

# Souvenirs from the Front

*Contributed by Phillipa Malins*

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WWI on Aug 4th, Cuckfield Museum has been loaned some fascinating new objects which are now on display as part of its 'A Small Town at War' exhibition, amongst which are:

## A Red Cross 'Dorothy Bag'

Fred Manvell enlisted in the Royal Sussex Pioneer Regt in Sept 1914, at the age of 17, so that he could fight with his elder brother, Ern. They were two of the eight children of Stephen Manvell, head gardener at Butler's Green House, who lived at Steeple Cottage, Butler's Green, near Haywards Heath.

Fred fought at the Battle of the Somme and was injured three times during the War. On the third occasion in 1918, when he was gassed, his uniform was discarded because it is likely to have been contaminated but his buttons and regimental badges were removed and placed in his handkerchief, along with his notebooks containing diary entries and other personal possessions.

They were put in a drawstring bag, known popularly as a Dorothy Bag, which was labelled and tied around his neck to prevent it being lost. The bag with its contents, kept intact by the family after the war, has been kindly loaned by his daughter Hazel Gubbin and is displayed with cards sent by the two brothers and family photographs, showing the very warm ties that bound the family. Although Fred survived the war, sadly Ern was killed in March 1918.

Five million 'Dorothy Bags', called after the traditional drawstring bags carried by brides, were made by volunteers during WWI, organised by the Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. They were sent to the Front where there was a problem with soldiers becoming separated from their belongings when they were being treated in Dressing Stations. To find one of these bags, in such good condition and still with its contents, is a treasure.

## German Field Glasses

Percy Brooker was the father in law of Cuckfield resident Margaret Brooker. Born at Stumbleholme Farm, Ifield, W. Sussex in 1895, he joined the Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery because he understood horses. He was sent to France in 1915 and served alongside an RAMC doctor, Dr. Purdy, witnessing the Battles of Ypres and the Somme.



*German WWI Field Glasses*



*Fred Manvell's 'Dorothy Bag' and contents*

When he returned from the war, Percy brought with him a pair of field glasses which he had taken from the body of a dead German soldier as a souvenir. Knowing this was forbidden, he concealed them in a piece of bread and hid them in his mess tin. His family used the glasses for many years and his grandchildren, Peter Brooker, Jose Gibbs and Mary Wyatt, who have kindly loaned them, remember playing with them as children and indeed they still work today!

Although Dr. Purdy and Percy survived the war and even retained the same horses throughout, Percy was gassed twice which led to his premature death in 1948.

The Museum is displaying the glasses with a set of replica WWI mess tins.