

## HERITAGE CIRCLE

### Robin Hanworth, Gallantry and Campaign Medals

Robin Hanworth spoke about his passion for collecting and researching gallantry and campaign medals at the October meeting of the Heritage Circle at Rickinghall Village Hall. His interest began when he was a schoolboy in Norwich and he used money saved to buy medal ribbons and to mount them on card.

Robin started by talking about the hierarchy of campaign medals, the highest of which is the Victoria Cross. It was instituted by Queen Victoria in 1855 to recognise gallantry in the Crimean War. The medal has an intentional simplicity so as not to mask the bravery of the recipient who had changed the course of an action. It was made from the metal of Russian cannons captured at Sebastopol rather than gold or silver. It now has a plain crimson ribbon although at its inception there was a blue ribbon for those medals given to naval personnel. This is a rare medal and only three people have managed to win two Victoria Crosses and two of those were in Medical Corps.

Robin has a particular link to the next highest medal, the Military Cross, as his grandfather and one of his uncles gained this award in the First World War. His uncle, Harry Vaughan Robbins, was a Second Lieutenant with the King's Royal Rifle Corps at Ypres and was given the medal for helping a wounded man to safety when under fire. The Military Cross can only be awarded to officers. Soldiers in the ranks received the Military Medal for their bravery. Similarly, only officers could win the Air Force Cross as the men in the ranks were given the Air Force Medal.

A question at the end of the talk raised the issue of how gallantry awards were decided. Robin's view was that a lot depended upon luck, being in the right place at the right time because gallantry was not always observed. In addition, the relationship of the individual with their commanding officer was influential.

Robin then spoke about campaign medals. He displayed the images of a variety of them. The earliest examples dated from the Boer War (1899-1902). A Queen's South African Medal had five clasps on the ribbon which named battles that the recipient had been engaged in. The colours of the ribbons often have a combination of red, white and blue, but gold could be used as a symbol of the sun for campaigns in hotter climates.

The medals known as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, which were irreverently named after characters in a *Daily Mirror* strip cartoon, were sent in large numbers to recognise service in World War I. They were the 1914 Star, the British War Medal 1914-1918 and the Victory Medal 1918. Many were discarded because of the revulsion at what the men had experienced. There was a similar collection of medals for involvement in World War II. The 1939-1945 Star was given to soldiers, along with medals for specific campaigns such as the Burma Star and the Atlantic Star. These have now been replaced by a General Service Medal for campaigns since the Korean War. However, separate medals for the Gulf War and Afghanistan recognise these individual conflicts.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be on Wednesday 22 November at 7.30pm at Rickinghall Village Hall when Graham Moore will give a talk entitled *Radio Broadcasting Through the Ages*. New members and visitors are welcome. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available at [www.heritagecircle@onesuffolk.net](mailto:www.heritagecircle@onesuffolk.net).

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