



# The Jewellery Quarter & THE WORLD WARS

In honour of Remembrance Day, the Jewellery Quarter Business Improvement District (JQBID) have put together a small exhibition highlighting some of the many local stories and connections to the two World Wars and their impact on the Quarter.



 @JQBID

 @jq\_bid

 /JewelleryQtr



## ABOUT

# The Jewellery Quarter

Goldsmiths and silversmiths have been working in this area for nearly 200 years and the Jewellery Quarter continues to produce circa 40% of British jewellery today. The trade reached its peak in the early 1900s on the eve of World War I. The two World Wars and their impact was keenly felt in the Jewellery Quarter by both businesses and residents.

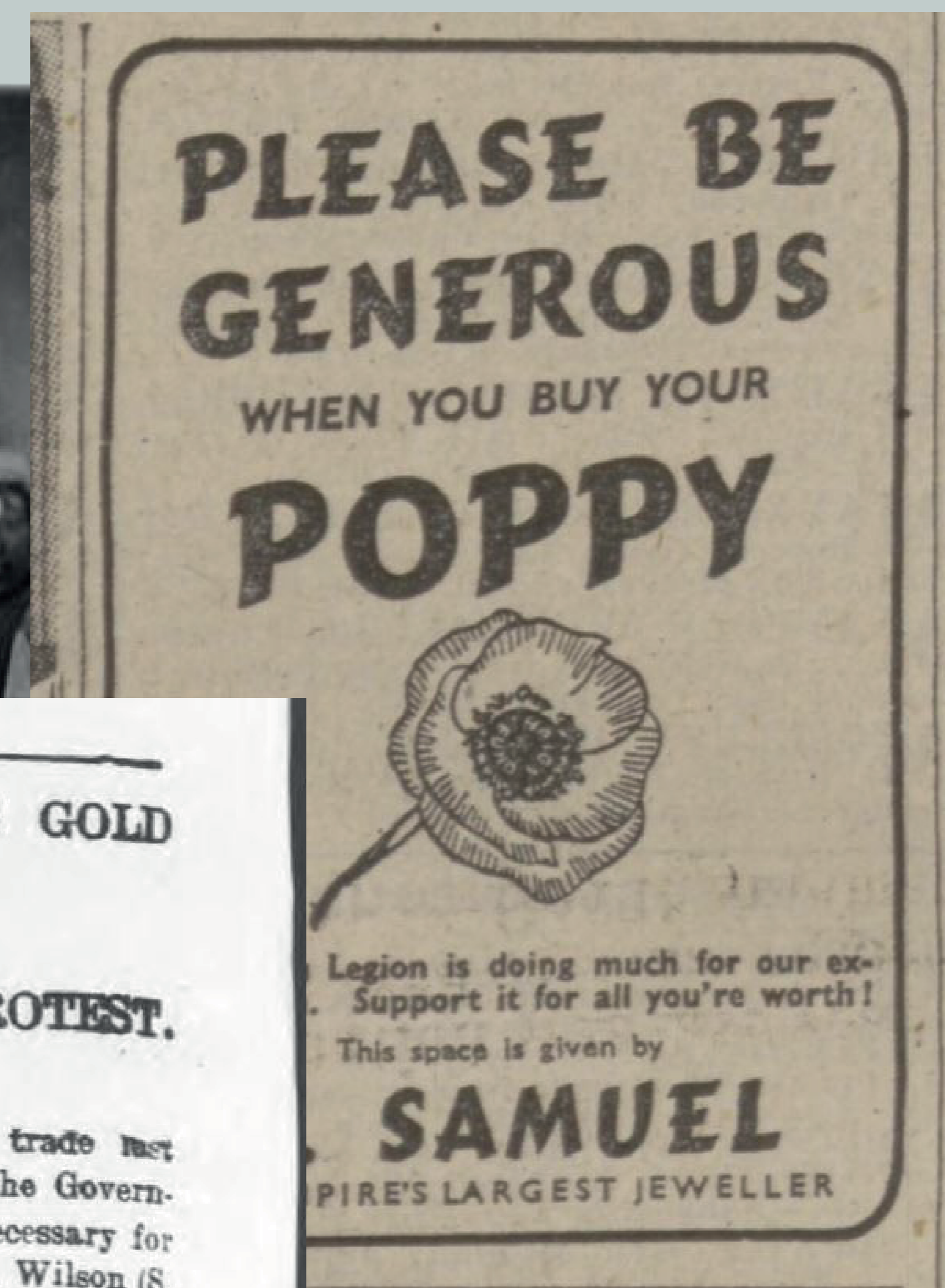


### GOVERNMENT AND THE GOLD SUPPLY.

### WORKING JEWELLERS PROTEST.

Workers engaged in the jewellery trade met night protested against the action of the Government in withholding the gold supply necessary for the continuance of the trade. Mr. C. E. Wilson (S. H. Johnstone and Co.) occupied the chair at a meeting held in Highbury Hall, Birmingham, for the purpose of considering the question.

The Chairman pointed out that efforts in other directions to get the Treasury to release the gold supplies had not been successful, and therefore the time had arrived for the workers to take strong action and endeavour to force the Government either to release the gold or tell them why they could not do so. The speaker recalled a remark



## IMPACT ON THE Jewellery & Metal trades

During both World Wars the metal and manufacturing businesses across the Quarter were heavily involved in supplying materials for the government and the military. Local firms adapted their machines and supply lines to produce everything from munitions and military buttons to water bottles, mess tins, regimental pins and much more. As WWI broke out many skilled workers volunteered for the armed forces but were later called back from the front to man the crucial supply lines at home.

During WWII local firms once again took on government contracts. There was even a local whip-around amongst jewellers in August 1940 for scrap metal such as old dies, tools and scrap steel. Some smaller businesses struggled to adapt or gain the lucrative government contracts and it became increasingly difficult to survive as precious metals were hard to come by and few people were in the market for luxury goods. Bombed out factories and warehouses also had an impact on the local trade both during and after the second World War.

Figure 1: Female munition workers tapping friction tubes in large shells in an unnamed Birmingham jewellery firm, March 1918. © IWM (Q 108399)

Figure 2: Birmingham Daily Post Wednesday 22 November 1916

Figure 3: Advertisement in The Birmingham Mail, 9th November 1944.



# Local Stories

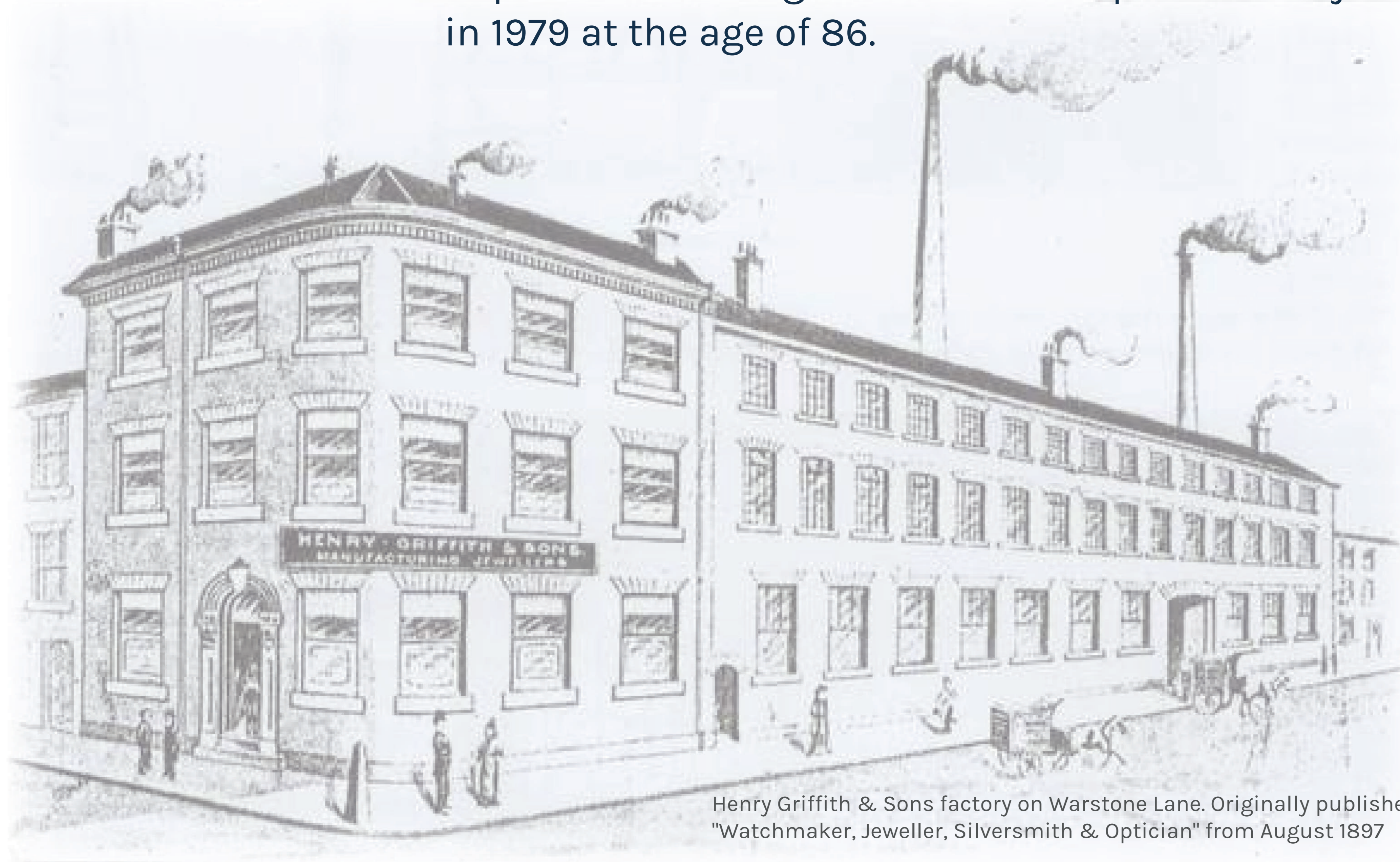


## Captain Dennis Paine

Captain Dennis L. A Paine was a jeweller before World War I, working at Henry Griffiths and Sons on Warstone Lane. The company specialised in small silver pieces such as thimbles and napkin rings.

He had an illustrious career in the armed forces rising to Captain in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He was permitted to resign from the army on compassionate grounds in 1921. By 1939 he was recorded as working as a Silversmiths Department Manager. Dennis Paine passed away in 1979 at the age of 86.

Birmingham Daily Gazette  
30th January 1918



Henry Griffith & Sons factory on Warstone Lane. Originally published in "Watchmaker, Jeweller, Silversmith & Optician" from August 1897



Pte. F. Greening,  
R. War. Regt.,  
killed in action  
4 February, son  
of Mrs. Greening,  
25, Shefford-road,  
Aston. He pre-  
viously worked for  
Messrs. Anstey and  
Wilson, Kenyon-st.

Birmingham Daily Gazette, 19 February 1917

## Private Frederick Greening

In 1911, at age 15, Frederick was working as an electro-plater at Anstey & Wilsons, located on Kenyon Street. The company are well known for their sunburst motif clocks.

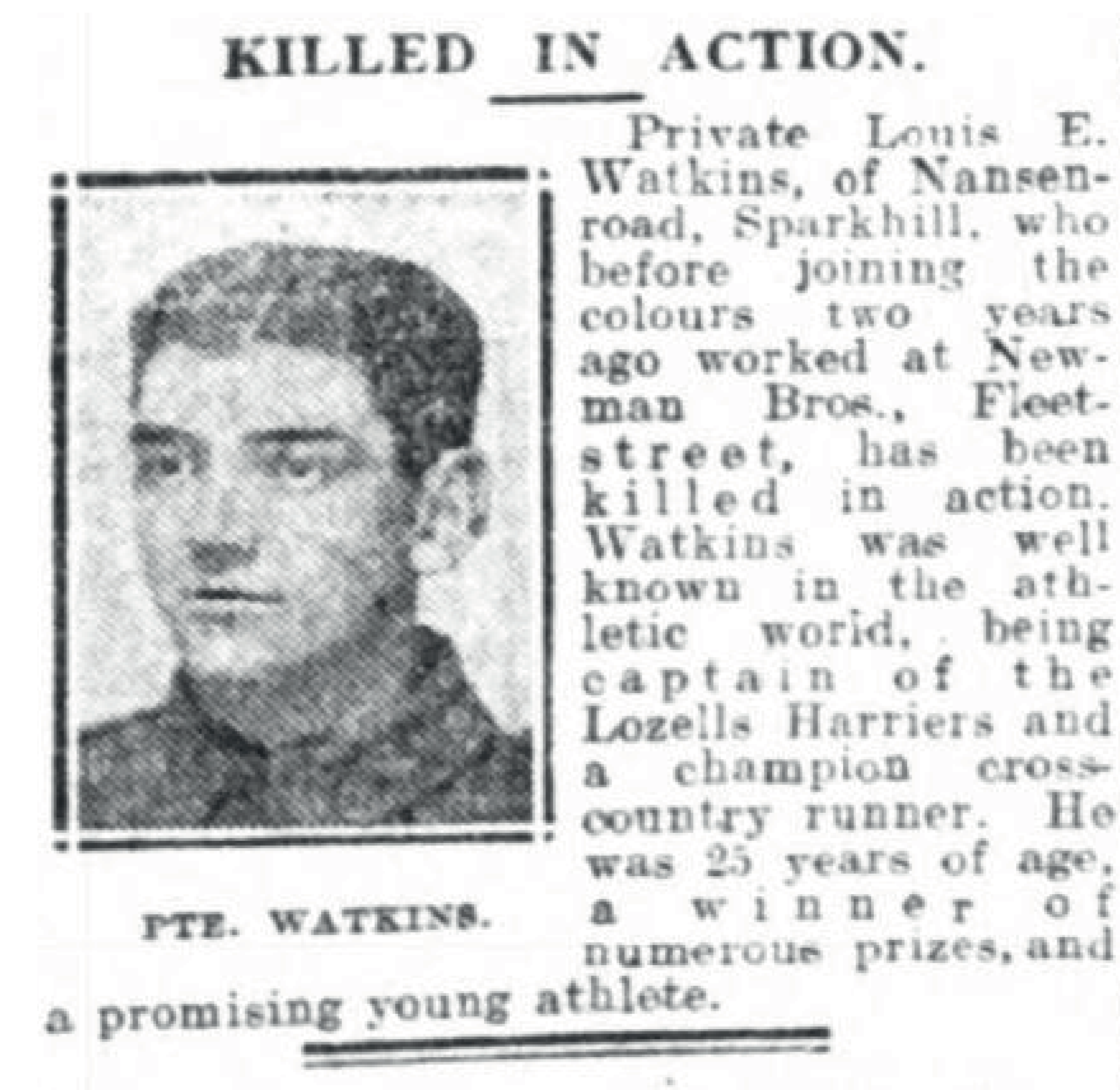
He joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and was killed in action on 4th February 1917 in France, aged 21.

## Private Lewis E. Watkins

Born in Sparkhill Birmingham in 1892, by the age of 19 Lewis was a brass polisher working at Newman Brothers, coffin furniture specialists located on Fleet Street. Lewis was a champion cross-country runner and captain of the Lozells Harriers.

On 20th October 1915 Lewis enlisted and joined the Royal Garrison Artillery. He died on 26th September 1917, aged 25. Lewis was posthumously awarded the British War and Allied Victory Medals which were collected by his father on 19th August 1919.

The Newman Brothers factory still stands in Fleet Street and has been re-opened as the Coffin Works Museum.



Evening Despatch 25th October 1917



# Bombings

There were 77 air raids carried out on Birmingham during World War II with over 2,000 casualties. The bombings greatly affected both businesses and residents in the Jewellery Quarter. A local Police Constable, John McCormack, was awarded the British Empire Medal for his actions on 28th July 1942 addressing a fire caused by bombing. The story was vividly recounted in the Birmingham Gazette.

*"A bomb had started a fire in the storeroom over Barclays Bank, Great Hampton Street. He found the fire and with a stirrup pump extinguished it. He then returned to Kenyon street and attended the fire at the Wandsworth Electrical Company. PC McCormack took a jet through a house, 25 Mary Street, and in this way reached the rear of the burning premises, which were then a mass of flames, and the outer walls collapsing. He climbed a shaky ladder placed against an old wooden building, and from there played on the fire and prevented it from spreading to adjoining factories and workshops."*



# Warstone Lane & Keyhill Cemeteries

There are two cemeteries in the Jewellery Quarter dating back to the Victorian era. During air raids in World War II St Michael's & All Angels Church in Warstone Lane Cemetery was badly damaged and demolished shortly after. The church was originally built in 1848 and was located at the top of the spectacular catacombs which still stand today.

One of the strangest tales from WWII in the Jewellery Quarter concerns husband and wife Alfred and Mabel Wakeling. A bomb hit their business, The Vine Inn on Carver Street, on 12th December 1940. The body of Alfred and a woman, presumed to be Mabel, were found in the rubble and buried in Keyhill Cemetery. Sometime later Mabel's body was discovered in the basement where she appeared to have been trapped by debris. It was reported her fingers and nails were badly damaged, presumably from trying to escape. Reports also surfaced that a passer-by had heard strange noises from the rubble and informed the authorities. However as both Alfred and his wife had been accounted for the report was ignored. The body of Mabel was eventually buried with that of her husband and the mystery woman.

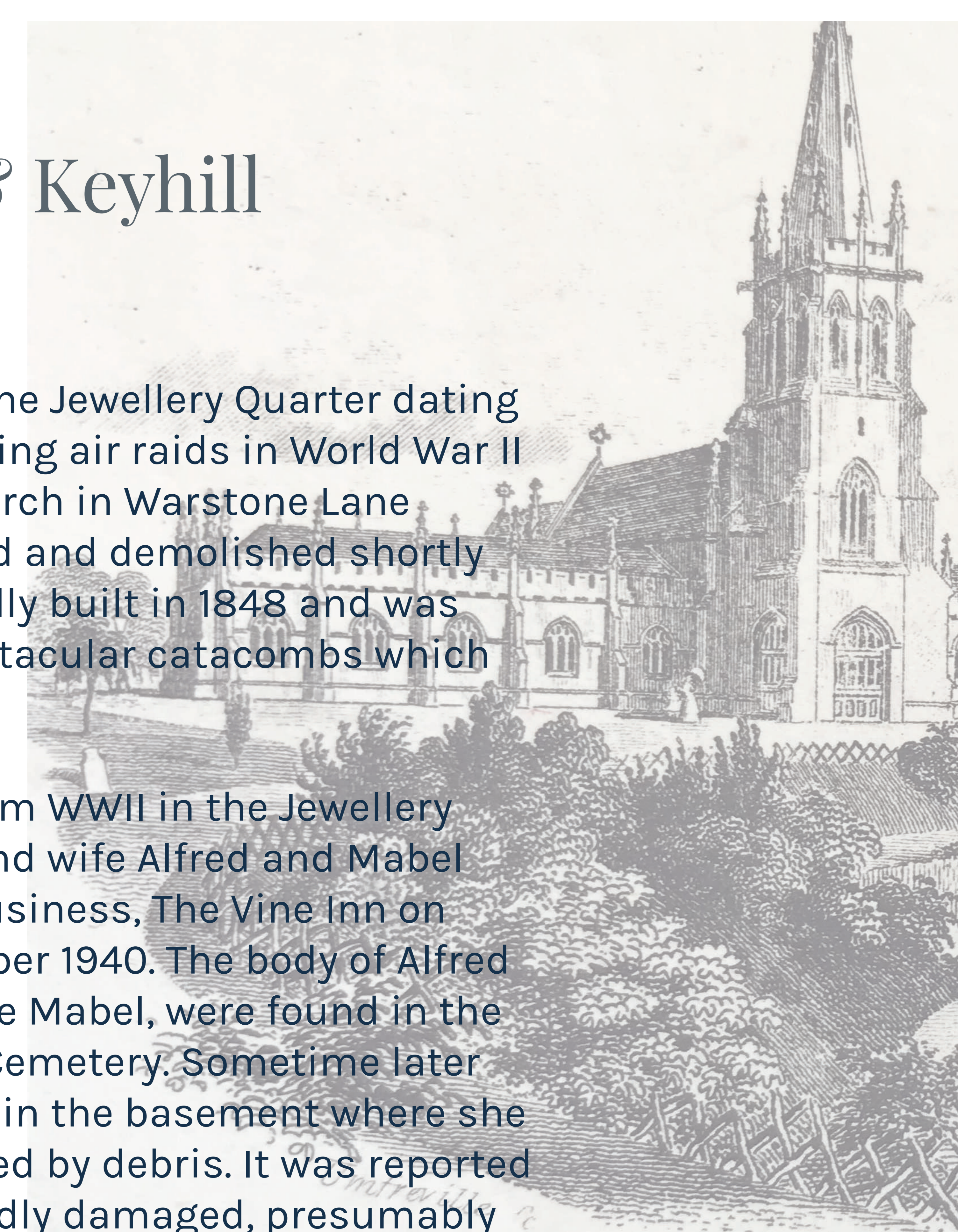


Figure 1: Barclays Bank on Hockley Hill, taken in 1956. Reproduced with permission by Barclays Group Archives.

Figure 2: St Michael's & All Saints Church, damaged by bombing in World War 2. Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.

Figure 3: St Michael's Church, from Granger's Map of Birmingham 1870 gives an impression of how the catacombs and church would originally have looked.



## BIRMINGHAM PALS

# 14th, 15th & 16th Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment

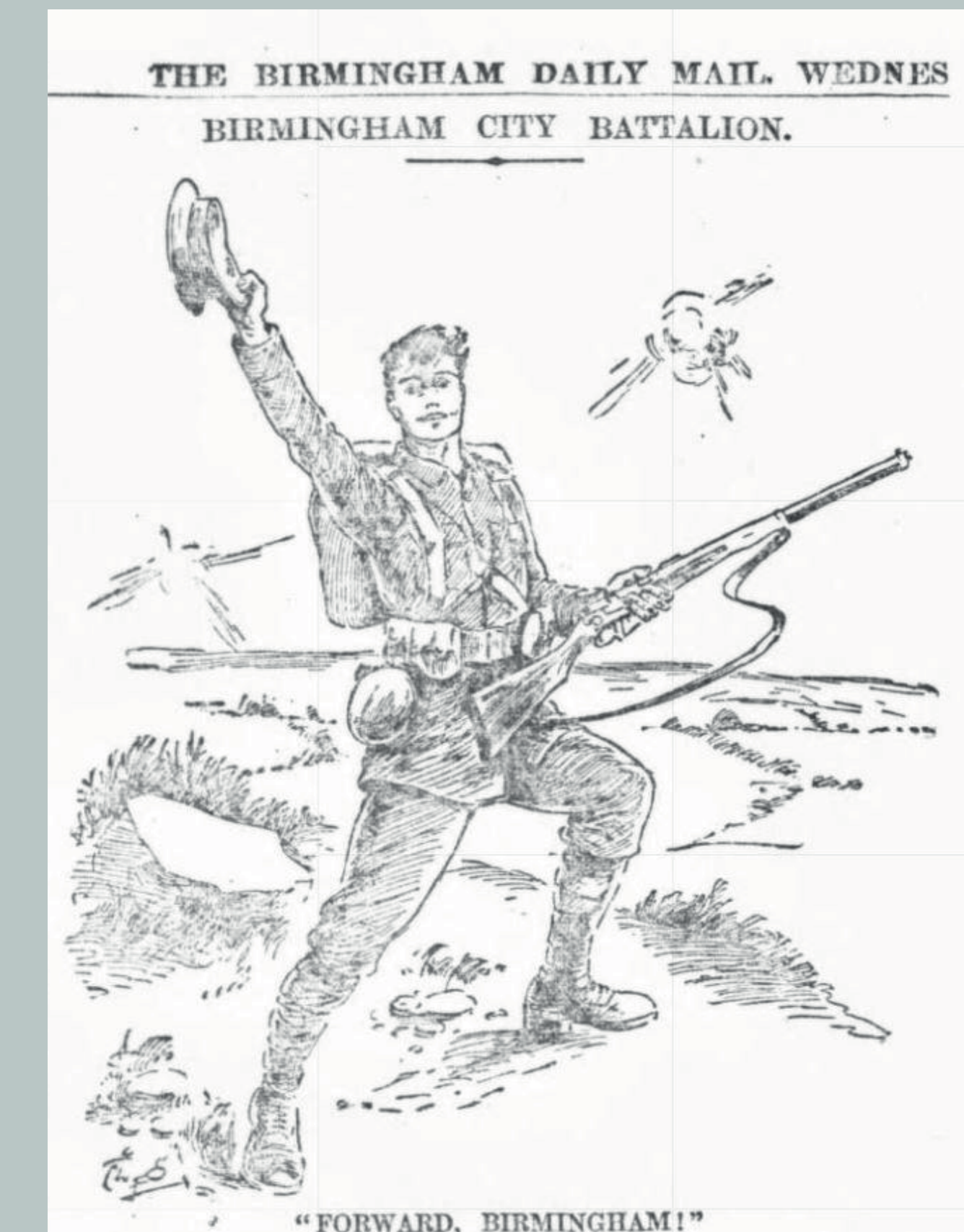
Thousands of local Birmingham men, from all walks of life, signed up with the armed forces following a public appeal on 11 August by Lord Kitchener for 500,000 volunteers.

Taking the example of Liverpool and Manchester, many men from the same workplace, family or professional association joined up in groups to the same regiments known as "pals" - hence the Birmingham Pals. In fact, so many men from the Jewellery Quarter signed up that a Jeweller's Company was formed.

The first casualty of the Birmingham Pals was a jeweller, Private Frederick Thomas Griffiths. He died from a tuberculosis infection on 25th October 1914 while they were still in training.



© IWM (INS 7627)



The Birmingham Daily Mail, 2 September 1914



The Birmingham Daily Mail 5th August 1914



The cap badge of the 1st Birmingham (14th Service) Royal Warwickshire Regiment. © IWM (INS 5639)



Munition Worker at nearby Kynoch Ltd. One of the largest Birmingham munition factories during World War I they were located in Witton and many thousands of workers, most of them women, were employed creating ammunitions, cartridge clips and cases. Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham.

## Women at work

The demand for soldiers during both wars lead to acute labour shortages and both unmarried and married women were encouraged to apply for work particularly in munition factories. Local firms adapted their machinery to produce munitions and accessories for the army and other government institutions.

Women had been used for cheap labour for a long time in the Quarter but their overall working conditions did improve slightly during and after WWI. Many local employers advertised a "war bonus" on top of wages. At the end of WWI many of these women would lose their jobs leading to large unemployment among women.



THE LANEWOOD STRADED ROAD, BIRMINGHAM

Government poster produced in 1941 © IWM (Art.IWM PST 3645)



# Local Stories

## Baker & Finnemore Ltd

The firm began as a pen manufacturing company under the name "Wagner Steel Pens" in 1849. They moved into their current premises on Newhall Street in 1922.

Like other local firms they relied on female workers during both World Wars to maintain their supply lines. The pictured job advert from 1915 lists "smart press girls" as well as "war bonuses" indicating they were working on government and military contracts. Many local pen nib manufacturers adapted their machines and presses to produce ammunitions and other military supplies.

**STEEL Pen Trade.—Girls Wanted, not under 14 years.—Apply, Joseph Gillott and Sons, Graham St.**  
**STEEL Pen Trade.—Experienced Lookers-over Wanted.—George W. Hughes, Legge Lane.**  
**STEEL Pen Trade.—Wanted, Piercers, Raisers, Straight and Cross Grinders, Slitters; also Learners.—Hughes, Legge Lane.**  
**STEEL Pen Trade.—Piercers, Markers, Raisers, Grinders, Rounders, and smart Press Girls; war bonus; also Pen Scourer and Warehouse Girls.—Baker and Finnemore, Ltd., Newhall St.**  
**STEWARDS and Stewardess, for works club; must be ex-**

Birmingham Mail Monday 6 September 1915

**British Blades for British Tommies**

**War Office Contract for Myatt Daymark Blades**  
Made in Birmingham with Sheffield Steel

The first War Office contract ever awarded to an English firm for the supply of safety razors and blades to the Army has been secured by W. J. Myatt & Co. Ltd., of Birmingham.

It is only a few weeks since this firm secured a similar contract from H.M. Office of Works.

No more conclusive evidence could be afforded of the merits of the British Myatt Blade and the exclusive 'Daymarking' principle that has made its reputation.

The 'Myatt' is the only safety razor blade in the world marked with the days of the week in such a way that each edge can be used and rested in turn.

'Daymarking' maintains the keenness and temper of the blade and ensures that it keeps in tip-top condition for a longer period than any other make.

**MYATT PATENT DAYMARK BLADES**

MADE IN ENGLAND SOLD EVERYWHERE **1/3 FOR FIVE**

W. J. MYATT & CO. LTD. ARGENT WORKS, BIRMINGHAM

Yorkshire Evening Post, 25 October 1928.

**MILITARY CREST BROOCHES**  
IN 9CT. AND ENAMEL & SILVER AND ENAMEL

ROYAL NAVY SERVICE COAST FLEET AIR ARM (Fleet Badges) ROYAL AIR FORCE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

SPECIAL DESIGNS SUBMITTED FOR GEM SET BROOCHES PRICES ON APPLICATION

ANY BADGE CAN BE SUPPLIED SET WITH EITHER DIAMONDS OR ROSE DIAMONDS

**DEAKIN & FRANCIS LIMITED**  
17 REGENT PLACE, BIRMINGHAM, 1  
Telephone: CENTRAL 7751 (2 lines) Telegrams: DEAFRA, BIRMINGHAM  
LONDON OFFICE & SHOWROOMS:  
AUDREY HOUSE, ELY PLACE, HOLBORN CIRCUS, LONDON, E.C.1  
Telephone: HOLBORN 4808

Advert in Goldsmiths Journal April, 1940.

## Myatt & Co. Ltd.

In 1914 the company was located in the Argent Works on Frederick Street and employed circa 400 people. They were specialists in electroplating and made a broad range of products including table wares and razor blades. The advert from 1928 promotes their ongoing supply contract with the military.

The stunning Argent Works building still survives today and houses the Birmingham Pen Museum amongst other businesses.

**NOW ON ACTIVE SERVICE**

FOR THE DURATION OF THE WAR WE ARE ENGAGED ON WORK OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

Manufacturers of:  
**'EXQUISITE' FASHION JEWELLERY**

**W. A. P. WATSON LTD.**  
10, GT. HAMPTON ST., BIRMINGHAM, 18.

An advert in British Jeweller, March 1942.

## Deakin & Francis

Originally founded in 1786 they still operate part of their business from their original premises in Regent Place. Deakin & Francis is currently managed by brothers Henry and James Deakin and may be one of the oldest family jewellers in the country.

The firm lost many of their workers as well as senior management in World War I including Captain J.H. Francis. His death on 4 June 1915 marked the end of the Francis family line.

## W.A.P Watson Ltd

The company formed in 1914 and by Word War II were based at 9-10 Great Hampton Street. During the war they were engaged on government contracts but returned to costume jewellery during peacetime.

This advert from 1942 in a trade magazine ensured their regular clients knew they couldn't fulfill regular orders, while simultaneously indicating that the company was still in business.

## With thanks

We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the many individuals and organisations who lent their time and expertise to this work including; Barclays Group Archives. Colin Giles & the Pen Museum. Marie Haddleton & the Hockley Flyer. The Coffin Works. Friends of Warstone Lane & Keyhill Cemetery. The Jewellery Quarter Research Trust.