

FORGET ME NOT

ARTHUR WILLIAM SUTTON

SUZANNE FLEMING'S GRANDFATHER.



Arthur William Sutton my maternal grandfather was born 08.8.1880, an auspicious date in that it remains the same when reversed. He was the firstborn son in a family of fourteen sisters and one brother. He may well have felt delighted to leave the family home and join the army. He enlisted with the 5th (R) Battn. 18th Regiment of the Coldstream Guards as a regular soldier. At 19yrs. old this strong and healthy young man found himself en route for South Africa to fight in the 2nd Boer War in 1899.

The oft heard family story that he swam from Algeciras to the African coast across the Straights of Gibraltar, seemed a surprising feat for this young working class lad. Knowing now that he was on a British ship, almost certainly putting in at the garrison in Gibraltar prior to heading south to the Cape, makes it appear at least possible. His siblings were all strong swimmers thanks to the fact that their father was the caretaker of the newly built Barry Rd. swimming baths in Northampton. The family lived on site and frequented the baths as they wished. I imagine that a group of raw young soldiers abroad for the first time could easily goad the brave swimmers to attempt the swim across the Straight.

He fought in the Orange Free State, Transvaal and Cape Colony without injury, returning home (to Northampton) in 1902.

He remained a reservist in the Guards, and decided to join Northampton Rugby Football Club (The Saints) for some sport and exercise. He played at Franklin's Gardens numerous times, scored the odd try, alongside the famous Edgar Mobbs, a great W.W.I hero and officer.

Arthur married Mary Ann Wright in 1907, my mother Phyllis, being born in December 1908. She is the 8yr. old child on our posters selling the "forget-me-nots" to raise money for soldiers. The beautiful young woman holding the tray was a close family friend whom I remember until she died in her nineties (and still a fine looking woman).

In 1914 the situation in Europe was clearly unstable and war was declared in August. Arthur Sutton (Bill), rejoined the army, but this time joining the 19th Middlesex Regiment. Leaving England in July 1914 as part of "The Old Contemptibles" expeditionary force for Belgium. He fought at Mons and throughout the four years sustaining only a minor injury of some shrapnel damage to his eye. This is the reason, when being photographed with his brother and father, he stands in profile to hide the dressing. Considering the appalling number of fatalities and casualties, his good fortune seems to have been remarkable. He was finally discharged from the army in 1920, with the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major.

Again he returned to his family in Northampton, and did a variety of jobs in the shoe industry. For a time he chauffeured Mr. Manfield (of Manfield Shoes) and drove the company van.

When the Second World War began he volunteered reporting for duty, but at 59yrs. of age was directed to drive ambulances instead of active service. This he did until he contracted the then killer tuberculosis which ended his life in 1945.

Bill Sutton was loved by all, known as "a man's man" (maybe reacting to a young life with fourteen sisters, a wife and two daughters.) We can look at his portrait, hold his medals and velvet rugby caps and feel some pride in our grandfather whose story we tell.



Wenn wir zwei beisammen steh'n,
Muss die Welt vor Neid vergeh'n!



Card to Phyllis + Midge from
their Father. 1st World War

