

THE PRINCESS MARY'S CHRISTMAS GIFT, 1914: 110 YEARS ON



An exhibition at The Great War Huts, Hawsted. December 2024

Exhibition Catalogue



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Held between 6–7 December 2024, at The Great War Huts in Hawsted, Suffolk to commemorate the 110th anniversary of Princess Mary's Gift to 'All Sailors afloat, all Soldiers at the Front', and of Christmas 1914.

Exhibition designed and developed by Peter Doyle, Lyndsay Knight and Taff Gillingham

All objects on display are from the collections of the Great War Huts, Peter Doyle and Taff Gillingham

In memory of Richard Archer

Text and photography by Peter Doyle

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Further reading

This exhibition is a companion and extension to the book *For Every Sailor Afloat, Every Soldier at the Front: Princess Mary's Christmas Gift, 1914* by Peter Doyle (Unicorn, London, 2021) available from www.unicornpublishing.org.

About Great War Huts

Great War Huts at Brook Farm Camp is a ground-breaking First World War museum and visitor centre in the heart of the Suffolk countryside in Hawsted, near Bury St Edmunds. Built on a four-and-a-half-acre site, the original plan was for eleven replica wooden barrack huts providing a lecture theatre and exhibition and display spaces to tell the story of the First World War in a fresh way. But it was the discovery of an original Recreation Hut in Ipswich, due for demolition, that changed everything.

The eleven huts planned will all now be original buildings, originally constructed over a century ago to house the servicemen and women who served during the war. The huts are all different showing many types of construction. Some have been dismantled from across the country and others found within a few miles of Brook Farm Camp. All of them are being restored to their original condition using the methods, tools and materials of the time.

Great War Huts provides a unique setting in which to learn about the personal, military and social history of the conflict. www.greatwarhuts.org

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Christmas 1914: The War at Sea and in the Trenches

Big gale blowing, with very large sea and squalls. I had a most pleasant middle (I don't think!). Came down at 4 am to find my hammock sopping with water, a whole sea having come down the hatch.

Midshipman A. Scrimgeour, HMS *Crescent*, 10 November 1914¹

Front Line. It is thawing, with some rain; and the parapets are beginning to slide into the trench. Everything and everybody plastered with mud: mud on your hands and face, and down your neck and in your food, and bits of mud in your tea.

Pte D.H. Bell, London Rifle Brigade, 27 November 1914²

The military backdrop to the development of Princess Mary's Gift Fund was one of many challenges. As with all wars involving the British Empire, the Royal Navy, the 'Senior Service', was the 'bulwark of the nation' – protecting its island shores and those of the Imperial possessions overseas. The Royal Navy, the strongest in the world, was mobilised on 1 August 1914, and almost immediately it guaranteed the safety and security of the French coast facing the English Channel and North Sea. Under Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, the Grand Fleet was embodied, and was to carry out its duties from the high Seas to the inshore waters from almost the start; the first RN ship to founder was that of HMS *Amphion*, off Yarmouth, sunk by mines; the first German U-Boat to be sank by the British being U-15, which fell victim to HMS *Birmingham* on 9 August. What would follow were hard months at sea, and many challenges, not least the loss of HMS *Aboukir*, *Cressy* and *Hogue* in September, defeat at the Coronel in November, and the triumph of the destruction of Admiral von Spee's squadron at the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914.

The Army under Sir John French had already endured the harsh retreat from Mons in August and had helped turn the tide that was flowing against the Allies, fighting alongside the French army at the Marne and on the Aisne. What followed was a desperate struggle to prevent the Germans from outflanking British Expeditionary Force in the 'Race to the Sea', and ultimately to the establishment of trench warfare that would hold almost to the end of the conflict. And one place in particular would become the epicentre of British endeavour: the Ypres Salient. Here, to the east of the city of Ypres, once a mediaeval jewel set in the clay plain of Flanders, the British and French fought the Germans over the possession of the low ridges that dominated that plain. To those who had helped defend it in that first great battle, Ypres itself was approaching a ruin:

As we drew near to the old walled and moated town we thought it had not been worth defending, for it was already in ruins, and it looked as if every house and building had been destroyed by shell or flame.³

The war in 1914 was distinct from the other years that followed. Here was the death of open warfare, and the rise of the trench warfare during the grim winter that closed the year. On both sides the idea that this terrible war should interrupt the Christmas season was viewed with horror, and the concept that the war would, indeed, be over by then



A group of cheery Army Service Corps soldiers pose for their families from 'Somewhere in France', 1914.

was touted. But it soon passed. Then there was the moment of hope that was the fabled 'Christmas Truce', a fleeting moment before the guns opened up once again. The naval campaign had been hard, with many losses; the cold dark waters of the North Sea and the North Atlantic were just as foreboding as the mud of Flanders for those men afloat in their steel-walled ships.

It is not hard to see, then, why there was a general expression of love towards the men overseas in 1914, with the sharing of cheery greetings and gifts where they could. The Princess's gift grew out of the same strength of feeling.

This Exhibition has been put together from private collections to remember both the 110th anniversary of Christmas in the trenches and on the high seas in 1914, and of the initiation and delivery of Princess Mary's Christmas Gift for 'every sailor afloat, every soldier at the Front'. The exhibition represents one of the most extensive ever mounted on the topic –including some rare survivors that have not been seen in public before. This catalogue serves as a unique record of this unique exhibition.

Princess Mary's Christmas Gift

8 October 1914. Buckingham Palace, London. Fine Day. I worked in the morning. I had my music lesson with Mr Keene. I saw Mama, David and Mr Peacock about arranging a fund for sending pipes and tobacco to the sailors and soldiers at the Front...⁴

The remarkable story of the Princess's Christmas Gift started with a simple appeal to the nation. On 16 October, 1914, *The Daily Mirror* – a popular illustrated tabloid newspaper which, boldly, proclaimed its circulation of 'more than 1,000,000 copies – published the deliberations of a Committee set up to oversee a new public appeal that was to support the war effort.⁵ This press notice, and others like it, announced to the world the germination of an idea based on a simple letter: a letter full of genuine pathos, a letter penned by the youthful princess herself. Carefully composed on a single sheet of Buckingham Palace headed notepaper, and dated 15 October 1914, this letter was destined to be distributed widely across the Empire.

In it, and with youthful sentiment, Princess Mary announced that there would be a Christmas gift for all those sailors and soldiers serving at sea and in the field in the first year of its existence:

For many weeks we have all been greatly concerned for the welfare of the sailors and soldiers who are so gallantly fighting or battles by sea and land.

Our first consideration has been to meet their more pressing needs and I have delayed making known a wish that has long been in my heart for fear of encroaching on other funds, the claims of which have been more urgent.

I want you all now to help me to send a Christmas present from the whole nation to every sailor afloat and early soldier at the front.

On Christmas Eve when, like the shepherds of old, they keep their watch, doubtless their thoughts will turn to home and to the loved ones left behind, and perhaps, too, they will recall the days when as children themselves they were wont to hang out their stockings, wondering what the morrow had in store.

I am sure that we should all be the happier to feel that we had helped to send our little token of love and sympathy on Christmas morning, something that would be useful and of permanent value, and the making of which may be the means of providing employment in trades adversely affected by the war.

Could there be anything more likely to hearten them in their struggle than a present received straight from home on Christmas Day?

Please, will you help me?

Mary⁶

The Princess's fresh voice and her genuine feelings of the importance of Christmas shone through in her letter. It would be the catalyst that would eventually deliver some 2.5 million gifts to men and women who were in uniform at Christmas 1914.

The young princess aged about 12 years old, pictured in contemporary 'Rotary Photographic' postcards and a Wills cigarette card (not the last time that she would appear in this medium).

There was great public interest in the King's children, and such postcards were numerous.



Princess Mary pictured in 1914 by Ernest Brooks, a photographer who gained fame both as 'official photographer' to the royal family, and later as a war photographer in both Gallipoli and France.

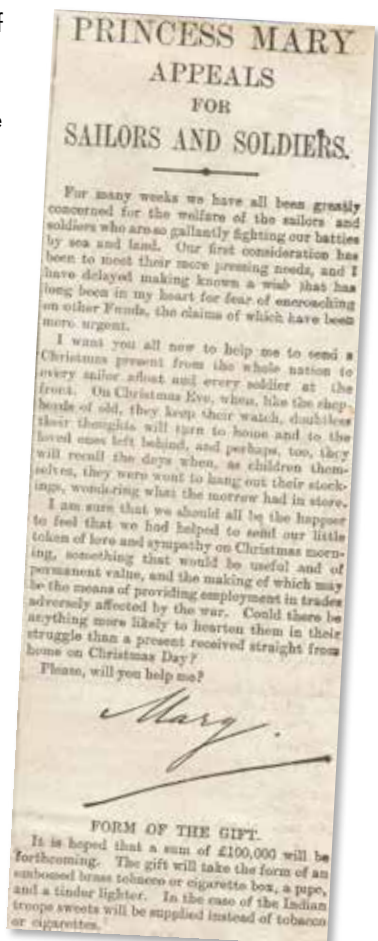
This image captures the beauty of the young princess, an image used as the basis for the 1914 gift's 'cigarette card' (bottom, left).



Princess Mary's genuine and heartfelt letter of 15 October 1914 galvanised the public into donating money to the Gift Fund – as there was no possibility that Mary could pay for the gift herself. In total, some £162,592 13s 5d was collected – significantly in excess of the £100,000 hoped for – enabling the Executive Committee of the fund, chaired by the Duke of Devonshire, to carry out its duties (and eventually extend its scope).⁷

Copies of the letter were sent to prominent citizens, and wealthy clubs, but it was the publication of the letter in the national newspapers that saw the greatest flood of money coming in, from people of all backgrounds and walks of life.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the letter was cut out and pasted into scrapbooks, like this one from 1914, kept alongside cuttings of the 'Angels of Mons' and the Christmas Truce.



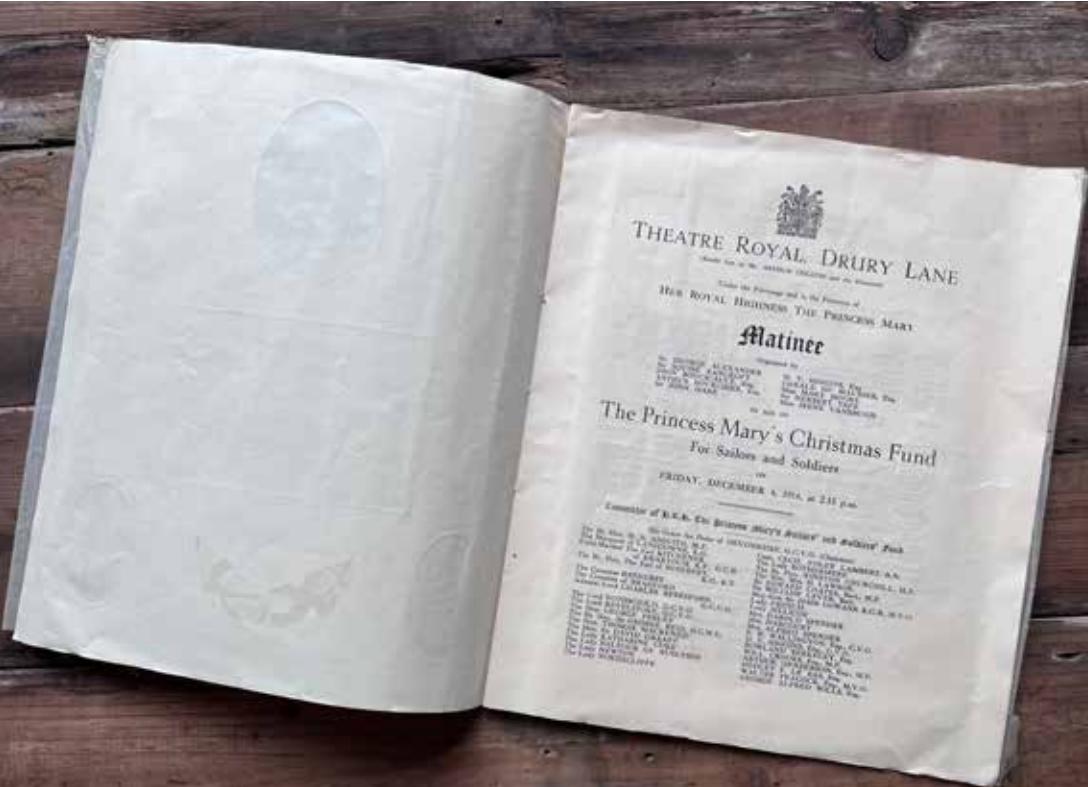


All donors to the fund, no matter how much they gave, received a receipt and acknowledgement from the Fund's treasurer.

P.R. Craft was a society painter, with Lily Parish a five-year-old child. Both donations were equally valued. It was felt that the scheme would particularly attract younger donors, just like Lily.

A fund-raising matinee held in London's Theatre Royal Drury Lane on 4 December 1914 had Princess Mary and other members of the Royal Family in attendance, alongside the Duke of Devonshire, the Prime Minister, Lord Lansdowne and Lord Kitchener.

A unique event, it brought some £826 18s 4d to the Fund's coffers.



Princess Mary continued with war work throughout the conflict. However, she is said to have found her 'true vocation' when she became a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) probationer at the Great Ormond Street Hospital for sick children in 1918, aged 21.

Though the Princess worked two days a week at the hospital, her mother, Queen Mary, was still surprised to see her daughter engaged in such significant duties when she visited in August 1918.⁸

The princess became the Viscountess Lascelles upon her marriage in 1923, and raised her family in the Harewood Estate in Yorkshire. The birth of her children was of popular interest to the public.

Quiet and unassuming, Mary would remain committed to public service throughout her all-too-short life. She died in 1965, aged 67.⁹



Chocolate of the Queen, 1900

Queen Victoria's gift – of chocolate in a specially commissioned tin – was set to become one of the most treasured artefacts of the Boer War of 1900-02 and was the very direct inspiration for the Princess's Gift in 1914. Victoria's gift was born 19 November 1899, when Sir Fleetwood Edwards, Keeper of the Queen's Privy Purse, wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne that would be reproduced in the press:

Windsor Castle, November 19, 1899

Dear Lord Lansdowne, The Queen commands me to inform you of her anxiety to make some personal present as soon as possible to each of her soldiers serving in South Africa. Her Majesty has decided upon sending chocolate, which, she is given to understand, will be appropriate and acceptable. It will be packed for each man in a tin that has been specially designed for the occasion. The Queen hopes that you may be able to arrange for its conveyance and distribution.¹⁰

With such a gift being given directly from the Sovereign to every soldier serving in South Africa, it was likely to be highly prized; particularly so, given the fact that the tin, and its contents, were so carefully designed:

Her Majesty's Order for a Hundred Thousand Boxes of Chocolate for the troops has been divided among three firms. The chocolate, which will be suitable either as beverage or a sweetmeat, will be supplied tin boxes, each containing half a pound, a quantity sufficient to make from twelve to sixteen cups. A special box has been designed. The lid will have a red ground with large gilt, medallion of the Queen in the centre as well as the Royal monogram in red, white, and blue, and the inscription, 'South Africa, 1900.'¹¹

Queen Victoria pictured in her Jubilee year 1897, by court photographer Alexander Bassano.

The Queen was held in high regard by her troops, and her decision to send a New Year's Gift of chocolate to all those fighting in South Africa on New Year's Day 1900 was extremely well received.

Though the Queen had not originally planned to pay for the gift herself, she soon took on that responsibility, amounting to a sum of £3,587 10s paid from the Privy Purse.



The chocolate box the Queen sent to the troops was ridiculed by those nations harbouring sympathies for the Boer cause, such as the Netherlands, Germany and France. Postcards like these make direct reference to the chocolate in a negative, sneering, sense.

The French card (*top right*) depicts soldiers sweltering in the Southern Hemisphere winter, drinking hot chocolate that is 'infallible for curing wounds'; while German card (*bottom right*) notes that: 'The English soldiers in South Africa enjoy attention from all sides: they get chocolate from the Queen and shoe polish from Ohm Krüger'. Nevertheless, the gift came at the right time to bolster spirits of an army that had suffered three successive defeats in 'Black Week'.



The Queen's Chocolate box was designed by Barclay & Fry, based in Southwark, London. This was the heyday of offset chromolithographic printing on tin, and the procedure required at least three different colour prints to get the full effect.

The design was carefully constructed to have the Queen's monogram, the words 'SOUTH AFRICA 1900' and, significantly, a message in the Queen's handwriting: 'I wish you a happy New Year – Victoria R.I.' This meant that the gift was personal to each soldier, a gift directly from the sovereign to her servicemen in South Africa. The central gold-coloured raised cartouche with the Queen's bust was intended to represent a medal for each man serving in South Africa.

Queen Victoria's tin was compared directly with the Princess's box in the 1915 militaria book *'Chats on Military Curios'* (*left*)



Barclay & Fry's tin for Fry's Chocolate, the originator of the tin and the Royal Warrant Holder. Barclay & Fry was the exclusive manufacturer of Fry's Chocolate tins.

Fry's design is distinctive, with a well-modelled bust of the Queen, and had a darker blue border than the others, with the Queen's message running parallel to it.

As neither Frys nor Barclay & Fry's, both Quaker companies, sought to profit by the arrangement, their names do not appear on the box. Nevertheless, despite this, the trade name 'FRYS' was impressed in the chocolate, while Barclay & Fry registered the box as a trademark in November 1899 to restrict its use for other purposes.

Full tin of Fry's Chocolate, retained and sent home for safekeeping.

Soldiers preserving chocolate intact in their boxes was a common occurrence, perhaps emphasising its significance to those who received it.





Barringer, Wallis & Manners' tin for Rowntree's Chocolate. This tin follows the Barclay & Fry design almost perfectly, though differs by having a slightly smaller Queen's head, the Queen's message on an angle, and a Prussian blue border.



Full tin of Rowntrees Chocolate, as sent home by a soldier from South Africa.

Like the Fry's chocolate bars illustrated above, these ones are stamped 'ROWNTREES'. In keeping with the others, no such trade name appears on the tin itself.



Hudson, Scott & Sons' tin for Cadbury's Chocolate. In many ways, Cadbury Brothers was a reluctant participant in the gift scheme.

The Cadbury tin is more narrowly rectangular than that of the other two manufacturers, and is also distinctive in that there is no border to the cartouche, with the Queen's head being noticeably smaller.

Full Tin of Cadbury's Chocolate, as sent home from South Africa. Note the red, white and blue ribbon used in the packaging.

With a smaller tin, there was less chocolate which was nonetheless impressed with the distinctive trade name 'CADBURY'.





Framed Fry's Chocolate tin

retained as a keepsake of service by the family of Sapper A. Adams, 42nd Company, RE.

The Queen's Chocolate tin was rightly prized. The tradition of royal gifts would continue with the Princess's Christmas Box, which is also often found framed.

The interior of Sapper A. Adams' tin, showing that he marked his service in ink within.

Remnants of the blue ribbon that was used to tie the cakes of chocolate together are present.





Queen Alexandra was crowned alongside King Edward VII on 9 August 1902, following Victoria's death on 22 January 1901.

A Rowntree's coronation souvenir tin (left) was made to commemorate the event, illustrative of the lithographic skills of British tin manufacturers. The larger tin (far left), also by Rowntrees, and based on the earlier one, was given to orphan children and widows of the South African War at a special Christmas dinner held by the Queen on 27 December 1902, attended by some 1500 people.¹²

Royal chocolate box souvenirs, made by Barclay & Fry Ltd for Fry's.

Though Queen Victoria was clear that her Chocolate Box could not be reproduced, these tins use the same basic box die as used in stamping out the Queen's Chocolate Box for the troops in 1900.





The Scottish Regiments' Gift Fund, chaired by William McDonald Sinclair, was set up to supply Scottish soldiers with 'plug tobacco' (below) in time for Hogmanay 1900 ('Frae Scots tae Scots'). Some 20,000 tins were supplied in November of that year.¹³

This and a similar tin, for the 1st and 2nd battalions of the Devon Regiment at Christmas 1901, highlight just how prized such gifts were in war, prescient of the future gifts of the Great War.



An amateur snapshot, though out of focus, depicts an old soldier posing proudly alongside his Queen Victoria Chocolate tin.

As an 'Old Sweat', he wears both South African and First World War medals. No doubt he would have been eligible for the Princess's gift too, but he chose not to display it.



At the outbreak of war in 1914, tin manufacturers were fully employed in making patriotic lithographed tins for chocolate, sweets or biscuits; typically, they depicted military leaders or the Royal Family. The same manufacturers of these tins would soon be employed in the production of die-struck brass boxes for Princess Mary's Gift Fund.

The Christmas Box

In many ways, the embossed brass box of the Princess's gift identifies with the war as it was being fought in 1914; in 2014, *The Daily Mail* certainly thought so. A hundred years from the commencement of the Great War, the newspaper created a carefully produced replica of the box to be given away to its readers (*see page 75*), perhaps recalling the contribution of its co-founder, Lord Rothermere, who put a thousand pounds into the pot at the inception of the fund. With boxes being delivered directly to individuals, the choice of this gift to mark the Centenary was also personal, the boxes: 'still cherished in many homes, treasured reminders of a long-gone member of the family who answered his country's call. A century on, they remain as poignant and evocative as ever.'¹⁴

Central to the box is a representation of the Princess herself, depicted in profile, and surrounded by a laurel wreath. This echoes the gilded image of Queen Victoria at the centre of her Chocolate Box, issued in 1900. This is more than coincidence, a nod towards the influence that the Queen's chocolate box had, without doubt, in the formulation of the idea – a fact that was not lost on contemporary commentators:

The box in which Princess Mary sent a Christmas present of tobacco to every British sailor and soldier at the Front... is embossed with the Princess's portrait and the flags of the Allies, and looks remarkably like the one in which Queen Victoria sent chocolate to the soldiers in South Africa during the Boer War.¹⁵

It was natural that the designer of the Princess's box, Professor Stanley Adshead should echo that of the late Queen, and incorporate the raised dais with the Princess's profile in gilt, just as was presented in the Boer War chocolate box.

That the Princess sat for a special photographic portrait for the purpose was reported in the press in late October, and particularly in *Society Magazine*, *The Tatler*:

Princess Mary has adopted the suggestion that photograph of herself should be embossed the covers of the boxes which will contain smoking requisites which her Royal Highness has provided as a Christmas gift for the troops at the Front. Princess Mary recently sat in the studio of Mr E. Brooks, of Buckingham Palace Road, for a special photograph, and it is this photograph which is to be reproduced on the boxes.¹⁶



PRINCESS MARY'S CHRISTMAS GIFT TO THE SOLDIERS AND SAILORS :
THE LID OF THE BRASS TOBACCO-BOX.

There is a tasteful and appropriate design on the lid of the brass boxes which will contain Princess Mary's Christmas present of tobacco to the bluejackets and troops. In the centre is a profile relief of the Princess, with the words "Imperium Britannicum," above, and "Christmas 1914" below. At the sides and corners are the names of our Allies—France, Russia, Belgium, Japan, Serbia, and Montenegro. Princess Mary's Fund recently reached £131,000.

Photograph by Illustrations Bureau.

Each box was manufactured in brass by at least six manufacturers, all of whom were skilled in the production of chromolithographed tinware. The three leading manufacturers were Barclay & Fry, Barringer, Wallis & Manners and Hudson & Scott, who were all commissioned to turn their hand to the manufacture of the Princess's brass box, the design of which had been formulated in advance by Stanley Adshead, Professor of Civic Design at Liverpool University. The design was released to the press, as here, published in the *Illustrated War News*, 19 December 1914. This can be taken to represent the standard form of the box, though there were many minor variants.

Under a cartouche depicting the Empire, and representing all its component Dominions, the profile of Princess Mary was given in a laurel wreath and flanked by her distinctive cypher, the letter 'M'. At the base of the box is another cartouche with the words 'CHRISTMAS 1914', with space for the recipient to engrave their name. Around the edges of the box the Army is represented by an unsheathed bayonet with laurels and scrolls (*top*) and the Navy by two dreadnought battleships ploughing to the east and west through heavy seas (*bottom*).

The nations of the Triple Entente of 1907 are represented by a group of three flags flanking the central design, with two circular cartouches having the names 'FRANCE' (*left*) and 'RUSSIA' (*right*). The names of the other combatants in 1914 are given the four corners: 'BELGIUM', 'JAPAN', 'MONTENEGRO' and 'SERVIA'.

Princess Mary Gift Box: known variations in detail¹⁷	
Plating/no plating	Plating and variable quality brass seen in some variants
'IMPERIUM BRITANNICUM'	Variants with serif and sans serif fonts
'JAPAN' cartouche	Incomplete J, presumably due to die wear or inadequate pressing
'CHRISTMAS 1914.'	Variants with full stop/no full stop after 1914; smaller font variant
Princess Mary's profile and hair	Varying degrees of detail; one with a noticeably smaller profile
Laurel wreath	Variants with: 'squashed' rondels and variable flowers within them; crossed stalks present/absent at base of the wreath; variant with 19 pairs of leaves on the right-hand laurel branch
'M' cyphers	Variants with noticeably narrower cyphers
Crosshatching in upper panels	Variation in the number of crosshatches, from 6 to 7
Bayonet (upper right panel)	Varying details: narrow/defined crosshatched bayonet grip to less defined broader/rounded form; variant with missing upper crosspiece presumably due to die wear or inadequate pressing
Dreadnought in the lower panel	Variations in the amount of the top turret showing; the ensign at the prow of the ship; the form of the waves

The boxes were die struck in brass, for both officers and men, the dies themselves being worked in steel to ensure that they could withstand constant re-use. Two dies are known to have survived, one in the collections of the Imperial War Museum, and this reverse die, recently added to the Royal Collections Trust from the collection



of Queen Mary (reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Collections Trust).¹⁸ The great number of minor variations that can be identified in existing boxes shows that there must have been an equal number of varying die sets. This die appears to be one that is characterised by its delicate profile of the young princess, and a smaller font-size for the words 'CHRISTMAS 1914.'

This is one of at least twelve die pairs (comprising positive and negative dies) that were available for distribution to museums after the war, a number that must therefore represent the minimum that existed to stamp out in brass the lids of each box. The cost of the manufacturing the dies was calculated at twenty-five pounds.¹⁹ Variations reflect the skill of the die maker and the extent of wear due to heavy use.

Each brass box had the same design features, but they often varied. This example differs from the norm in having nineteen leaves in the right-hand laurel of the wreath. It takes a keen eye to distinguish the many variations – and to date, no clear association between type and manufacturer, or date of manufacture – has been established.





A typical variant that omits the full stop after the year '1914'.

As with all the boxes, close examination reveals other small details at variance with the standard design. Most of these details are due to slight differences in the engraving of the original steel dies, or of their wear through use.



Another box type is distinguished by its smaller, more delicately proportioned profile for the young princess, and a smaller font for the 'CHRISTMAS 1914' date.

This is one of the most recognisable, and pleasing, of all the box 'types'.

Spot the difference:

a box with differing hair detail for the Princess, six crosshatches in the upper panels, the bayonet cross-guard missing.

Most distinct, however, is the sans serif 'IMPERIUM BRITANNICUM' in the upper cartouche, once again the mark of the individual die engraver.



Brass was an important munition of war and its use by the box manufacturers was in competition with shell production. Finding adequate brass to complete the 2.6 million boxes finally delivered was a struggle, and inferior materials were employed.

Plated boxes are commonly encountered, the plating used to maintain its finish; here the shiny plating has worn off with age and use.





A myth has arisen that officers received silver boxes, rather than brass. This is false, as only brass boxes were issued. In some cases, however, soldiers had their boxes plated in other metals, such as silver, or chrome like the one illustrated (right).

Nevertheless, rare die struck boxes have been found that are marked 'SILVER'. These are not standard issue and must have been one-off pieces.

Engraved boxes are commonly found, though rarely as professionally executed as this one – despite the engraver having made a mistake. Pte Walter E. Paice, 2nd Grenadier Guards, arrived in France on 13 August 1914, and received his gift in the Theatre of War. The 2nd Grenadiers were in the front line at Christmas. The battalion war diary notes: 'Great Deal of shooting all day' for the 25th.²⁰ The much-fabled Truce was by no means universal.





Professor Adshhead had designed the box so that recipients could add their names to the lower cartouche, so as to read, for instance, 'Pte Thomas Atkins, CHRISTMAS 1914.' Very few did this, though Driver John Blake, 41st Ammunition Column, RFA found space for his regimental number, 29080. Dvr Blake landed in France on 16 August 1914.

'**Trench art**' pieces employing brass from Princess Mary Gift boxes are quite unusual, most probably as the boxes were revered, many of them sent home to be kept as a souvenir of service, or retained in memory of a life lost. This cigarette case and matchbox fold are rare examples that reuse brass from the cherished gift box.



The 'Standard Gift' for Smokers

Princess Mary wants to send to every soldier and sailor gift consisting of an embossed tobacco box, tinder lighter, pipe, tobacco and cigarettes. It is a modest enough little gift and everyone can be represented in the presents our gallant defenders are to receive Christmas morning.²¹

Princess Mary's Gift Fund was to provide a gift for all 'Sailors afloat and Soldiers at the front' on Christmas Day 1914. The significance of that day had been spelled out in Princess Mary's letter, a letter that provided such an impetus to the development of the Gift Fund. And in framing the name of the fund, there was surely never any doubt that, with the largest navy in the world, and with a father whose character had been so clearly shaped by his time with the 'Senior Service', sailors came first in any pecking order.²² This principle remained inviolate throughout the existence of the fund.

Even so, with the first meeting of the Executive Committee, the idea of who would qualify to receive a gift became even more refined through association with the respective commanders of the armed forces, serving at sea and in the field. In this way, the gift was 'in the first instance...limited to sailors serving under Sir John Jellicoe and soldiers serving under Sir John French'.²³ This proposal was made by committee member H.V. Higgins, a London solicitor, late of the 1st Life Guards, and it was seconded by the Duke of Devonshire himself. Higgins was well connected, having been Queen Alexandra's Aide de Camp – and he was also a Chairman of the Ritz.²⁴ His suggestion was taken seriously, and this allowed the gift to be fully aligned with those who were on active service – leaving those serving in uniform, and at home without consideration.

With the majority of men active smokers in 1914 (in contrast to the belief that smoking was scandalous for women), it made sense that tobacco products – rather than the chocolate of the previous war – should be the gift of choice for Christmas. There were many contemporary schemes to provide 'smokes' to sailors and soldiers, and when the Princess's Executive Committee met for the first time, the choice of contents had been decided. Nevertheless, there would be need to consider alternatives for some groups.



For Christmas 1914, each gift was packed in a simple cardboard box (*right*) that was capable of holding the brass box, with the tinder lighter and pipe placed on top. These simple but sturdy boxes were made by the London firm of Johns, Son & Watts Ltd of 40-50A City Road, London EC.²⁵ Very few survive today; this one has a later posting label added. The gifts, in their boxes, were sent overseas in crates for distribution in multiples of 56 (*above*). A replica is on display.



Each crate containing the boxes was secured with stout string, and a lead seal was crimped around the string to secure it. Special pliers were designed to imprint the Princess's distinctive cypher on the seal. Surviving examples of this seal are naturally extremely scarce.



The essence of the Christmas gift. With some 96% of the male population of Britain being smokers, it was inevitable that tobacco products would be the basis of the gift that was issued in time for Christmas 1914. In this it differed from its inspiration: Queen Victoria's chocolate tin of New Year 1900. Though it is commonly thought that there were variants, in truth these were limited to those given to Indian troops, and to a much smaller number of non-smokers and nurses.

The gift was to comprise: the brass box, packets of tobacco and cigarettes (the cigarette packet to contain a 'cigarette card' consisting of a photograph of the Princess and cigarettes with the Princess's monogram in an oval with a coronet); a Christmas 1914 card in an envelope; a pipe (of variable pattern); and an Asprey's tinder lighter, all packed in its cardboard box (page 33).



The tobacco products were presented in distinctive yellow wrappers with foil interiors. Both packets had the Princess's cypher in an oval topped by a coronet to their rear (*right*). The foil of the tobacco pouch was marked with a distinctive crosshatched pattern. Full tobacco packets are relatively common today, perhaps emphasising that cigarettes were then the choice of most smokers.

Two manufacturers (R.J. Hill & Co and Major Drapkin & Co) produced five million cigarettes each at a cost of £4,252; while three manufacturers produced the tobacco: British American Amalgamated Tobacco (15,000lbs), R.J. Hill (10,000lbs) and Cope Brothers (6,250lbs), at a combined cost of £3,297.





Surviving cigarette

packets are almost always found open. This is because each one contained a 'cigarette card' consisting of a reproduction of the Princess's photograph, taken by society (and later, war) photographer Ernest Brooks.

Both the cigarette card and the Princess's Christmas card in its envelope were created by the noted London manufacturer De La Rue, famous for its work in producing playing cards, bank notes, and other stationery products.





Half-a-million pipes were sourced from eight suppliers, with Harrods being the principal one (207,280 provided at a cost of £5,107 16s 8d).

The briar pipes supplied corresponded to no set type, and therefore 'gift pipes' are difficult to identify, unless found with the original gift. Illustrated types are 'Billiard' (top), 'Bulldog' (left, top) and 'Apple' (left, bottom).

Though one or two have been found with the Princess's monogram, this is extremely rare, and certainly not the norm.



Framed gift to an unknown sailor from the ill-fated battlecruiser HMS Queen Mary, which exploded with the loss of 1,226 sailors at the Battle of Jutland in 1916. Whether this man was one of the eighteen survivors is unknown. The gift is framed with its original 'Lovat' briar pipe and silver bullet pencil, brass gift box, the inner pages of the Princess's Christmas card. Pictures of the King and Queen were cut from their separately issued Christmas card.



'Dublin' pipe attributed to Bombardier W. Tucker of the Royal Field Artillery. Bdr Tucker has commemorated his receipt of the gift by the addition of a silver plaque, engraved 'XMAS 1914'.

The pipe is pictured alongside a tinder lighter typical of the time, a type that was safer than a match in wartime, as it smouldered rather than flamed.



The tinder lighter. Originally, the Princess's gift was to have contained a tinder lighter, specially commissioned from the noted London silversmiths, Asprey. These are marked with the Princess's coronet and cypher, the words 'XMAS FUND 1914' and the manufacturer 'ASPREY, LONDON'. Half-a-million lighters were ordered.

The famous suppliers soon fell foul of their agreement with the Gift Fund. Finding the 'ceric stones' needed to produce the spark impossible to source (being an Austrian patent), Aspreys' were unable to fulfil the order.

Just 137,000 of the 500,000 needed were supplied by Aspreys; some 32,544 generic, unmarked, lighters like that illustrated (*on page 38*) were obtained from four other manufacturers, but there was still a shortfall in gifts.



Other gifts had to be sourced by the Princess's Executive Committee to meet the shortfall left by the failure of Asprey's to fulfil its order. As the table below shows, these were a range of miscellaneous 'off-the-shelf' smoking, grooming and stationery items obtained from commercial suppliers. One of these was a knife, and this object has been the subject of



much speculation and supposition. Attributed items are rare. This one, a simple fruit knife with bone handles, is most likely to be representative of the type issued, and has been 'scrimshawed' by a soldier ('W.A.') of the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles. Most other knife types discussed by collectors are purely speculative, though a recent find is a 'Duralumin 1914' knife engraved by a soldier, who added the 'M' cypher.

Replacement items		
Number purchased	Item	Type
51,567	Tobacco pouches	Smoking requisite
2,160	Cigarette cases	Smoking requisite
10,000	Shaving brushes	Grooming
30,660	Combs	Grooming
1,074	Scissors	Grooming
20,232	Knives	Grooming/stationery
20,000	Bullet pencils	Stationery. Presumed to be in addition to those obtained for the Navy.
17,712	Pencils	Stationery. Assumed not to the bullet pencil type
29,360	Sets of postcards	Stationery. Intended to be given with the pencils [as specified in the minutes]

Assorted gifts purchased (for the army) in lieu of tinder lighters²⁶



Pocket testaments were common gifts to soldiers and sailors as they left for war. They are also often found in Princess Mary Gift boxes, like the one illustrated (below), given to Pte Euan John Jenkins of the RAMC by his friends in 1914.



That Driver Thomas J. Jones of the RFA, who landed in France on 16 August 1914, may have been given a bible as a replacement gift (above) is suggested by his inscription 'Xmas Gift 1914 from Princess Mary'.



Lady Florence Jellicoe's role in the Gift Fund's Executive Committee is largely unrecognised, but on 15 December it was she who suggested that a sterling silver 'bullet pencil' should be given as a gift item to replace the tinder lighter for sailors. Lady Jellicoe always stuck up for the Navy, and consequently 260,000 pencils were ordered from De La Rue to meet the needs of all eligible sailors.

The 'bullet pencil' (*above, centre*) used fired cartridges (harvested no doubt from various training camps across the country), with a silver 'bullet' containing a pencil. This idea may have been influenced by the 'Omdurman' pencil (*above, top*); a silver propelling pencil made with expired cartridges from the 1898 battlefield. Whatever their origin, interestingly, bullet pencils became a common advertising medium in post-war America (*above, bottom*).





One sailor's gift, sent home to his family in Leeds. As with Queen Victoria's chocolate box, issued just 14 years earlier, the Princess's gift was prized and revered as a personal gift from the Crown. Many men saved them and posted them home, alongside the other mementos of service at this most significant time of the year.



Postcards depicting the gift were issued at the time, and show just how important they were to the sailors and soldiers who received them.

This sailor's card was sent home by W. Croucher from the battleship HMS *Hibernia* in April 1915.



Gifts were often framed, like this one from 'Jim', an otherwise unidentified soldier, alongside his 'cutty' type pipe and the silk postcards that he sent home from France to his loved ones. Many such frames have been broken up in recent years, their wider meaning lost over time.

Gifts for the Indian Army

The gift box is a small but important symbol of the relationship of the Indian troops to the British during the Great War. It was a token of appreciation for soldiers who travelled thousands of miles to support the Allies. The fact that the tin has been looked after for over 100 years and now preserved in a Punjabi village museum shows that people still remember the sacrifices of their ancestors.²⁷

These boxes, preserved in India and Pakistan today, and those carried by soldiers in Flanders, link to the lives of those men who came such a long way to fight, and who were rightly feted.

Apart from a single deployment to Malta in the late nineteenth century, this was the first time that the Indian Army had been committed to a campaign ‘west of the Suez Canal’.²⁸ The men of this army were to meet with significant challenges:

They came from a country where the climate, the language, the people, the customs, were entirely different from any of which they had knowledge. They were presently faced with the sharp severity of a Northern winter. They, who had never suffered heavy shell fire, who had no experience of high explosive, who had never seen warfare in the air, who were totally ignorant of modern trench fighting, were exposed to all the latest and most scientific developments of the art of destruction.²⁹

The exact form of the gift that they would receive was, however, was subject to discussion, especially given Indian Corps was composed of men of widely differing ethnic and religious backgrounds, with its the ‘class’ system organised ‘on considerations of race, religion and locality.’³⁰ Typical of the first of these were regiments composed of Rajput, Pathan, Jat and Gurkha ethnic groups, largely from the northern areas of the subcontinent; typical of regiments organised on religious grounds were those composed principally of ‘Sikhs, Hindus and Mahomedans’; while those formed of Mahrattas, Dogras and Punjabis reflected the location of their recruitment.³¹ It was a complex business.

One matter that had clearly influenced the Executive Committee of the Princess Mary Gift Fund is the fact that for Sikhs, the smoking of tobacco was strictly forbidden. In its efforts to explain the nature of the Indian Army for British troops, the contemporary War Office guide *Our Indian Empire* was explicit, which stated, that for Sikh soldiers, ‘The very sight of tobacco is considered an insult.’³² Given that Sikhs ‘bulk[ed] more largely than any other class in the Indian Army’, it was imperative that no offence should be given.

With this in mind, and in order to ensure that the needs of the Indian Corps as a whole were met, the Executive Committee commenced a journey that would see them consulting those who knew India and the Indian soldier best. The matter was a point of discussion on their very first meeting of the Committee, ‘It being understood that the Indian Corps should have sweet-meats instead of tobacco and cigarettes... enquiries [were made] of Sir John Hewitt ‘what form of sweet-meats’ the Indians would prefer’.³³

After, the matter was adjourned for ‘further enquiry’, a consortium of five retired

senior officers of the Indian Army was consulted, again as recommended by Sir John Hewitt. Prominent among them was General Sir Alfred Gaslee, former commander of the Northern Army in India; Colonel C.S. Wheler, formerly of the Indian Staff Corps; Colonel Richard Ridgeway, a senior staff officer who had been awarded the Victoria Cross in India in 1879; Lt-Col. O.C. Bradford and Brevet Col. N.A.K. Burn.³⁴ To move the matter to its conclusion, the members of the Executive Committee met with these officers at the Ritz in London, and their advice was to be the germination of the idea behind the various gifts to be given to the Indian soldiers in France.³⁵ This was a matter of some interest to the press, and seemingly particularly so in the United States:

Princess Mary and her advisors are making special preparations to send the Indians Christmas gifts which will especially appeal to them. It is likely the gifts will take the form of boxes of candies and other sweet meats particularly relished by the men from the Far East.³⁶

These extended deliberations of the special group of retired officers so well acquainted with India and Indian troops were to lead to some definite decisions being made. In that all important meeting of 24 November 1914, Rowland Berkeley reported the resolutions of the Executive Committee:

In regard to the Indian Troops, the Gurkhas would receive the same present as the British troops, the Sikhs, the brass box filled with sugar candy and a box of spices, the remainder the brass box with a packet of cigarettes, sugar candy and a box of spices, and the camp followers a box of spices.³⁷

Indian Army 'class' groups (1914)	Gifts advised by former Indian Army Officers, 10 November 1914³⁸	Gifts actually supplied³⁹
Gurkhas	'Same as the British Army'	Standard gift: brass box, cigarettes (with cigarette card), tobacco, pipe, tinder lighter (or replacement), Christmas card
Sikhs	'Brass box and Saccharine Tablets'	Brass box, 4 oz 'sugar candies', spice tin (and spices), Christmas card
Brahmins, Rajputs, Dogras, Jats & Mahrattas	'Brass box, barley sugar, cigarettes & tinder lighter'	Brass box, 2oz 'sugar candies', cigarettes (with cigarette card), spice tin (and spices), Christmas card
Pathans, Punjabi Mohammedans & Hindustani Mohammedans	'Brass box, cigarettes & tinder lighter'	Brass box, 2oz 'sugar candies', cigarettes (with cigarette card), spice tin (and spices), Christmas card
Authorised followers	'Also to receive the present'	Spice tin (and spices) and Christmas card

Gifts for the Indian Army, Christmas 1914



Gift box given to Pte Williamson of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, an integral battalion of the Indian Army (Indian Expeditionary Force – IEF), serving in the Dehra Dun Brigade (Meerut Division) alongside the 9th Gurkha Rifles and the 2/2nd King Edward’s Own Gurkha Rifles. Williamson arrived on the Western Front on 12 October 1914. It is presumed that he received the standard gift, as would his Gurkha comrades. He engraved it for posterity.



Christmas card given to Pte John Irons, 1st Connaught Rangers, part of the Ferozepore Brigade (Lahore Division), IEF.

Irons was a professional soldier who enlisted in 1910 and had served in India before arriving in France on 19 August 1914. He was wounded on 9 November 1914 and received his gift from the Princess while in hospital, his card reading ‘Wounded, At Home’.



Gift to an Indian soldier who served in France and Flanders in 1914. Though not identified, we know that this man did not belong to a Gurkha battalion, as these doughty fighters were issued the same gift – containing smoking materials rather than spices – as the majority of soldiers in the British Expeditionary Force.

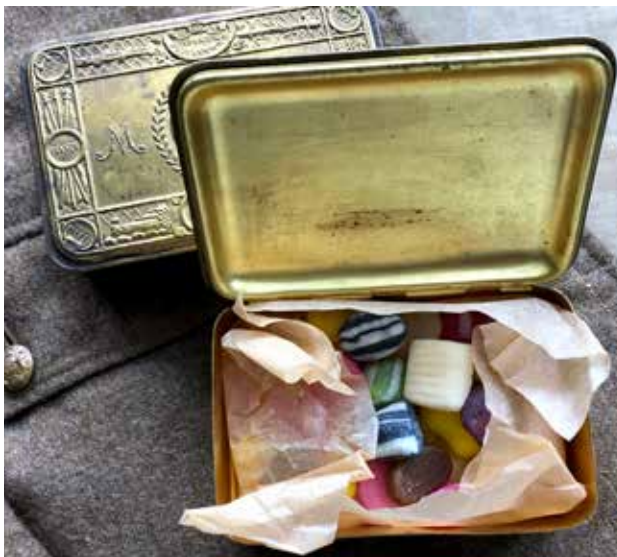
This gift is complete with the extremely rare 'Spice Tin' given to most other members of the Indian Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders. This is one of only two tins known to exist. It is presumed that the tin contained mixed spices, but further research is needed to confirm just what these spices consisted of. The brass Princess Mary Box would have contained 4oz of sweets (for Sikhs), or 2oz of sweets, plus a packet of cigarettes, for all other non-Gurkha combatant Indian soldiers.

The Princess's Christmas card was deemed not to be overtly Christian in nature by the Gift Fund Committee, and as such appropriate for all soldiers and sailors, whatever their religious beliefs.



The spice tin given to Indian soldiers is arguably the rarest of all components of the Princess's Gift. Though other box types have erroneously been identified as possible candidates, this is the only credible type. To date, only two specimens are known out of the 39,480 issued, this one, and one other. Measuring 11x8x2.5cm, the tin would have contained 'mixed spices' of value to the recipient.





Sugar candy was an important component of the gift to the majority of the Indian soldiers serving in France. An original suggestion was that 'barley sugars' would be acceptable (*reconstructed, top*), but other flavours could have been given (*reconstructed, left*).

While most received 2oz of candy (together with cigarettes), this mix would have been unacceptable to Sikhs, who received instead a full tin of 4oz of candy.



Gift box recovered from with a soldier in 2014 whose body had been lost in the field of Flanders for a hundred years. This box was in the soldier's breast pocket. Details of his 1903 pattern infantry equipment, together with Indian coins, indicate that this man was an Indian soldier, killed in the First Battle of Ypres in 1914 (Franky Wyffles/Flemish Heritage Agency).

Princess Mary gift pipe found with the Indian soldier

recovered from the battlefields in 2014. The soldier would not have been a Sikh; there is every possibility, due to the location of the man's body and other details, that he was a Gurkha (Franky Wyffles/Flemish Heritage Agency).



Gifts for Non-Smokers and Nurses

At such a distance from events of 1914, it seems surprising that the Executive Committee of the Princess Mary's Gift Fund should devote more time in considering the needs of non-smokers, rather than those of military nurses in uniform, who were in France, and close to the Front. But surviving records suggest that this was indeed the case, with the nurses seemingly almost an afterthought. For despite their obvious dedication to duty, the first mention of Princess Mary's gifts for nurses was at the Executive Committee for 27 October 1914, some two weeks after the launch of the Gift Fund. Evidently nurses had *not* been considered from its outset.

The fact remained that some men may not have wanted to receive smoking materials as part of a Christmas gift, through health concerns, religious beliefs or personal preference. It would also seem likely that there was a vocal anti-smoking pressure group reacting to the announcements of the gift's contents of the gift.⁴⁰ This may have been the reason for so much attention to such a small minority

The meeting of the Executive Committee of the 24 November was a momentous one. Donations had now reached a total of £108,197 – close on twice the original £55,000–60,000 estimate of cost for the Gift for 500,000 recipients that had been set over a month before.⁴¹ Now it was possible to identify alternative gifts to the standard tobacco products for both non-smokers and nurses, and these were itemised in the final meeting of the Executive Committee before Christmas, on 22 December 1914. The fruits of their deliberations would be received, gratefully, by both non-smokers and nurses overseas at Christmas, such as at the Casino base hospital in Boulogne:

Each man had a square [sic] cardboard box, in which was pipe and an artistically-finished brass box, bearing the portrait and monogram of the Princess. The box contained a packet of tobacco and one of cigarettes. If the recipient was a nurse, chocolate was substituted for tobacco. If he was a male non-smoker he received a neat khaki writing case, completely equipped for field correspondence.⁴²

Nurses' gifts are amongst the rarest of all the types given by the Princess's Gift Fund.



Khaki stationery pouch given to non-smokers, together with the brass box filled with 'acid tablets' (citrous sweets), and the standard Christmas card. Some 18,200 were produced. At least one contemporary commentator who received this gift noted that the Princess's photo (intended as a cigarette card) was received as part of the gift.

The pouch was produced by the ever-faithful firm of De La Rue, and contained a pad of writing paper, two packets of envelopes, and a pencil (with cap) made by the Eagle Pencil Co, London.





The non-smokers' gift included the pouch, the Princess's Christmas Card and the brass box and its contents of 'acid tablets'. There has been some confusion over the term, not helped by a surviving example in the National Army Museum (NAM), which due to staining appears to say, 'Acid Tablet'.⁴³ The otherwise accurate replica (above) has been based on this.

Careful examination of the NAM survivor, together with other examples show that the packet contained individual sweets in the manner of 'acid drops' (left) contained in a cardboard wrapper bearing a simple label as reconstructed (above).





Nurses were less well catered for by the Gift Fund, seemingly being low priority, or even an afterthought. Queen Alexandra, who gave her name and patronage to the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS), was more engaged, sending this elaborate and oversized card to all 'her' nurses serving at the front in 1914, together with a warm cape to ward off the cold of Flanders.

The gift that was settled upon for the 1500 nurses serving overseas in 1914 by the Princess's Gift Fund's Executive Committee was considerably simpler than that received by other recipients. It was to be two packets of chocolate presented in the brass box, together with the Princess's Christmas card.



Another rarity, a surviving packet of chocolate in its original box. There are two layers of 'CHOCOVUM' brand chocolate supplied by the London Chocolatier De Bry & Co, who provided the majority of the gifts (1000), with Pascalls contributing the remainder. These chocolate 'cakes' for nurses were bound by a pink ribbon and presented in a grease-proof paper wrapper with a well-presented and dainty label.

Other Gifts in 1914

The Princess's gift was not the only one that was issued in 1914. In the Autumn of 1914, it seemed that there were many other schemes in the offing, all formed to provide sailors and soldiers with war clothes, a cheery Christmas pudding, 'smokes' and chocolates, Christmas cards and a myriad of other items, useful or otherwise on Christmas Day 1914.

Some of the schemes were national, emanating from the King and Queen, or even the Queen Mother; others were local, the product of schemes in towns, cities and villages across the United Kingdom to raise money to give a gift to their local Jack or Tommy. As these schemes called upon people to remember their own, they were often successful, and as a result the number of gift boxes and enveloped that there despatched to France and Flanders in the days coming up to Christmas was staggering, with over half a million parcels despatched for the front through the Post Office

Looming large and rotund in most fund-raising efforts in the autumn of 1914 were Christmas puddings. Early in the life of the Princess Mary's gift fund campaign, it seemed to some that an association with other schemes then in play might be beneficial, and particularly that which was being developed by *The Daily News*. This national newspaper proposed sending out a Christmas pudding to all men in the field, an echo of the Field Force Fund's efforts during the South African War.

It was agreed, though, that the Princess's scheme would go its own way. This meant that the soldiers and sailors of 1914 would receive a plethora of parcels that would be unrivalled in other years of the war.



The King and Queen's Christmas card was an entirely separate gift from that of their daughter – though often found (and framed) together with it. Developed after a suggestion from Maj.-Gen. Sir William Robertson, the cards were delivered to all men at the front and at sea in time for Christmas Day in an envelope with the Royal arms embossed on the rear flap.



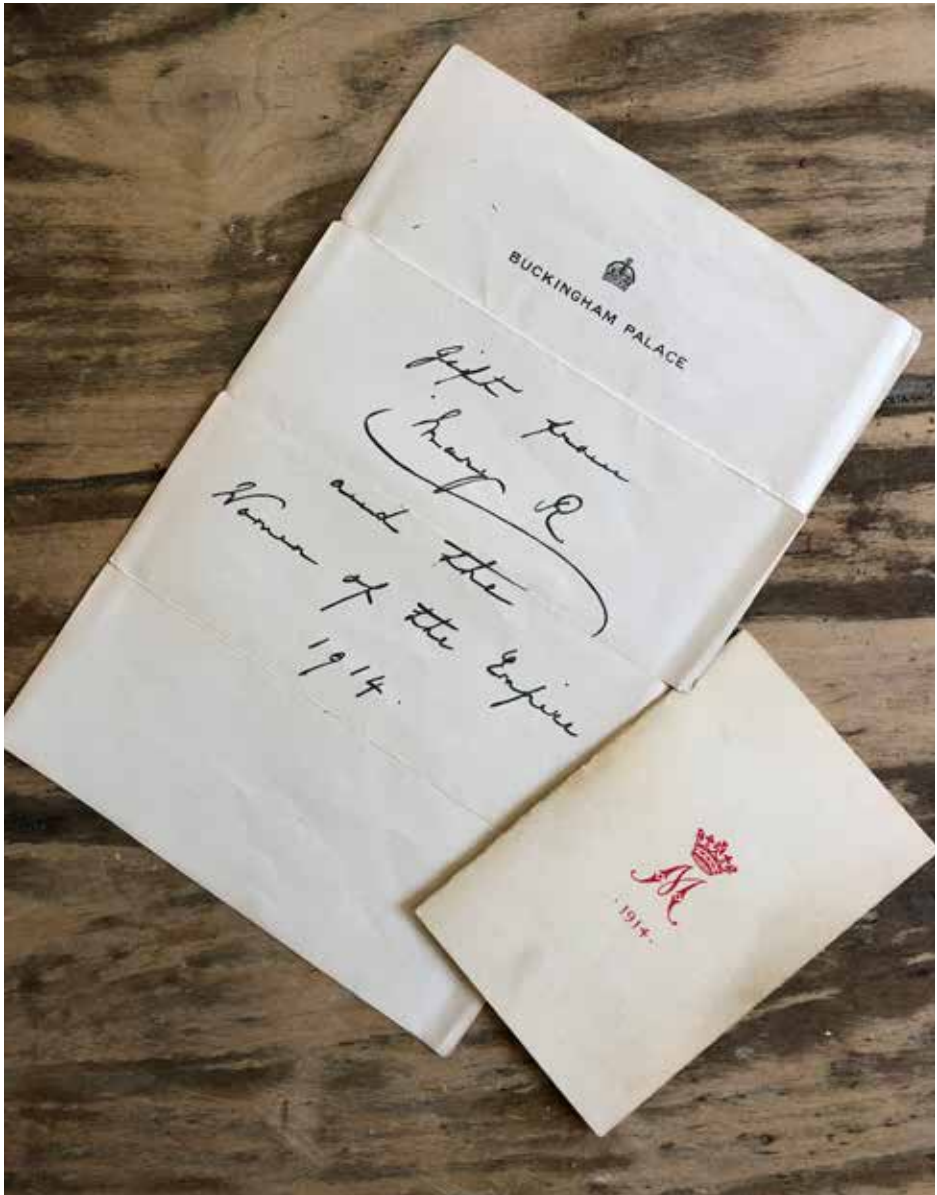
There were two designs (with the King as an Admiral for the Navy, *left*, or Field Marshal, for the Army, *above*). A third version, with a different message, was given to wounded men (see page 68).



The royal card was highly prized by all ranks, so it is not surprising that it was treasured.

A special wallet was produced by the Elbee Novelty Company (above) was created so that men could carry the card with them. Others close to frame the card for posterity (right).





The Ladies of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild were busy in 1914. The Guild was set up to provide comforts for the troops, and when Lord Kitchener requested that 300,000 pairs of socks (and an equivalent number of woollen 'body belts') for the troops at the Front, the Queen and her 'Women of the Empire' were mobilised to supply them. Each parcel of woollens received by the men was accompanied by this facsimile letter. Often found with the Princess's gift, this note has nothing to do with it directly.



Christmas puddings were a feature of many gifts sent to the troops (though not universally admired). Lady Rawlinson, wife of Lieut-Gen. Sir Henry Rawlinson, GOC 4th Corps, organised a pudding for each man serving with the Corps in Flanders, each one delivered with this special Christmas card, specially drawn by her husband. While a sentry looks on, hope dawns on the horizon.

Local Christmas funds also generally provided Christmas puddings. One such fund, from the City of Nottingham, delivered generous parcels including the pudding, but also chocolate, caramels, cigarettes, postcards and pencils, laces, tins of dubbin, formeloids, boric ointment and Vaseline, and tablets of soap, together with a 'booklet of greetings' (right). Some 130,844 items were despatched to Nottingham men in 1914, and the scheme was continued in later years of the war.

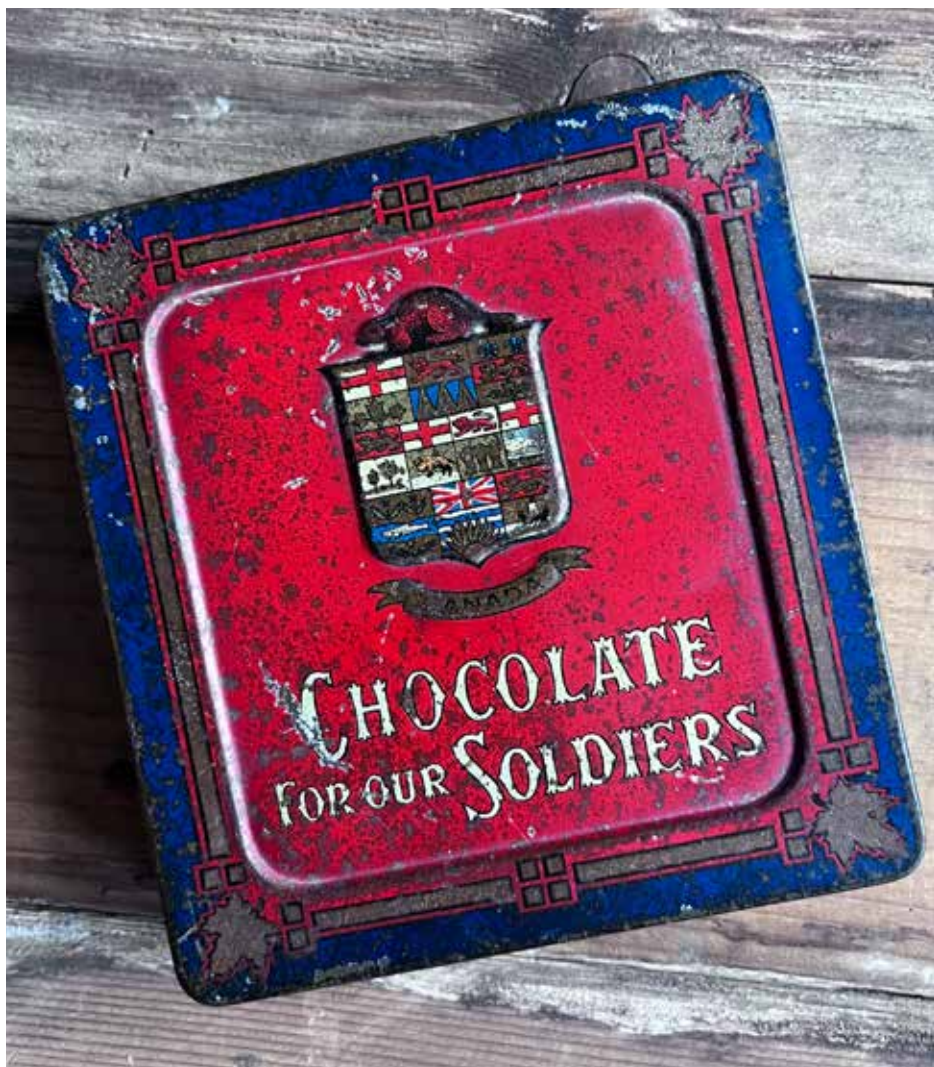


There were many other similar schemes; York, for example, supplied a specially designed Christmas chocolate tin produced by the city's own firm of Rowntrees, signed by the mayor.



The British Grocers' Federation was a trade organisation that represented grocers from the length and breadth of the country. Centrally coordinated but locally run, in 1914 each regional branch provided funds for a tin of toffee in a khaki-coloured oval tin that was specially designed to fit inside a soldier's tunic pocket, to be delivered at Christmas 1914.

Dedicated to 'Our Fighting Heroes' each one was accompanied by a slip from the local donors to let soldiers and sailors know they were remembered at home.



Ever since Victoria's gift, chocolate was a favourite with fighting men, serving both as a food and a treat. This tin of Cowans' 'Maple Buds' chocolate, a brand name of MacDonald Manufacturing Company of Toronto, was given to a soldier for Christmas 1914.

Canadian soldiers started arriving in Flanders in late 1914, and those present in France and Flanders were eligible for the Princess's gift. All others in uniform on Christmas Day, whatever their location, would receive a slimmed down gift, thanks to the success of the Princess's fund raising.

'At Home and in the Colonies'

By late November 1914, the success of the fund-raising effort meant that after just over a month's collection of funds from, an extension to scheme could now be safely entertained. It appeared there was now sufficient money to allow Executive Committee to enlarge the 'area of distribution of the gift', such that 'every soldier wearing the King's uniform at Christmas' would receive at least part of it. This meant that all those men 'At Home and in the Colonies' would be eligible for the gift.

After a long discussion it was decided that all the Soldiers under Sir John French and all the Sailors under Sir John Jellicoe at Christmas time should receive the full gift... and should donations to the fund ultimately permit of it, every soldier wearing the King's uniform at Christmas should receive a present consisting of a brass box, and what else was left for further discussion.⁴⁴

The extension of the scheme was to take in the growing numbers of recruits, though with fewer men serving in the Royal Navy, only a small additional increase was required. But for the King's armies, both at home and in the colonies, this was a considerable commitment. As such, at the meeting of the Executive Committee on 24 November, it was determined that an additional million boxes would be ordered – a momentous decision that effectively committed the Executive Committee to the continuance of its work for the whole duration the war. And to ratify this decision, an emergency meeting of the General Committee was held on the same day resolved that 'owing to the response that had been made' to the appeal 'it had been found possible to very much extend the area of distribution'.⁴⁵



The expansion of the Gift Scheme to include all those in uniform on Christmas Day 1914 meant that a huge number of men were now eligible to receive a gift, both at home, and across the Empire, amounting to some two million more gifts on top of what was originally planned.

Given the effort needed to source the items needed for the first iteration of the gift, it is hardly surprising that this would be simplified, to the gift box and the bullet pencil as suggested by Lady Jellicoe. Though some of these would be silver 'bullets', the majority would now be produced in nickel, and held in place with a cardboard 'keeper'. The Christmas Card of 1914 was now morphed into a 'New Year' card of 1915, but with no envelope to save on resources.





Gift box issued to Pte J.

Parkinson of the 17th West Yorkshire Regiment, the 2nd Leeds Pals. The expansion of the scheme meant that Parkinson, a volunteer soldier from 1914/15, was eligible to receive the gift, as were all other men in uniform at home. This included men of Kitchener's Army like Parkinson, Territorials, and soldiers of battalions that had not yet moved overseas.



Pte Parkinson has commemorated the receipt of his gift by engraving it, and inscribing the New Year's card contained within it with his name.

The expansion of the scheme also meant that large numbers of men would not receive their gifts in a timely fashion. Large numbers were sent overseas to the Dominions, and for those already serving on one of the new fronts, they would have to wait until their return to receive them. This would add to the growing challenge of sourcing sufficient brass to manufacture the boxes. The last boxes would not be distributed until at least 1920.



Responsibility for the distribution of the new gifts fell to individual battalions as the war progressed. In many cases this was a burdensome task.

Some battalions distributed them by post, with a return card inside. This one, issued to soldiers in the Liverpool City Battalions (the Liverpool Pals), is typical. Others, typically in the Dominions, held special parades to help distribute the boxes with some aplomb to returned soldiers, or their next of kin for those men lost in action in all theatres of war. This was particularly the case for ANZAC soldiers who had died in Gallipoli in 1915.

The 11th Royal Fusiliers was another Kitchener's Army Battalion that was passed the responsibility of distributing the gift. The card insert refers to the challenges of manufacturing a box from brass, at a time when there was dire need to use this valuable metal in the production of shells and other munitions of war.



Gifts for the Wounded, Prisoners of War and Next of Kin

The focus of the Executive Committee in its early days was inevitably the delivery of gifts to those men serving at sea and at the front; but given the significant number casualties, and recognising the sacrifices they had been made, these men and their families could hardly be excluded from the distribution. Accordingly, the question of the supply of gifts to the wounded and returned soldiers, prisoners of war – and even men ‘on furlough’ – became a matter for some discussion by the Executive Committee, and once again the steady growth of the fund beyond its projected £55,000-60,000 gave some confidence that if donations continued to be received, that ‘the wounded, prisoners and men interned [in the Netherlands] should receive if possible the full gift’.⁴⁶ Though still tentative, this resolution meant that men who were overseas on Christmas Day would also be rewarded with a gift.

Those who had been taken prisoner would have a long wait to receive their gifts from 1914; and for the families of the deceased, the ability to claim these small tokens undoubtedly provided some comfort. Wounded soldiers, seen as heroes who had spilled their blood for their country, were subject to much attention, and would receive not only the Princess’s gift, but other gifts besides. In the first instance, all those men who had served overseas and who were in hospital on Christmas Day, would be included in the distribution of the initial gift; and those who had been captured would have their gift set aside for them until they returned. For those men who had lost their lives, Next of Kin could at least expect to receive the box.

The King And Queen’s Christmas card was issued to all those who were serving at the Front or at Sea at Christmas 1914 (see page 58). While the affecting standard message, written in the King’s own hand, was ‘*May God protect you and bring you home safe*’, (right, bottom) for those who had been wounded were was a separate card with its own special message: ‘*May you soon be restored to health*’ (right, top). Wounded sailors and soldiers could also expect to receive the Princess’s gift (see page 47); for those in hospital at Christmas 1914, this card from the Sovereign would no doubt provide an extra morale boost.





Queen Alexandra, Princess Mary's grandmother, was known as a kind and caring person. Plans were in place to provide boxes with her image in 1914 (top right) to wounded men on Christmas Day. Typically containing monogrammed cigarettes, they may also have contained sweets.⁴⁷ The Queen continued this practice, with an improved, lithographed tin, in 1915 and 1916 (top left).



Cadbury Brothers, though strict Quakers, at their board meeting of 11 November 1914, Cadbury Brothers determined to send boxes of chocolate, with a suitable message, to 'all British recognised military hospitals at home and abroad accommodating wounded soldiers'.⁴⁸ There were two patterns of tins, the principal one is shown (above, right). They continued this practice with simpler packages into at least 1916 (right).





U.S. 131

POSTAL ADDRESS:- INFANTRY RECORD OFFICE LETTER

Registry No 8 District
34660

Infantry Record Office
Center
1916

Dear *Mother,*

In accordance with instructions received from the War Office, I forward herewith the following articles, being the personal effects of the late No. *12,352*
(Rank) *Private* (Name) *H. Clow*
(Regiment) *DEVON REGT*

closed form.

Yours truly,
H. H. Lewis
Major and Colonel
1/c Records No 8 District

List of Effects
1. Gift Box

to *Mrs. H. Clow*
29, Theobald Terrace,
Upper Holloway,
London, N.

Gifts were issued to the next of kin of soldiers killed in the war, where those men had not already received them. In the case of Pte Horace Clow, killed in action at the Battle of Loos on 30 September 1915, his Gift Box was presumably part of the personal effects he left behind before landing in France in July 1915. On his death, Pte Clow's Gift Box was sent to his family in 1916, and the letter listing the gift as part of his effects retained by his family within it, as a remembrance of the soldier.



Corporal Robert Ross of the 2nd Scots Guards landed in France on 25 July 1915, and sadly died of his wounds almost a year later. He was just 21. Cpl Ross is buried in Etaples Military Cemetery. His box, containing the full gift, was sent on to his family: *As you are next of kin of the late gallant soldier... I am sending herewith a Gift Box, one of which was supplied by HRH Princess Mary's Gift Fund for presentation to each soldier who was serving at home at Christmas 1914. It is regretted that it has not been possible to issue the box to you before this. It contains a pencil case and a card, as do all the boxes supplied for those who were not serving overseas at the time.*



Driver William Elkington arrived in France on 12 July 1915, and died just under a year later, on 17 June 1916. He is buried in Norfolk Cemetery on the Somme. His wife received his box in 1920, distributed with the curt note: *'Herewith one Princess Mary's gift, December 1914. Kindly acknowledge receipt...'*



Rifleman Frank Angrave of the 2nd Kings Royal Rifle Corps arrived in France on 13 August 1914, and was reported killed in action just over a month later. The Birmingham Daily Mail announced his death in November: *Friends of Private Frank Angrave in Birmingham have just received from the War Office an intimation that he was killed in action on the 17th of September. Angrave was a reservist, and joining his old regiment, the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifles, went out to the front at the outbreak of the war. He was employed the General*

*Post Office, Birmingham, having previously been engaged on postal work at Harborne. He leaves a widow and one child.*⁴⁹

This was a mistake, as Frank Angrave had been listed as missing, and was a prisoner of war.

Angrave made an application to receive his gift in 1920, as all men captured prior to Christmas were eligible to receive theirs, and rolls of prisoners from each regiment were assembled to permit this.

His gift survives in its original box, with a mixture of items from 1914 and 1915. It seems that once received, it was carefully put away.



Aftermath and Legacy

‘Princess Mary’ Gift, 1914

[A] correspondent, formerly a driver in the R.F.A., reported that he has in his possession, intact, his Princess Mary Christmas Gift, 1914, and he wonders if there another anywhere to match it. He sent the box home to his wife who had it framed, and seal of the tobacco has not been broken. The cigarettes are set in threes in each corner so that does not know if the tobacco is still good condition or not. Happily, our correspondent went through the whole war without scratch.⁵⁰

By 1936, Princess Mary’s gesture had become immortalised; this correspondent to the Nottingham press was not the only one to feel pleased with his framed gift; there were many like it, in houses up and down the country; gilded boxes shining out from behind glass, a snapshot of remembrance of the early years of the war. Others were polished, mounted on plinths or even encased in precious metals. Memories, cherished memories were captured there; perhaps with reflections of hard times, of heavy seas and of even heavier soils in the fields of Flanders that conspired against men to make this war one of personal fights against the elements, as much as any other enemy. Such memories are surely difficult to erase.



One soldier’s war. Princess Mary’s Gift Box has been described as a ‘box of memories’. This one is typical. Mounted on a bakelite plinth, it contains mementoes of service: shell shards, and German insignia.

The Princess's Gift

would not be repeated in subsequent years, and neither would the Sovereign's Christmas Card. There were other gift issues, from local societies and Comforts Funds, and Christmas Puddings still loomed large. These boxes, once full of chocolate manufactured by Cadbury from raw materials sent from the Caribbean, was issued at Christmas 1915.



Seaman A. King of HMS Agamemnon has used his tin to record his action in the Dardanelles earlier that year.



REGIMENTAL GIFTS, usually paid for by subscription to Christmas or Comforts Funds, were popular – particularly in wealthy battalions such as the London Rifle Brigade, the 5th (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment. Echoing the Princess's gift to non-smokers, this 1915 gift consists of a writing set that was no doubt cherished by its recipient.



Family gifts would always be welcome, so Rowntrees of York provided this 'Service Box', filled with 'Elect' Chocolate. It had a compartment to its rear for postcards, and was supplied with a match striker, a useful companion. Obtained by collecting coupons given away with Rowntrees chocolate, examples were sent overseas in 1915/16.

Operation Christmas Box, previously known as UK4U, supplies gifts to all those on operational deployment at Christmas time, and in 2014, they referenced the Princess's gift as an inspiration, supplying a replica tin of playing cards with their gift (*below, left*).

The Daily Mail produced its own replica of the Princess's box in 2014, to mark both the centenary of the Great War, and the issue of the original gift. These replicas are still available in some numbers, showing the enduring legacy of the Princess's Gift. Fortunately they are easily distinguished from the originals (*below right*).





Fortnum & Masons issued their own version of the gift box in 2014. It contained chocolate designed to survive all climates, a special pack of cards, and a Christmas card. The 'Tommy's Tin' designed to contain these treats was manufactured in Southwark, just as the Princess's box had a century before. The gift was sent to all service personal on overseas deployment at Christmas 2014 and came as a complete and welcome surprise to all who received it.

Notes

- 1 Alexander Scrimgeour *The Complete Scrimgeour, From Dartmouth to Jutland: 1913-16*. London: Conway Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 194
- 2 Anon [D.H. Bell] *A Soldier's Diary of the Great War*. London: Faber & Gwyer, 1929, p. 67
- 3 J.F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum*, Naval & Military Press, 1993, p. 288.
- 4 Princess Mary's Diary, 1914. Princess Mary's Archive, courtesy of the Harewood House Trust.
- 5 *The Daily Mirror*, 16 October 1914
- 6 For example, *Dublin Daily Express*, 16 October 1914
- 7 *HRH The Princess Mary's Sailors' and Soldiers' Christmas Fund, Payments and Receipts Account to 20 June 1919*, IWM B.O.2 1–815
- 8 <https://www.royal.uk/first-world-war-royal-archives>
- 9 Elisabeth Batsford: *Princess Mary, the First Modern Princess*. Stroud: The History Press
- 10 *The Irish Times*, 21 November 1899
- 11 *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 25 November 1899
- 12 *Leeds Mercury*, 26 December 1902
- 13 <https://learning-hub.theroyalregimentofscotland.org/museum-highlights/objects-of-interest/scottish-regiments-gift-tin/>
- 14 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2688267/Treasures-trenches-They-symbols-generations-awesome-sense-duty-Kings-shilling-given-new-recruits-royal-Christmas-Box-sent-Front-Now-Mail-giving-away-glorious-replicas.html>, accessed 23 February 2021
- 15 *The Leader* [Melbourne, Australia], 27 February 1915
- 16 *Daily Record* 29 October 1914; the story also made the front page of *The Tatler*, 4 November 1914.
- 17 Variants © Paul Hinckley, with contributions by Matt Harley, 2002© Terence J. Evans *The Christmas Tin. The Princess Mary's Christmas Fund 1914*. The Author, 2014
- 18 RCIN 75331© Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2024 | Royal Collection Trust
- 19 *Receipts & Payments Account*, to 30 June 1919
- 20 War Diary, 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards, Aug.-Dec. 1914, WO 95/1342/1
- 21 *Thanet Advertiser*, 14 November 1914
- 22 Harold Nicholson, *King George V*, London: Constable, p. 35
- 23 MEC, 15 October 1914, note 4
- 24 Obituary, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 22 November 1928
- 25 https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/1914_Who's_Who_in_Business:_Company_J, accessed 7 November 2020
- 26 Minutes of the Executive Committee (MEC), 22 December 1914, note 6; the *Final Report*, p. 6, also indicates that 'purses' were also given, though these do not appear in Berkeley's original report to the Executive Committee; Table from Peter Doyle, 'For Every Sailor Afloat, Every Soldier at the Front' *Princess Mary's Christmas Gift, 1914*, London: Uniform, p. 143.
- 27 Dr Irfan Malik, personal correspondence, 30 December 2020; the museum is run by Dr Malik's uncle, Riaz Malik.
- 28 J.W.B. Merewether & F. Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, London: John Murray, 1917, p. viii.
- 29 *The Indian Corps in France*, p. ix
- 30 War Office, *Our Indian Empire. A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India*, London: HMSO, 1913, p. 33 *et seq*; *The Indian Corps in France*, p. 482 *et seq*.; *With the Indians in France*, pp. 56–59.
- 31 *The Indian Corps in France*, p. 482

- 32 *Our Indian Empire*, p. 52
- 33 MEC, 15 October 1914, note 8
- 34 MEC 3 November 1914, note 5; MEC 10 November 1914, note 3; *Final Report of the Princess Mary's Gift Fund*, p. 7, listed General Gaslee together with Col C.S. Wheeler [sic], Col. Ridgeway; Lt-Col. O.C. Bradford and Brevet-Col. N.A.K. Burn; C. Hayavadana Rao (ed.) *The Indian Biographical Dictionary*, Madras: Pillar & Co, 1915, pp. 154–55, 336, 362.
- 35 MEC 10 November 1914, note 3
- 36 *Bismarck Daily Tribune* [Bismarck, North Dakota], 7 November 1914; also *The Sunday Star* [Washington D.C.], 15 November 1914
- 37 MEC 24 November 1914, note 3
- 38 MEC 10 November 1914, note 3
- 39 *Final Report*, p. 7; the brass box certainly contains four ounces when packed alone; Doyle, *For Every Sailor Afloat...*
- 40 Sean O'Connell, review of Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800–2000*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000; *Reviews in History*; <https://reviews.history.ac.uk>, accessed 29 December 2020;
- 41 MEC, 15 October 1914, note 7
- 42 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 28 December 1914
- 43 Doyle, *For Every Sailor Afloat...*, p. 206; <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1998-06-131-1>
- 44 MEC, 17 November 1914, note 4
- 45 MGC, 24 November 1914, note 1
- 46 MEC, 17 November 1914, note 4; some 1500 men of the 1st Royal Naval Brigade crossed over into neutral Netherlands in October 1914, and were interned there.
- 47 See Doyle, *For Every Sailor Afloat*, p 220.
- 48 Cadbury Archives, Minute book for 1914, 11 November 1914, minute 910, p. 150-151.
- 49 *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 2 November 1914
- 50 *Nottingham Journal*, 14 November 1936



This Exhibition has been put together from private collections to remember both the 110th anniversary of Christmas in the trenches and on the high seas in 1914, and of the initiation and delivery of Princess Mary's Christmas Gift for 'every sailor afloat, every soldier at the Front'. The exhibition represents one of the most extensive ever mounted on the topic –including some rare survivors that have not been seen in public before. This catalogue serves as a unique record of this unique exhibition.



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