

Charlie Collins

Additional information compiled by Anne Collins

I started this project knowing very little about my paternal grandfather's (Charlie Collins) time during the First World War. He was known as Chas and Termino to his pals. I knew he had served in Egypt and Palestine, I had seen a few photographs marked up in a small plastic wallet by my late father Sam, as "Dad's war". Charlie never spoke about his time in the Middle East which was common amongst most war veterans.

It was not until I found an old wallet of Charlie's, which concealed two diaries, that the story of his war started to unfold. One of the diaries was dated 1912 but it had obviously been taken with Charlie when he enlisted, as the entries were during the war years. The diaries hold a few snippets of information but it revealed that he was involved with the First Gaza Stunt March 26th 1917. It shows he had time to go on leave whilst in Egypt and that he had been isolated in hospital to avoid Spanish flu.

The most poignant find was two letters from Albert Dawes also known as Jim, who was serving on the western front. Jim Dawes' letter written in June 1917 refers to looking forward to seeing Charlie in Blighty, when the war is over. I then found a newspaper cutting in the same wallet from the Herts Advertiser reporting on the death of Albert on 31st July 1917 at Ypres. So many young men were killed, so many friendships ended.

Charlie's parents were James William Collins and Agnes. They were married on 5th July 1876 in Tottenham and moved to the Railway Hotel in Wheathampstead in the late 1880's, where Charlie Collins my grandfather was born in 1895. His father (James William) had been the Coachman for many years at Brocket Hall to the late Lord Cowper. He took over the pub in 1887 and worked up a flourishing trade and reared a family of 13 with his wife Agnes. Frederick George, my great uncle was 9 years old when he came to Wheathampstead and was the second son. Charlie was the youngest son and second youngest in the family. Charlie went to St Helen's School at Wheathampstead and he would tell friends later in life that he couldn't remember leaving. He just "drifted" out of school into his brothers Fred's antiques business.

I recall my grandfather telling me that he was left handed. This was not accepted by the school and he had to learn to write with his right hand. He however continued to use his left hand to saw or turn a screw driver.



Fig. 1 - *The Railway Hotel, Station Road Wheathampstead in the early 1900's. Left to right Agnes William (in the door), the maid daughters Ada and Kitty, Son Wilkie by the Bicycle, unknown person in the trap.*

My grandfather Charlie Collins started life as a young boy at the Railway Hotel Station road Wheathampstead.

The brothers bought, repaired and sold furniture in the pub yard, first at the Railway Hotel and then later at the Red Lion. When Charlie's mother died in the early part of the 1900's, his father set up home at 12 High Street (where the dentist surgery is situated in 2019).

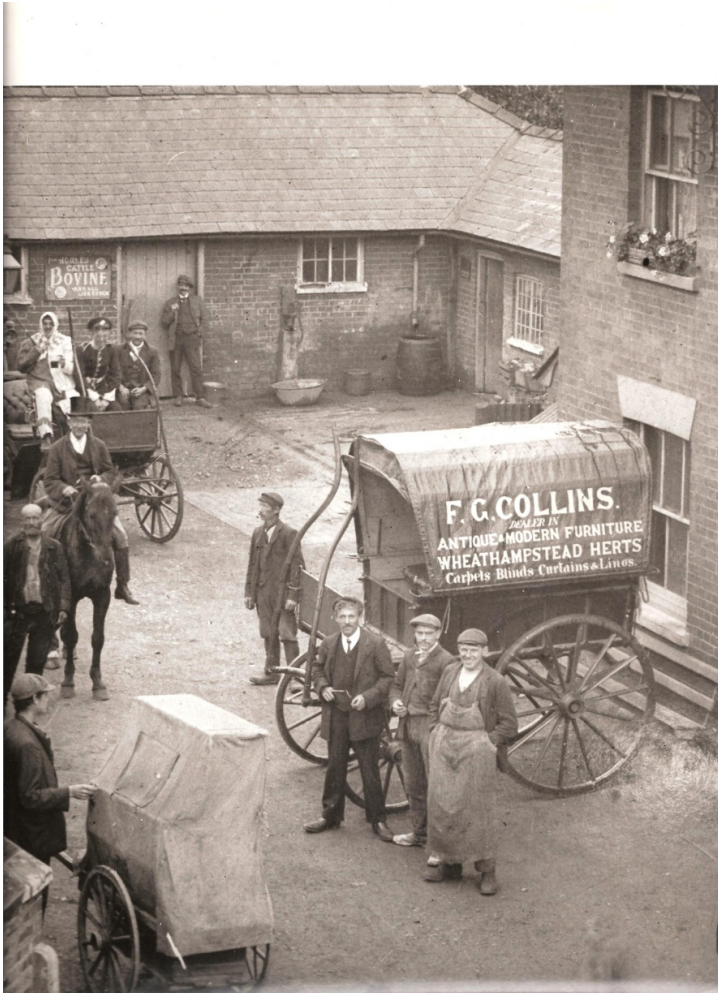


Fig. 2 - First mode of transport for the Collins business circa 1907
The family left the Railway Hotel In 1909

1911

Fred Collins was partnered by Charlie his younger brother in 1911. By 1911 Charlie had established his London connection. He would drive up in his horse and cart to collect furniture his brother Fred had bought at Christies the previous day. The brothers were also cabbies for the Railway hotel and in those days they hired horses from Tattersalls and the horses used to come down on the train.

In 1915 on July 4th the ledger records for Lamer House "taking down, labelling and removing to the Rectory the whole of the beds and bedding as used for hospital and packing away for time being in top room – 3 man horse and van. Cost £1 14 shillings and 6 pence."

July 8 1915, the ledger records "Setting up room as required for Squadron Officers with furniture from storage over Brewery at Lamer House, Apsley Cherry Garrard, price 16/6 (16 shillings and 6 pence) Cleaning down walls."

On the 17th November 1915, Charlie Collins enlisted with the Herts Yeomanry (age 20) to fight for King and Country. He left behind his two sisters Grace and Millie,

minding the family business. His elder brother Fred was a member of Herts Yeomanry who served in France and Italy in the motor transport unit.



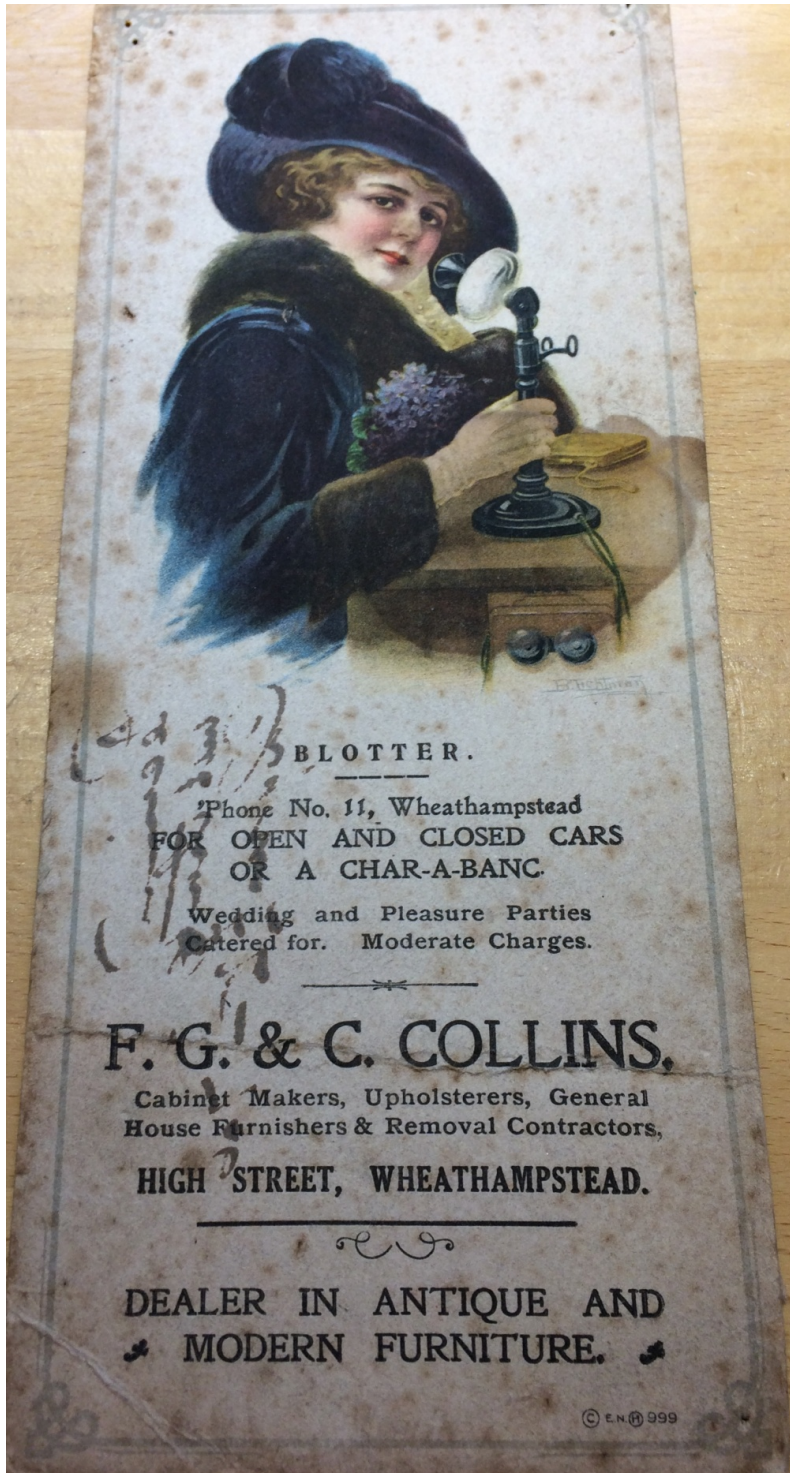
Fig. 3 - Frederick George Collins



Fig. 4 - Collins premises 12 High Street Wheathampstead

The sisters did a good job in looking after the business, fighting their corner when it came to unpaid bills.

A lot of correspondence was via post cards in the 1900's and they encountered one disgruntled customer who Grace had written to over an unpaid bill. The customer wrote to her saying she should not make references to debts on post cards. Grace's response was that there was still a bad debt.



BLOTTER.
Phone No. 11, Wheathampstead
**FOR OPEN AND CLOSED CARS
OR A CHAR-A-BANC.**
Wedding and Pleasure Parties
Catered for. Moderate Charges.

F. G. & C. COLLINS.
Cabinet Makers, Upholsterers, General
House Furnishers & Removal Contractors,
HIGH STREET, WHEATHAMPSTEAD.

**DEALER IN ANTIQUE AND
MODERN FURNITURE.**

© E.N. 999

Fig. 5 - The family business carried out a whole host of activities that included repairs to furniture, fitting blinds, supplying and laying lino and a cabbie service.

On the 23rd September 1916, Charlie left Maresfield (training camp) and arrived at St Budeux, Plymouth Camp. On the 28th September 1916, Charlie then left St Budeux for Egypt from Devonport Plymouth at 1.30 pm. Charlie set sail for Egypt on the 29th September 1916 on the Carmeronian Leyland Liner SS. October 12th 1916.

When Charlie arrives at Alexandria Mustafa Camp, the base depot, his diary entry records “some voyage“.

Charlie had probably never travelled further afield than London, his colleagues had probably never travelled beyond Wheathampstead. Their first experience of a truly foreign country would have been the sights, sounds and smells of markets in the alleyways of Egypt. It is perhaps very difficult to fully understand this today. The population of pre first world war Britain did not enjoy the opportunities and ease of modern travel that we do today. They did not have access to magazines and newspapers full of colour photographs that we have now or the vast array of television programmes and films showing the wonders of other lands. The world that Charlie faced in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) when he landed in Alexandria would have literally one that they had never seen before and for which nothing could have prepared him.



Fig. 6 - Charlie Collins -Top Row Far Left

Men usually spent a week in Alexandria or near Cairo to acclimatise to the heat and sometimes much longer. Troops would go through drill and exercises in the early morning and late afternoon, gradually doing more in the late heat of the day. Most soldiers would have been issued with light “Khaki drill” uniforms being cotton instead of woollen serge and pith helmets before arriving in the country, but others would have received them once on Egypt.



Fig. 7 - Reverse of photograph reads "A pal of mine".

Tom in the 1st Plato for
Sergt. a Squadron
which do you
think on the matter up
for A.S. Sergt. Brown
No. 3 Troop

Fig. 8 - Extract from back of photograph



Fig. 9 - "What do you think of the make-up of Sergeant Rowe No 3 Troop?"



Fig. 10 - Group photo of Herts Yeomanry.



Fig. 11 - No 1 Troop on Active Service in the field

Fig. 12 - No 1 Troop on Active Service in the field.



Fig. 13 - Charlie Collins - front row far right marked with "x"



Fig. 14 & 15 - Written on the reverse - "The Arab horse laughing at the joke in the Saturday journal Herts Yeo 10th January 1917" - "Telling him the tale from the journal, A Squadron January 10th 1917".



Fig. 16 - Charlie Collins standing on the horse - possibly at El Arish on the coast.



Fig. 17 - Charlie Collins on the far right.

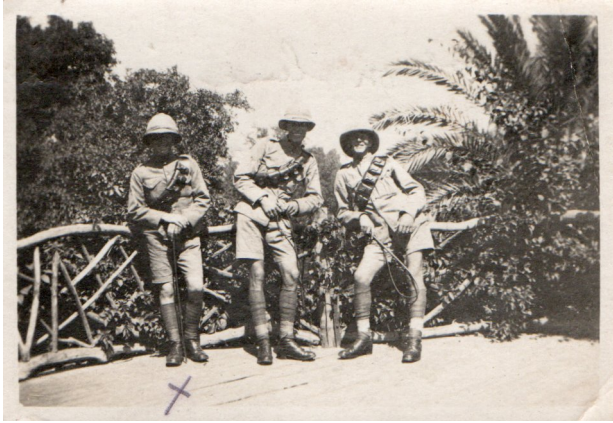


Figure. 18 - Charlie Collins marked with "X" in Egyptian Garden, Cairo.



Fig. 19 - Charlie's post card to his sister Grace dated 11th October 1917. "Had a good time last week on holiday, letter following soon please remember me to all."



Fig. 20 - Hospital.

Charlie's diary records on September 26th 1918, "left the field for hospital, arrived at Ludd 27th". We do not know any detail of his injuries.

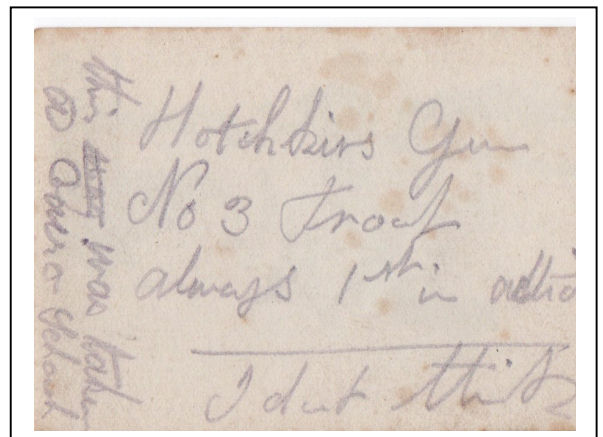


Fig. 21 & 22 - Number 3 Troop of Herts Yeomanry. The back of the photograph reads "Hotchkiss Gun No 3 Troop always 1st in Action I don't think. This was taken at Cairo school".



Fig. 23 - Letter to Charlie

Charlie corresponded with his pal Albert Dawes (Jim). Two letters were found in Grandad's wallet and the news paper article relating to Jim's tragic death.

Extract from paper found in Charlie Collins' wallet

WHEATHAMPSTEAD SOLDIERS FATE

On September 8th 1917, a photo of Pte Albert Edward Dawes of Wheathampstead appeared in the "Herts Advertiser" and a paragraph to the effect that Mrs Dawes had been notified that her son Albert was missing. A further communication from the War office now states that the Army Council have been regrettably constrained to conclude that he is dead and that his death took place on July 31st 1917. The usual message of sympathy from the King and Queen was enclosed with the notification. The following letter from the Earl of Lucan was received by Mrs. Dawes in January. The information given by Sergt J M Munro of Royal Welsh Fusiliers Tootal Road Hospital Manchester is as follows . "I knew Pte Dawes. We were in the same advance on July 31st 1917 at Ypres. I did not see him myself, but his death was reported by a man

who did see him. This man was killed on a burying party a week afterwards, so that further information cannot be given. In the circumstances Dawes was reported missing but I do not think there is any doubt about his death." "The writer adds "We are so very sorry to send to you this information, and would caution that we do not accept a single report of death without further confirmation, although we very much fear, as no news has been received about your son since he was reported missing, he cannot have survived the night on the 31st July 1917. Please accept our sincere sympathy. We are continuing our enquiries."

Charlie's diary gives snippets of information on the 24th March 1917. He writes "resting in Raffa in Palestine Saturday Night March 25th and 26th, 1st Gaza Stunt".

Charlie does not give any detail of his involvement in the battle. The First Battle of Gaza was fought on 26 March 1917, during the first attempt by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) to invade the south of Palestine in the Ottoman Empire during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign of the First World War. Fighting took place in and around the town of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast when infantry and mounted infantry from the Desert Column, a component of the Eastern Force, attacked the town. Late in the afternoon, on the verge of capturing Gaza, the Desert Column was withdrawn due to concerns about the approaching darkness and large Ottoman reinforcements. This British defeat was followed a few weeks later by the even more emphatic defeat of the Eastern Force at the Second Battle of Gaza in April 1917.

Charlie's diary records - December 25th 1917 Xmas day "At Jaffa taking firearms down the line, 54 Division squad in action".

Between the 20th and 22nd December became known as the Battle of Jaffa. On the 21st December, A squadron came under the command of 162 Brigade that was to lead the divisional attack. The objective in 54th's Divisions sector was to occupy the line. As a preliminary to the night of 21st and 22nd December. At dawn of 22nd December, the day scheduled for the main attack, the enemy could be seen moving North. 162 Brigade found no serious resistance and secured the approximate line at Et Tire Fajja. No 2 Troop with an additional Hotchkiss gun, moved through Fajja to Ras el Ain. The squadron withdrew but went out again on 23rd December.

On 21st June 1918 Charlie's diary reveals

"Jaffa races 1st Chase 132, 2nd Chase 143" On August 5th to 18th 1918. Charlie's diary reads "isolated at El Arish from Spanish flu. On the sea coast"

Charlie's diary records September 4th 1918"left El Arish for the squad in line".

On September 20th 1918 Charlie writes "going on leave to Cairo - address New Khedimal hotel – return to Daniel Balach by the 1800 train, Kantara, onto the field".

September 26th 1918 Charlie writes "left the field, for hospital arrived at Ludd 27th"

"Left Kantara December 8th 1918 on board the Voluminia"

"March 16th 1919 left Kantara EEF base Egypt, embark at Port Said. March 17th 1919 sailed for Blighty on board the Canberra, March 20th 1919 arrived at Taranto Italy. March 26th 1919 left Taranto for France Le Havre to proceed to Blighty on board the Canberra SS".

Post War

The two Collins brothers returned safely home to Wheathampstead from Europe and the Middle East. The furniture business flourished during the early 1920's. In 1926 Fred Collins saw the potential for his growing business and bought 54 High Street and 1 Church Street Wheathampstead (with adjoining cottage) for £350. He received an extra £25 discount when he won the toss of a coin. The best bargain Charlie Collins ever struck was the £12 he paid for the old Winter Garden from Blackmore End House in 1926. It was an auction of "Fixtures and Fittings" from the house and it was held on 26th October 1926. My father Sam Collins recalled that it was a sale of the building fabric from the top of the chimney down to the foundations. This winter garden was used to create the shop front of 54 High Street.

MESSRS. F. G. & C. COLLINS,
MONTHLY LISTS
Of Antique & Modern Furniture, Outdoor Effects,
Spare Motor Parts and Accessories for Sale.

IMMEDIATE DELIVERY.
All Goods quoted nett cash on delivery. Free delivery local radius only.
All Boxes and Packing charged for, with Quotation for returns.
A Post Card will reserve any Article for three days, pending inspection.

Bedroom.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	
Re-Upholstered Box Ottoman Sofa	2	15	0	Mahogany Pembroke Table tapered legs	3	5	0
Combination Black Bedstead	1	17	0	Green Velvet Arm Chair	3	0	0
Essential Cupboard	1	0	0	5-ft. Club Fender	4	10	0
Black and Brass Cot and Mattress	1	15	0	Tapestry Arm Chair	4	15	0
Black Enamel and Brass Cot	1	10	8	Velvet Adjustable Arm Chair	1	15	0
4-ft. 6-in. Black and Brass Bedstead	8	12	6	Baby's Adjustable High Chair	1	5	0
4-ft. 6-in. Wool Overlay re-made new tick	2	18	0	Baby's Bentwood High Chair	1	5	0
Mahogany Chest of Drawers	3	0	0	Carved Oak Coffin	7	10	0
Bedroom Chairs	7	0	0	Beech	4	0	0
Mahogany Chest Drawers	5	0	0	Circular Mahogany Table	2	5	0
Mahogany Chest Wardrobe	8	0	0	Velvet Covered Arm Chair, Hair Stuffed	5	0	0
Japanese Gent's Wardrobe	8	8	6	Four Oak and Leather Chairs	8	10	0
Wicker Cradle	1	0	0	Fair Plated Card Trays	1	10	0
Walnut Carrying Invalid Chair	4	0	0	Plated Coffee Pot	1	10	0
4-ft. Feather Bed	1	0	0	Plated Fair Fish Servers	1	15	0
Hip Baths	4	0	0	Kitchen Table, good condition, nearly new	1	10	0
Double Chest Drawers	10	10	0	Kitchen Table, good condition, small supports	1	5	0
Inlaid Square Front Chest Drawers	10	12	6	Several Sets Table Tops on Trestle supports	1	0	0
Several Sets Toilet Services	11	0	0	Very Large Stained Hanging Cup-board	3	0	0
Double Mahogany Chest Drawers	7	10	0	6-ft. Saddlebag Settee	7	0	0
Satinwood Chest Drawers, with Hazelwood front	1	0	0				
Gilt Carved Chair	1	0	0	Outside.			
Fair unlined ditto	1	15	0	Garden Seats	1	15	0
Sheraton Inlaid Gent's Wardrobe	18	10	0	Several Deck Chairs	1	8	0
				Stone Pedestal for Sundial	1	12	0
Downstairs.				Very good 24-in. Mangle	4	5	0
American Cloth, 4-piece Suite	7	0	0	Galvanized Water Carrier, on wheels	2	5	0
Chesterfield in Tapestry	4	0	0	Iron Garden Chairs	2	5	0
Circular Mahogany Table	1	0	0	One Dozen Motor Jacks from 2 to 5 tons	1	5	0
Long Stained Dresser Cupboard	3	0	0	New Fouring Chairs	1	6	0
4-ft. 6-in. Extending Dining Table	8	10	0				

High Street, Wheathampstead, St. Albans, Herts.

Fig. 24 - Auction notice

Petty crime

In 1921 the two Collins brothers wrote a letter complaining to the "County Petty Sessional Court" that each had received a summons in respect of an offence against motoring regulations. Apologies were offered to the Court on non-attendance on account of business calls. The letter referred to the fact that while people are willing to work hard and help the state, they were harassed over minor matters, whilst others were free to draw dole and enjoy their lives in idleness. The police did not contest the explanations so Earl Verulam presiding at the bench took the lenient view and ordered the brothers to pay costs only. The summons against Fred was driving a motor car without lights and Charlie was driving a motorcycle with no rear number plate. Fred explained that the night in question was an exceptionally light night and he exercised his discretion by driving home slowly a distance of 200 yards without a lighted lamp. He claimed his action was "no danger to anyone". Regarding the charge against Charlie and the rear back plate, Fred claimed that he had sent it to the blacksmith to have straightened. Charlie only used the machine to take a message some half a mile away. He maintained that the police knew that the cycle was properly registered and pointed out that the front plate was in order. Fred asked the Court to take into account "With the present state of trade and employment what encouragement is there for us to endeavour to respond to the Prime Ministers appeal for employing reserve de mobs (*sic*) when at present all your endeavours are hampered as such trivial matters as these. We both commenced work the very day we were de mobbed and have practically done 12 hours or more every day since, knowing every £1 we earn means about 14 shillings for the State. Yet we get not so much consideration as the army of unemployed." The two brothers were clearly much aggrieved about being summoned for minor motor offences when going about their daily business having served in and survived the First World War and now trying to earn a living.

George Bernard Shaw

In the late 1920's George Bernard Shaw was a customer of my great uncle and grandfather, on 23rd June 1921 they delivered parcels to his property in Hanover Square and Bath from Adelphi Terrace. In 1923 they fitted carpets on his landing and sewed cushion covers. In 1924 there was additional carpet laying. In 1925 collecting a garden shelter from Station and delivering to Ayot and a Copper Scuttle was purchased. It is interesting to read the invoices as it shows the diversity of the business, carpet fitters, upholsterers and furniture removers.



Fig. 25 - Dinner invitation

Charlie continued links with the Herts Yeomanry for many years after the war.