

GREAT WAR STAINED GLASS WINDOW MEMORIALS IN KENT

No. 2: St Nicholas, Ringwould, Kent.

Captain and Adjutant Frank Scobell NISBET

2nd Manchester Regiment

KIA 26 August 1914, Le Cateau, France

Window: St Nicholas, Ringwould, Kent.

Kent links: Prep school; father former Rector of St Nicholas, Ringwould.

Medals: South Africa, Queen's Medal (3 clasps), King's Medal (2 clasps); 1914 Star, Mentioned in Despatches (October 1914)

War Grave: None. La Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial



Captain Frank Scobell Nisbet
Source: Winchester College at War

Frank Nisbet was born on 22 November 1878 at St Luke's Vicarage in Gloucester, the elder son of Reverend (later Canon) Matthew Alexander Nisbet and his wife Louisa Janey, née Scobell. He was educated at The Grange Preparatory School in Folkestone and, between 1891 and 1894, at Winchester College. In his final year at the school his younger brother died at the age of fourteen. Nisbet determined on a military career and entered RMC Sandhurst, where he captained the Association Football XI and played cricket and golf. He retained a keen interest in these sports during his military career, being a member of the MCC and playing cricket for the Free Foresters and other clubs when quartered in different parts of the country. In 1896 he won the Singles Tournament of the Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club in Deal.¹

He was gazetted to the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment in 1898 and was promoted to Lieutenant in July 1899 and to Captain in July 1901.² By the time of his second promotion he

¹ Colonel L.A. Clutterbuck (ed), *The Bond of Sacrifice: A Biographical Record of British Officers who Fell in the Great War* (reprint, Uckfield n.d.), p.283; Winchester College at War, <http://www.winchestercollegeatwar.com/archive/frank-scobell-nisbet/>

² *London Gazette*, 22 August 1899, p.5251, 15 October 1901, p.6712.

was serving with the British forces in the Boer War. At first he was given charge of the 17th Brigade's Ammunition Column, taking part in operations that led to the surrender of Boer forces in the Caledon Valley in August 1900. He subsequently rejoined his battalion during operations in the Orange River Colony.³ He returned to England in 1902.

In 1912 Nisbet was appointed Adjutant of the 2nd Battalion and thus was responsible for 'the hundred and one things that is (sic) necessary when a Regiment has orders to mobilise'.⁴ The battalion was stationed at the Curragh in Ireland at the outbreak of war. Under the plans for creating a British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the battalion became part of 14th Brigade, 5th Division in II Corps. It arrived at Le Havre on 16 August 1914 and on the 17th entrained, arriving at Le Cateau at noon on the following day. From there the battalion made an eight-hour march to Landrecies, around which the 5th Division was concentrating.⁵ After a few days resting, the battalion advanced towards Mons, taking up its assigned position between Jemappes and Bois de Boussu on the Mons-Condé canal during the afternoon of the 22nd.

The 2nd Battalion did not play a major part in the Battle of Mons on 23 August, as 14th Brigade was in reserve. Indeed, the BEF's first significant clash of arms appears not to have been noticed. The War Diary of another 14th Brigade battalion, compiled after the event, states that 'The news reached us later that a great battle had been fought from our position on the left to Mons on the right and that certain units had suffered terrible losses'.⁶ The 2nd Manchester's War Diary does not have an entry for 23 August, possibly owing to the notes of events being in Nisbet's possession when he was killed. That evening, however, despite II Corps holding its own, the great withdrawal began when it was realised that the French Fifth and Fourth Armies, the former after heavy fighting at Charleroi and the latter in the Ardennes, were retreating and had left the BEF's right flank exposed. There was a real possibility that the BEF could be enveloped and pushed back into Mons.⁷

II Corps withdrew from the trap without too much harm, but the movements in the next forty-eight hours led to both the battalions becoming increasingly separated and a worrying gap of about five miles emerging between the BEF's two corps. General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's orders from GOC Sir John French were to retreat to St Quentin, but in light of the Corps' inability to throw off the pursuing Germans, he decided that he had to stop and fight. By giving the enemy a bloody nose he might gain time to break contact and allow his exhausted and hungry troops a breathing space. On his own initiative he decided to fight at Le Cateau.⁸

The 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment played a much more prominent role at Le Cateau on 26 August than at Mons. The 5th Division was placed on the right of the line, with 2nd Suffolk's at the extreme right and 2nd Manchester's in support. The latter's War Diary recorded the events: 'About 10 am Germans advanced, attacking the Suffolk's and [the RFA] batteries vigorously with shell fire and machine guns. The battalion was ordered to support them and A Company under Captain Trueman went to right and B Company under Captain

³ Clutterbuck, *Bond of Sacrifice*, p.283.

⁴ 'It is a Gas-ly War': The Diary of Major Swindell, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Part 1', 6-12 August 1914, <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-people/diaries/2464-it-is-a-gas-ly-war-the-diary-of-major-swindell-2nd-battalion-manchester-regiment-part-1.html>

⁵ War Diary, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, 13-18 August 1914, TNA PRO WO 95/1564; J.E. Edmonds, *Official History of the Great War: Military Operations France and Belgium 1914* (1933: reprint Uckfield n.d.), Vol. 1, p.49.

⁶ War Diary, 1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, 23 August 1914, TNA PRO WO 95/1564.

⁷ Robin Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914* (London 2004), pp.154-55.

⁸ For Smith-Dorrien's decision to stand and fight, see Antony Bird, *Gentlemen, We will Stand and Fight: Le Cateau, 1914* (Marlborough 2008), pp.45-49.

Knox to left with Captain and Adjutant Nisbet'.⁹ The rest of the account concentrates on the right side of the line and there is no account of what happened to B Company. Nisbet's death was, however, recorded: 'The casualties in the centre were very heavy, Captain Nisbet being shot through the head and 13 other officers wounded'. Among the wounded was Knox. This may explain why *The Bond of Sacrifice* account related that Nisbet 'was killed ... while leading a company whose Captain had been put out of action'.¹⁰

Smith-Dorrien's decision to fight at Le Cateau was vindicated as II Corps was given some breathing space to continue its retreat to St Quentin the next day as a more cohesive unit. The retreat ensured, however, that Nisbet's body was never recovered. No doubt it was buried by the Germans or by local inhabitants, but no record of the site exists. Nisbet is thus memorialised on the La Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial to the Missing.

Frank Nisbet was the third of Canon Nisbet's seven children to die (four daughters remained).¹¹ One daughter, Mary, had died within days of birth in 1876 and his only other son in 1895. When it came to deciding on an appropriate memorial to Frank, the parents chose to erect a stained glass window in memory of all their dead children.¹² The family was wealthy—when Canon Nisbet died in 1919 he left £25565 in his will, the equivalent of nearly £1 million today—and could afford to arrange a very beautiful two-light window. The parish church chosen was St Nicholas in Ringwould, a Cinque Port village between Deal and Dover, where Canon Nisbet had previously served as Rector.

The window was unveiled on Thursday 30 March 1916 and dedicated by the Bishop of Dover.¹³ The window has two lights, the left dedicated to Frank Nisbet, with the right memorialising his brother and sister (see below). Across the top of the window is the inscription: *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.* Along the bottom is the dedication: *To the glory of God and in memory of Frank Scobell Nisbet, Captain Manchester Regt who fell at Le Cateau 26 August 1914 aged 35, Hugh Matthew Nisbet died 27 Feb. 1895 aged 14, Mary Nisbet who died 3 July 1876 aged 3 days, children of Matthew Alexander Nisbet formerly Rector of this parish, Honorary Canon of Canterbury, and Louisa Janey his wife.*

The fact that this is a family memorial window means that the symbolism of the figures in the window varies. In the right light Mary is represented as a baby in the arms of a female saint and Hugh by St Pancras, the Roman youth (and patron saint of children) who was martyred for his faith under the emperor Diocletian at the age of fourteen (the same age as Hugh when he died). In the window the toga-clad St Pancras holds a sword point downwards so that it may be interpreted as a cross. The sword gives symmetry to the window, as in the left light Frank Nisbet is represented by St Michael with a sword in his right hand with the point in the mouth of an expiring dragon. This figure, with huge and elaborate wings, is of St Michael the Archangel, military leader of the heavenly hosts that threw the Devil and his minions out of the kingdom of God. The Devil here is represented by the dark blue dragon and, with St Michael's foot firmly on its head, signifies the restraining and defeat of evil. Possibly because the window is for a family group, both lights focus purely on a Christian message. St Michael carries no patriotic symbols on his shield, nor are there any military crests or badges in the background. This distinguishes this version of St Michael from others often used in Great War stained glass memorials.

⁹ War Diary, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, 26 August 1914.

¹⁰ Clutterbuck, *Bond of Sacrifice*, p.283.

¹¹ Nisbet was survived by three sisters and one half-sister.

¹² Nisbet's name is also on the War Memorial at Ickham, another of his father's parishes.

¹³ *Dover Express*, 7 April 1916.

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