

## World War I Training Trenches at the Gogs

### Background

On 31st January 1916, it is noted in our Club Committee Minutes that:

*“The Secretary produced a form of agreement with the War Office for the construction of a trench course on the links and was authorised to sign it on behalf of the Club.”*

The trenches were dug on land to the left of the fairway of the 16<sup>th</sup> hole on the Old Course (there is also evidence of trenches to the right of the 16<sup>th</sup> continuing up the left hand side of the remaining 6<sup>th</sup> hole from the old 9-hole New Course). The picture below, which is copied from “A Century of Golf on The Gogs” (2001) by Derek Tunnicliffe shows a group of soldiers in those trenches which includes one of our members, H A Nichols (the father of K G Nichols, who was also a member).



The training trenches did not impact on the golf course at that time but were nevertheless extensive, covering an area of several acres. They were a highly visible feature of the golf course for decades. The photo below, taken from a Lancaster in September 1946, thirty years after they were dug, shows their extent.

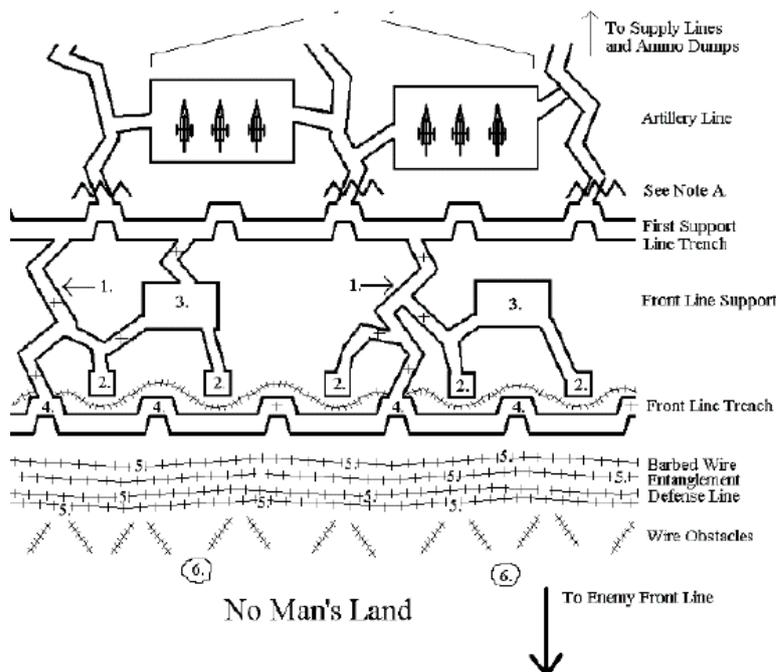
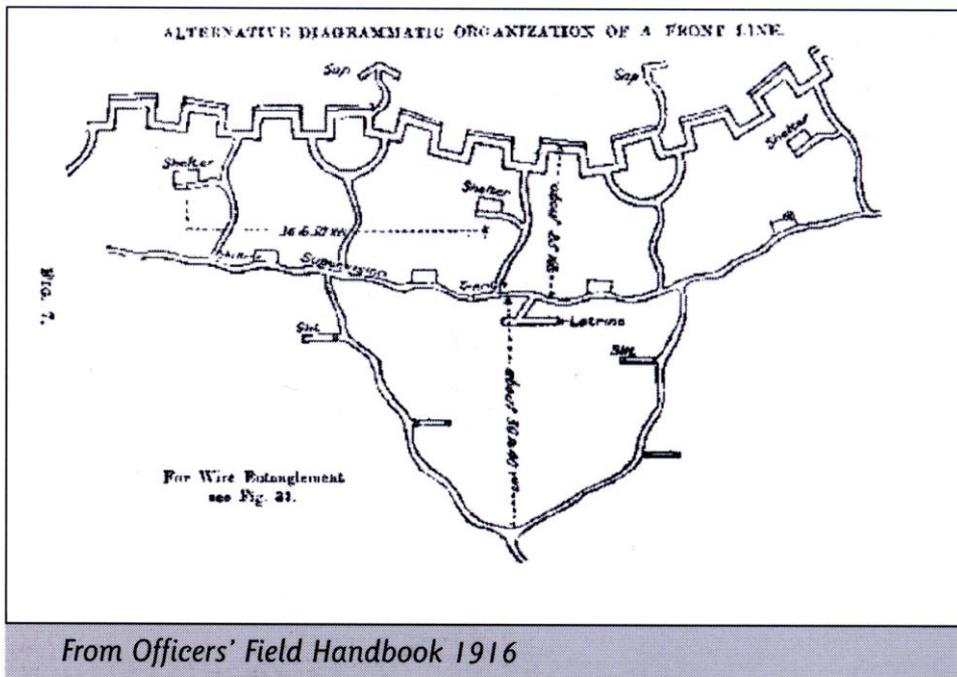


A large proportion of the trenches in this area have not survived due to the construction of the greenkeepers' premises as well as the creation of the New Course in the early 1970s and subsequently the Wandlebury in the 1990s. That which does remain is hidden from view under dense hawthorn scrub which has been allowed to grow unchecked in this area over the last half century.



## Historic context

The two diagrams below, one from the Officers' Field Handbook written in 1916 provide an illustration of how the front lines were organised. A comparison with the aerial photograph of our own trenches shows remarkable similarities – the crenellated front line and the network of interconnections between trenches and command points.



## **The Gogs trenches today**

A photograph of part of the trenches that still remain is shown below – heavily overgrown with scrub, but otherwise many of the features are distinctly visible and much structure is largely intact. This is particularly the case to the left of the 16th hole on the Old Course, There is a stretch of trenches of about 200 yards in length hidden in the scrub which look in excellent condition. With careful scrub removal, there is an opportunity to expose these trenches which would then become a highly visible feature on the golf course once more.



Clearly what remains of the training trenches on the Gogs may well contain important archaeology as well as being a significant heritage site in its own right. So, any remedial work needs to be done cautiously and with expert guidance, It should be added that members of our Club (and some staff also) from that era were undoubtedly killed in action on the Western Front – so the trenches have a memorial context also.

## **Practice trenches - government policy and initiatives**

Within Government, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for the protection and conservation of the historic environment in England. This policy is promoted via the funding of English Heritage. In 2014, at the time when a century had past since the commencement of the First World War, a special project was established - the Home Front Legacy 1914-18 – to record First World War remains across the UK. The training trenches at the Gogs have been registered with this project. Our goal is to protect these highly poignant but vulnerable remains so that future generations will be fully aware of their existence.

Michael Morrison  
12 November 2021