

My Family's Story

Name of contributor: Ann Cullis, Arts Development Manager

Family member and relationship to contributor: Walter Bell, Great Grandfather

My Family's Story:

Walter Bell was born on 23 April 1868 and joined the Army at 18. He served in India and South Africa, completing 20 years in 1906 with the rank of Captain. He then became Riding & Musketry Instructor to the Worcestershire Yeomanry, expecting a quieter life working with the horses. In August 1914, the Worcestershire Yeomanry were called-up and in 1915 Captain Bell embarked for North Africa. He was the Quartermaster, in charge of supplies and logistics.

On 23 April 1916, his 48th birthday, the Yeomanry were ambushed by Turkish forces at the Battle of Qatia. Captain Bell and several hundred officers and men were taken Prisoner of War and travelled by train and on foot through Egypt, Palestine and into Turkey, where they were held in Yozgad prison until December 1918.

I have Walter Bell's diaries and notebooks from his time in Yozgad. They include his calculations of provisions – bread, potatoes, soap, clean clothes – which he negotiated with the guards, and lists of Turkish vocabulary. I also have his bank passbook with a letter from a fellow soldier to the bank manager in Worcester. He says that after the Battle of Qatia, he found the passbook on the battlefield, and does not know if the owner is dead or alive, but hopes one day he will return to Worcester to reclaim his passbook.

Captain Bell was awarded the rank of Major on his safe return to Worcester, where he died aged 80 in 1948.

Image: Walter Bell's bank passbook found by a soldier on the battlefield and returned to Walter via Lloyd's Bank in Worcester.

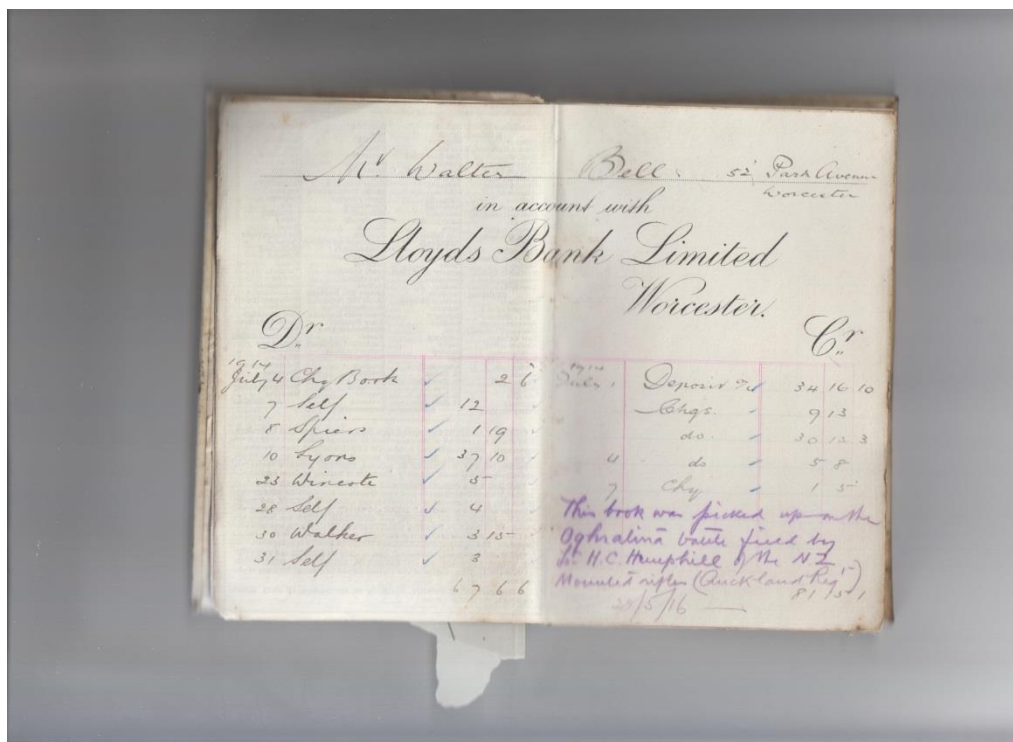


Image: Major Walter Bell, Worcestershire Yeomanry



Image: Soldier's letter to the bank manager in Worcester, May 1916

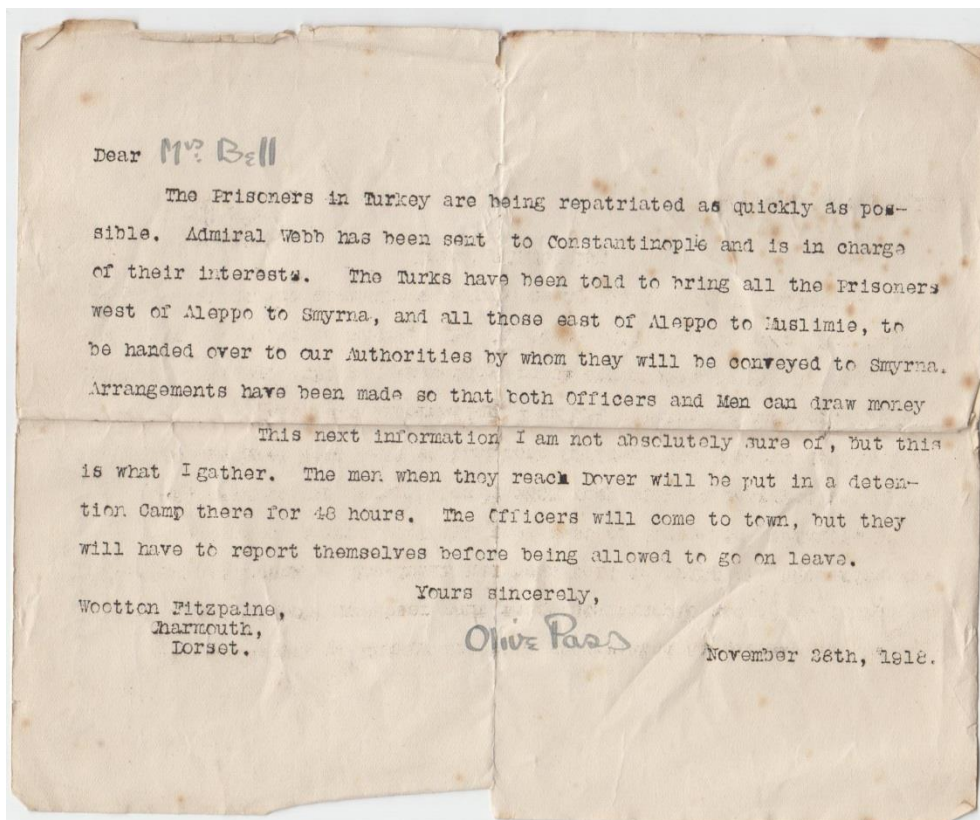
Romani
Kantara -
16/5/16.

Manager,
Lloyds Bank Ltd
Worcester -

Dear Sir,

I am enclosing herewith
a bank pass book which I personally
picked up on the scene of the
Oghratana el Kelina fight - which took
place on the 19th April between the
Turks and English Germany -
I trust the owner of the book is
still alive to enjoy the bank
standing to his credit.
My Squadron happened to patrol
the position shortly after the "blotting" up
but - every thing had been destroyed
by the enemy - the place presented
a mass of wood signs - and the loss of
so much stock made our stay
very short - The Australian troops actually
buried their dead but - I understand
they saw nothing of which they could
identify the bodies - The personal descs
had been taken - However I received word
Bell survives - I remain
Yours sincerely
H. Humphries

Image: Letter to Eliza Bell, 1918, repatriation of Prisoners of War



Dear Mr Bell

The Prisoners in Turkey are being repatriated as quickly as possible. Admiral Webb has been sent to Constantinople and is in charge of their interests. The Turks have been told to bring all the Prisoners west of Aleppo to Smyrna, and all those east of Aleppo to Maslimie, to be handed over to our Authorities by whom they will be conveyed to Smyrna. Arrangements have been made so that both Officers and Men can draw money

This next information I am not absolutely sure of, but this is what I gather. The men when they reach Dover will be put in a detention Camp there for 48 hours. The Officers will come to town, but they will have to report themselves before being allowed to go on leave.

Yours sincerely,

Olive Pass

November 26th, 1918.

Wootton Fitzpaine,
Charmouth,
Dorset.