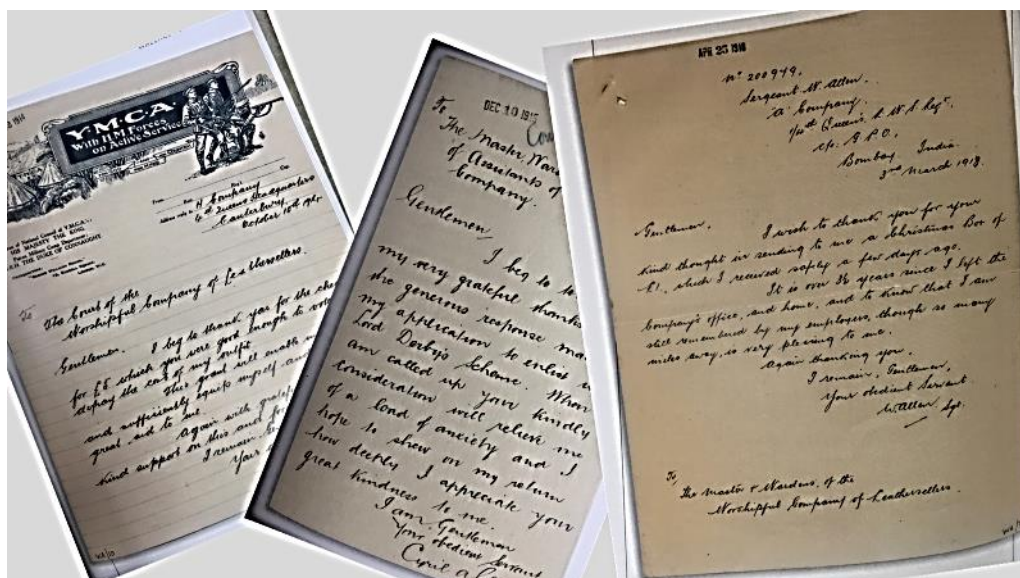
These grew out of the ancient guilds set up to protect and promote the interests of people working in certain trades. Today they are mainly philanthropic organisations. The Leathersellers' Hall is just off Bishopsgate, near the Gherkin and the Company administers charities, runs almshouses, governs schools, and gives grants to students.

## The file



One afternoon a few years ago while I was going through the archive, I came across some rather boring looking personnel files. They related to members of staff who had worked at Leathersellers' Hall in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## The letters





Inside the files, I found old letters, many in pencil and often quite hard to read. They were from three of the Hall's office staff, clerks, who volunteered to serve in the Army in 1914: Horace Blake, Wallace Allen and Cyril Glaysheer.



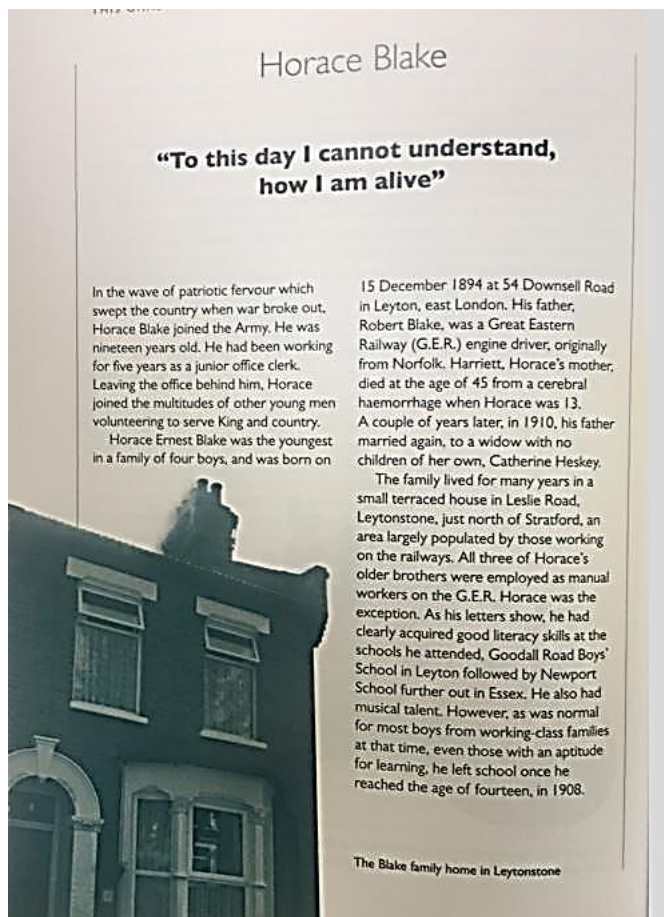
*From left to right: Horace Blake, Cyril Glaysheer in later life, and Wallace Allen.*

The Leathersellers Company had guaranteed to re-employ them when the war ended, and while they were in the army, they were to stay on the Company payroll at half salary which was to be paid to their mothers, or wives. Their peacetime boss, George Sutton, wrote regularly to these young men to give them moral support and they wrote back.

As I read the letters, one after another, I got caught up in their individual stories. These were ordinary Londoners, from terraced homes in Leytonstone, Croydon and Peckham.

All three had left school at 13 or 14, but they were highly literate and, as the letters showed, they were able to express themselves well.

They are formal in style. Being addressed to the boss, most start 'Dear Sir' and end with 'I remain, Sir, your most obedient servant' or something similar. But over the four years of World War I, and with all the experiences these men went through, their different characters shine through.



### The three men

After some training in England they were each sent overseas on active service. Horace and Cyril went to the trenches of France and Flanders. By contrast, Wallace was sent out to India, to defend the North-West frontier against possible invasion by the enemy – a neglected aspect of the First World War, which is generally thought of in a set of well-worn clichés.

As I read one letter, and then another, and then another, I found I had to keep going until I knew what happened to each man in the end. The hours passed and by the time I had finished reading the last one, it was evening.

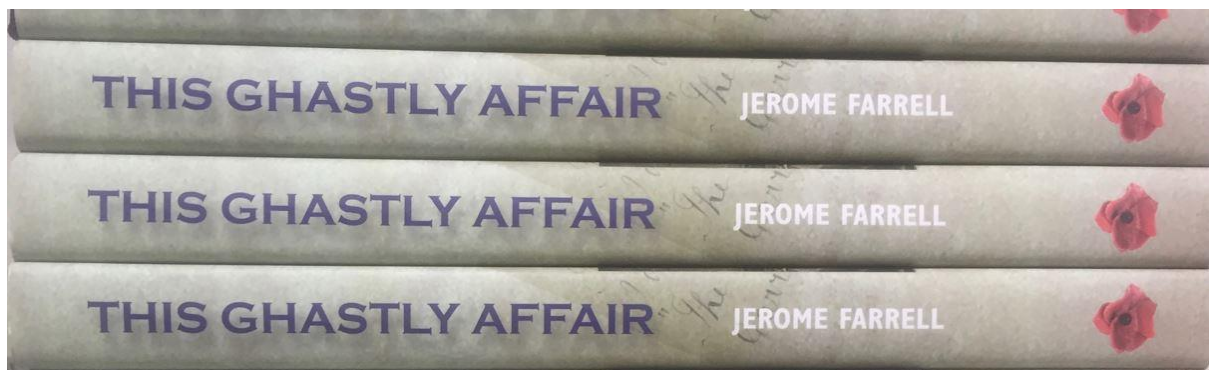
I was convinced these men's war stories were worth telling. As the centenary of the First World War was then coming up, I suggested to the Leathersellers' that, rather than putting up the usual plaque somewhere, publishing a book based on these letters might make a more fitting and a longer lasting memorial. My boss, the Clerk, supported this idea and it was agreed.

## Researching and writing the book

I began research for the book. Of course, I wanted to know if there was anyone connected to these three men alive today. After a lot of online sleuthing, and tracking down electoral registers and wills, then writing letters to people I thought might be relations (there were one or two red herrings), I found Wallace's daughter, a widow in her eighties living in south London; Cyril's niece, also a widow in her eighties and living in Surrey; and two grandsons of Horace, in Queensland, Australia. All of them were astonished to learn that a whole file of wartime letters from their relative were in these Company archives in London. I subsequently visited the homes of the two ladies, and corresponded by email with the Australians.

A bit like Isabella Beeton, author of the famous book of household management, who wrote "...if I had known beforehand, that this book would have cost me the labour that it has, I should never have been courageous enough to commence it", I probably underestimated the work involved. However, after endless drafts, corrections, proof versions and design decisions, several years later, this book is now published. All the proceeds from sales are going to the Red Cross, who provide invaluable support in many bloody theatres of war today.

## The title of the book



The title of the book comes from one of Cyril's letters from France when he is just about to be sent 'up the line' during the third phase of the battle of the Somme - he longs to be back at his office desk in London, once 'this ghastly affair' is all over.



### What the letters tell us

These men are not 'heroes' in any conventional sense, and their letters survived by accident. No one thought them of 'historical interest'. And yet today, we can see that they are exceptional. There are many letters written to family members which survive, but very few, between men who had respectful, professional relationships with each other. I would argue that where family letters may sometimes omit some of the horrors experienced to spare the feelings of their recipients, these men were able to be frank and open with one another. Taken together, they reveal many interesting, and sometimes moving, aspects of the war: army training; the bombardment by sea of Lowestoft in Suffolk; the air raids by Zeppelin airships and later by Gotha aircraft; the experiences of warfare on the western front, with its notorious trenches, lice and rats, daily dangers and hardships. But the men also write of boredom, of the poppies and of the cornflowers which grew close to the trenches.

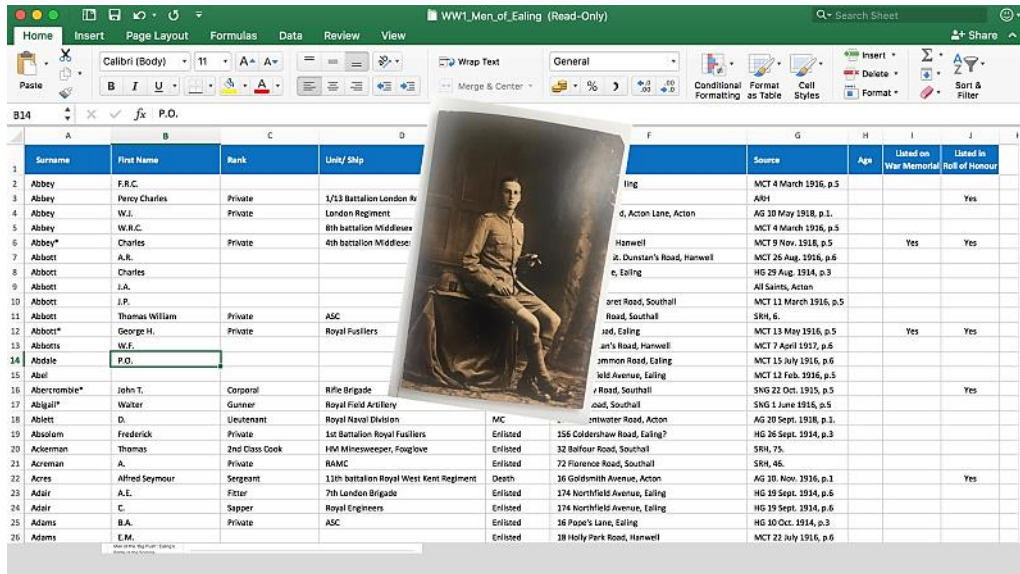
Horace was involved in the battle of Passchendaele, the centenary of which is just coming up, and some of his later letters come from Craiglockhart, the famous war hospital in Scotland for shell-shocked officers where he was sent after being gassed and blown up, and where several of the war poets were treated. Wallace, was in India for five years. He was kept on against his will for the last 12 months after the Armistice to deal with riots in the Punjab and the third Afghan War, and he describes the heat, the disease and the dangers posed by the rebellious tribesmen of what is now northern Pakistan.

All three men survived.



So, what then, of Acton?

## Ealing's Men at War



Surname	First Name	Rank	Unit/Ship	Source	Age	Listed on War Memorial	Listed in Roll of Honour
Abbey	F.R.C.			MCT 4 March 1916, p.5			
Abbey	Percy Charles	Private	1/13 Battalion London R	AG 10 May 1918, p.1.			Yes
Abbey	W.R.C.	Private	London Regiment	MCT 4 March 1916, p.5			
Abbey	W.R.C.		4th battalion Middlesex	MCT 9 Nov. 1918, p.5		Yes	Yes
Abbott	Charles	Private		MCT 26 Aug. 1916, p.6			
Abbott	Charles			HG 29 Aug. 1914, p.3			
Abbott	J.A.			All Saints, Acton			
Abbott	J.P.			MCT 11 March 1916, p.5			
Abbott	Thomas William	Private	ASC	SRH, 6.			
Abbott	George H.	Private	Royal Fusiliers	MCT 13 May 1916, p.5		Yes	Yes
Abbots	W.F.			MCT 7 April 1917, p.6			
Abdole	P.O.			MCT 15 July 1916, p.6			
Abel				MCT 12 Feb. 1916, p.5			
Abercrombie	John T.	Corporal	Rifle Brigade	SHG 22 Oct. 1915, p.5			Yes
Abigail	Walter	Gunner	Royal Field Artillery	SHG 1 June 1916, p.5			
Ablett	D.	Lieutenant	Royal Naval Division	AG 10 Sept. 1918, p.1.			
Abraham	Frederick	Private	1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers	Enlisted			
Adams	Thomas	H.M. Minesweeper, Fouglove		Enlisted			
Adams	A.	Private	RAMC	Enlisted			
Adams	Alfred Seymour	Sergeant	11th battalion Royal West Kent Regiment	Enlisted			
Adair	A.E.	Fitter	7th London Brigade	Enlisted			
Adair	C.	Sapper	Royal Engineers	Enlisted			
Adams	B.A.	Private	ASC	Enlisted			
Adams	E.M.			Enlisted			

Preparing for this talk, I thought I'd find out a bit about our own immediate MHPRA area. [Ealing's Men at War](#), is an online database set up by the local Library service. It shows the names and addresses of local men who served in the forces, and of those, who was killed. I discovered that at least nine men, from Mill Hill Road alone, were killed at numbers 3, 9, 44, 46, 53, 80, 81, 91 and 93, my own home. This last was a printer's clerk named Herbert Copas, who joined up as a rifleman and was killed in France in April 1917, aged 29. The news probably reached our house by telegram, opened by his mother Kate, the widow of a cab driver.

I am an historian, but personal and individual stories about the past have always captivated me more than general, abstract history. Stories like that of Copas, no less than those of Horace Blake, Wallace Allen, and Cyril Glaysher help bring home something of the reality of the First World War, and what it must have meant to so many families.

*Jerome's talk was followed by a reading of four letters by Ray Batchelor to give a flavour of the letters: one letter each from Horace, Wallace and Cyril, plus one written by Carrie, Cyril's wife.*

*Please contact the MHPRA at [millhillparkra@gmail.com](mailto:millhillparkra@gmail.com) if you are interested in purchasing a copy of the book (cost: £25).*