

# FORGET ME NOT

## ALBERT WYATT TERRY FLEMING'S UNCLE

(Uncle) Albert was a very close friend of our family who started work in a Northampton shoe factory at the age of 13. In 1915, at the age of 28, he joined the Coldstream Guards together with a close friend.

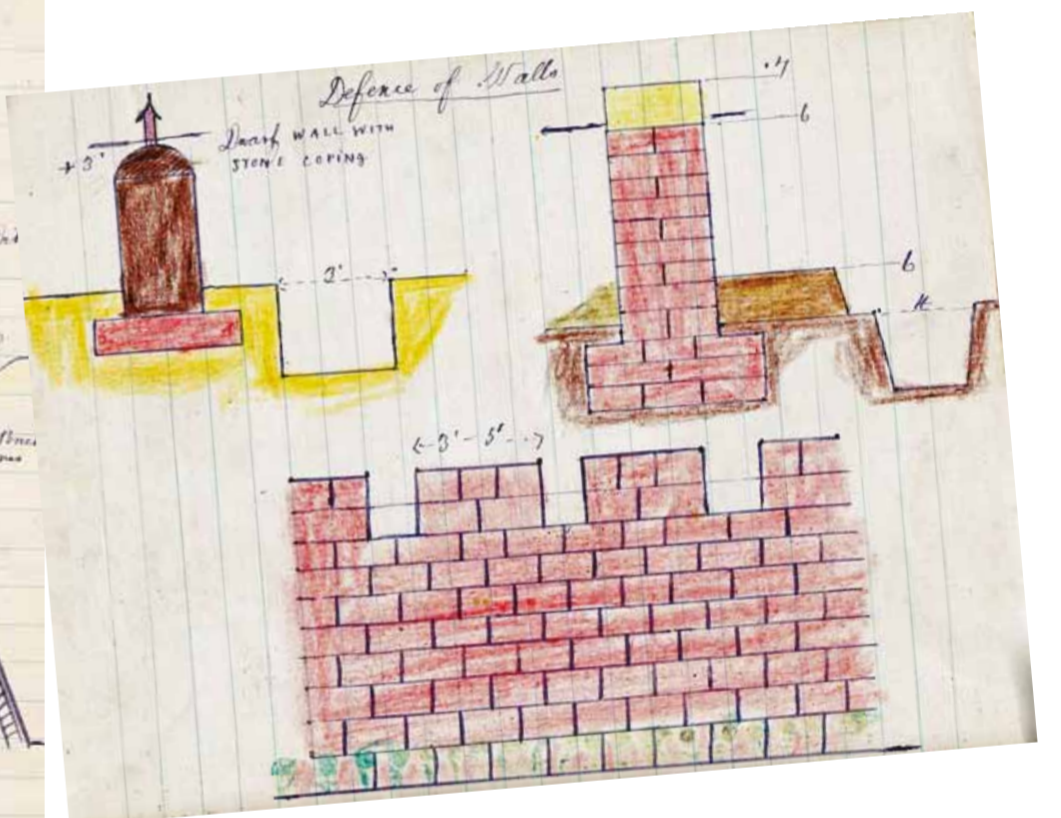
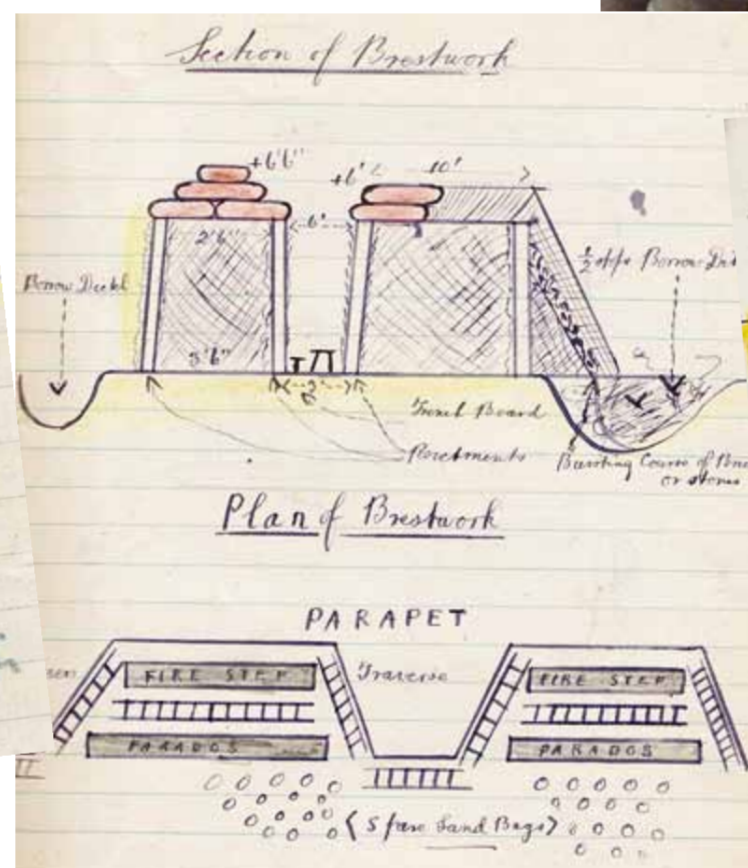
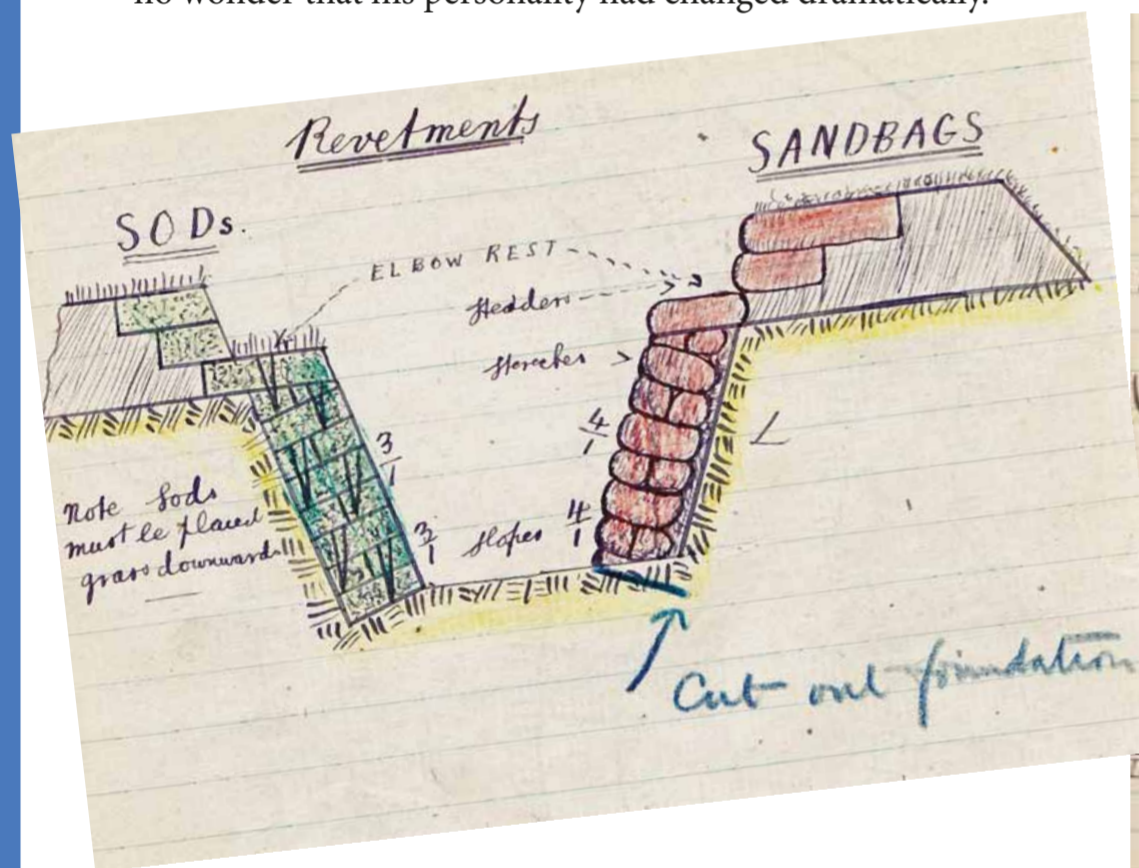
Albert was a keen cricketer and was well known in the local leagues for his bowling. When the army learned of this and his ability to throw a cricket ball long distances he was immediately trained as a Mills bomb thrower.

As a young child I was always asking him what it was like to be in the War, he would not talk about it at all. It was only as old age crept upon him that he started to tell me odd things. He once told me that as a bomb thrower he had to go into "no mans land" in the middle of the night, navigate through his own barbed wire defences and crawl on his stomach towards the German lines. When he was near enough to hear the enemies voices he had to hurl a couple of Mills bombs towards their trenches and then crawl back to his own trench, shouting the password to ensure he was not fired at by his own comrades. He explained how terrifying this was, especially one time when he was crawling back to his trench in total darkness and freezing conditions and he put his hand on something warm. He said he froze in fright, then, gently started to explore the warm object. He eventually realised it was a horse that had been killed in the shelling earlier that day. He told me he was so traumatised he cannot remember how he got back to the safety of his own trench. He also said the rats in the trenches "were as big as cats" and the soldiers used to feed them with scraps and made pets of them. He was one of the lucky ones who survived this war but he was wounded in the back with shrapnel. As it was too dangerous to have it removed, it was there until the day he died. My mother said he was never the same carefree chap he was, when he left for the war.

As a young growing child "Uncle" Albert seemed to be a very sad person, always preoccupied with his private thoughts, very quiet but always kind and gentle towards me. Like many young men returning from this terrible war he had seen many horrific sights and had endured unimaginable hardships, it is no wonder that his personality had changed dramatically.



Before Albert was sent to the front he attended a training course on how to build a trench and when I cleared my mother's house I found the exercise book in which he had made notes and drawn diagrams. At the back of the book, presumably after the war, he had written in pencil "What a difference between these trenches in writing and reading and those in France, be no wars on if they was like the pictures. Albert". I am sure this sentiment was shared by everyone who endured trench warfare.



## ALFRED WILLIAM STEVENS SUZANNE FLEMING'S GRANDFATHER

My paternal Grandfather, I remember him well. He was gentle and quietly spoken, uncomplaining and happy.

He was born in 1875, in Buckinghamshire and spent his youth in Little Horwood. He married in 1905, moving in with his in-laws to the burgeoning town of Northampton. His father-in-law was already a loco driver and persuaded Alfred to work on the railways. He started as a railway fireman, and eventually became a steam-locomotive driver until retirement. At the onset of W.W.I he would have been around 39yrs, too old to volunteer and in a Reserved Occupation. The railways were considered to be too important to lose trained personnel who helped maintain the continuity of transport of soldiers, freight, and national communications. Consequently, he did not go to the front and fight alongside his local friends.

As a child in the 1940's I recall being offered a ride 'on the footplate' with Grandpa (the driver). I was duly passed up by my mother to the waiting arms of Grandpa, at which moment I screamed blue murder at the sight of the massive roaring fire in front of me. I then spent the journey with my Mother in the carriage, and have regretted refusing that ride ever since.

