

Injuries take a toll on Wanderers half-back

NOSTALGIA

with Mike Dewey

THIS week we continue to tell the stories of the Wycombe Wanderers footballers who served in the Great War and survived. We will consider Harry Gates, who along with Bernard Hooper (whose story we told in the October 31 and November 7 editions) and George Buchanan, formed a partnership which was reputed to be "one of the best half-back lines the Wanderers ever had".

Harry was born in 1887, the son of William and Ellen Gates, at Old Brown's Farm in St Leonards, Aston Clinton, near Aylesbury. His father was a farmer at the time. Around 1892 his father retired from farming and became the licensee of the Horse & Jockey public house in St Mary Street, High Wycombe.

After leaving school he became a carrier for a short period before trying to enlist in the British Army on January 16, 1904. His application was rejected due to a 'skin rash'. On December 4 1904 he successfully applied again and enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps. This was for a term of three years, followed by a period of nine years in the First Class of the Army Reserve. He was quite tall for the time, at 5ft 10ins, had a fresh complexion, grey eyes and brown hair. After six months 'service and gymnastic course' his weight had increased from 154 to 160lbs! So he was a well-built man.

In the RAMC he underwent training at the Training School in Aldershot, receiving his certificate on May 16, 1905. The remainder of his three years of Army service was spent in the UK and he was able to pursue his passion for sport. He spent a week in hospital in Portsmouth in November 1905, suffering from contusion on his right foot, having been kicked on the foot playing football!

On his discharge in May 1908 he resumed his occupation as a carrier. He also began his footballing career with Wycombe Wanderers, playing in the team which won the Berks & Bucks Senior Cup in the 1908/09 season. He was also called on to play in the county team in that season, so receiving his 'County Badge'. The following year he was a member of the team that again won the County Cup, as well as the Charity Cup. He appears to have been a defensive half-back, never appearing on the score-sheet.

On October 2nd, 1909 he married Daisy Ella Stoner at Rotherfield Greys in Oxfordshire. The couple had a daughter Ellen Daisy born on May 3rd, 1910 and another Marjorie Vera on December 21, 1911. At this time the family were living at 64 Bridge Street in Wycombe.

Harry's father William died in 1908 and James Edworthy took over as licensee of the Horse & Jockey for a few years but was succeeded by Harry before the outbreak of the Great War. He was mobilised at Cosham on August 5th, the day after Britain declared

war on Germany, and posted to the 9th Field Ambulance the same day.

He spent the whole war at the Western Front in France and Belgium in the 9th Field Ambulance attached to the Guards Brigade, being involved in the Retreat from Mons and several other major engagements. The Retreat was the long withdrawal to the River Marne, in August and September 1914, by Allied forces on the Western Front. He was a stretcher-bearer.

The Bucks Free Press reported on November 30th, 1917 that he had 'finished his 14 days leave from the Front on Saturday last. Gates has been at the Front since August 9, 1914, and during that time he has been wounded three times, consequently he is entitled to wear three gold stripes'. He was injured again in June 1918 when he 'slipped and twisted his knee while walking along trench-boards to a bearer post', but did not require hospital treatment. However on July 27 he was 'hit with a cricket ball on the same knee and sent to No.1 Australian Hospital at Rouen, and was then transferred to the 74th General Hospital. Thereafter he suffered from 'chronic synovitis'. This causes joint tenderness or pain, swelling and hard lumps, called nodules.

On June 1st, 1918 he was promoted from Corporal to Sergeant and in December of that year was awarded the Military Medal for bravery. Harry was eventually discharged from the RAMC on



The Horse & Jockey public house can be seen on the far right of this photograph taken of the western side of White Hart Street about 1940. Most of the street was demolished in the 1960s, this being a great loss to the town of one of its most attractive streets.

May 14, 1919, returning to Wycombe to presume his career as 'Mine Host' at the Horse & Jockey. He did not resume his footballing career with WWFC, probably due to the wounds he had received during the war. He did become a Special Constable in the town, and also organised charity football matches between the town's tradesmen and the police and fire brigades.

His injuries had clearly taken a toll on his health and he died at the young age of 45 on January 6, 1933. He had been taken to the War Memorial Hospital on New Years Day for an operation but died there following complications. The funeral took place at All

Saints Parish Church, when the chief mourners were his wife and two daughters. The BFP reported that "there were 40 wreaths and these included from WWFC, workmen at Messrs Nicholls & Janes [whose factory was in St Mary St close to the Horse & Jockey], the 'Old Contemptibles', and the Wycombe Police Athletic Club".

Harry's daughter Ellen married Horace Lines in 1929, and his other daughter Marjorie married Reginald Bristow in 1934. Are there descendants of either of these still living in the Wycombe area?

If so we would love to hear from you.