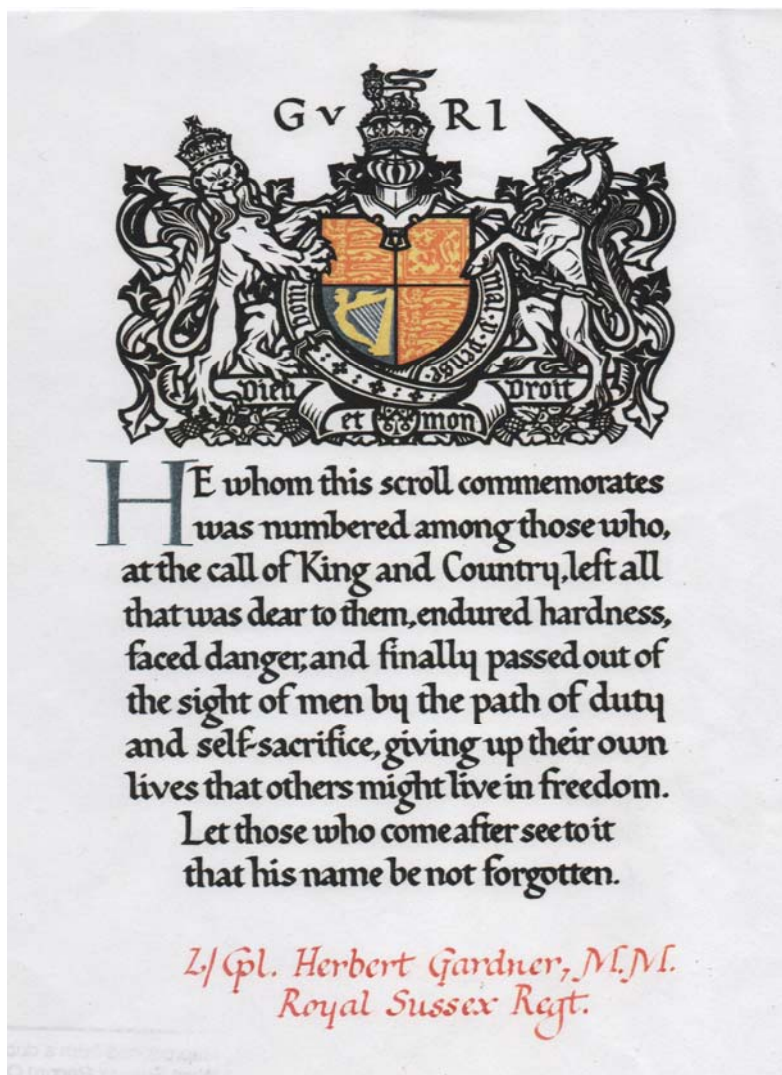


Herbert Gardner's Story



(image from West Sussex Record Office RSR MS 7/65)

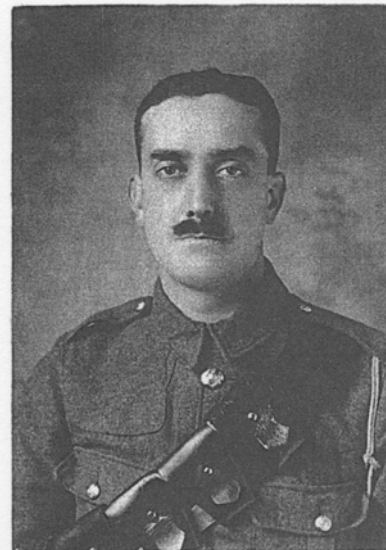
By Angela Levy

Herbert Gardner's Story

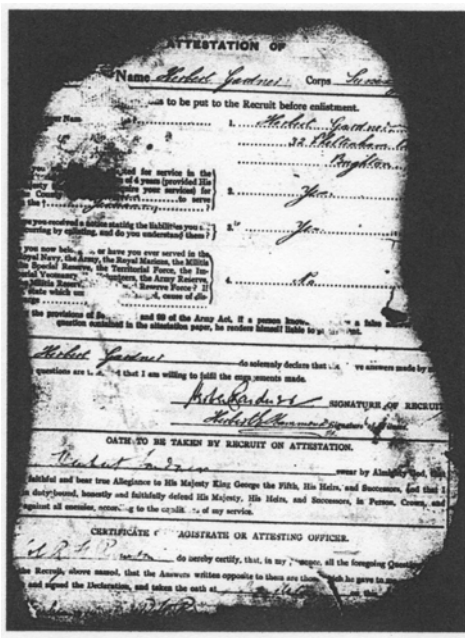
I have chosen to write about his man purely because his surname is the same as that of my paternal grandmother. There is no evidence that I am related to him but, from what I have learned, I would be glad to discover that I am.

Herbert Isaac Gardner was born in July 1883 at St. Mary's, Islington. He dropped his middle name early, however, for it does not appear in records after the 1891 Census when he was living with his father, Isaac, a printer compositor, his mother, Julia, two older sisters and an older brother at 64, Arthur Road, Islington.

By 1901 they had moved to 12, Comyn Road, Battersea, and Herbert was an estate office clerk.



Herbert Gardner
 (WSRO RSR MS 7/65)



Herbert's Attestation Form
 (from Ancestry.co.uk Military Records)

In 1906 he married Ethel Gertrude

Hensman, also a Londoner, at Wandsworth and in the 1911 Census (via ancestry.co.) they are shown living at 30, Prospero Road, Upper Holloway. They have no children and Herbert's widowed mother is living with them.

Herbert is now a theatre manager and his wife is a milliner.

By the time the First World War began on 4 August 1914, Herbert was in Brighton. When he enlisted there on 22 September 1914, his address was 32, Cheltenham Place and his occupation was cinematograph manager. Answers to the questions on his Attestation papers tell us that he wished to serve in the Sussex Yeomanry, that he had received a notice "stating the liabilities"¹ he was incurring by enlisting, that he understood these liabilities and that he had not served in any of the Forces before.

The Sussex Yeomanry headquarters at this time was in Church Street, Brighton, with Colonel R.H Rawson in command and it is his signature that appears as "attesting officer" at the bottom of Herbert's Attestation form below the oath he had sworn..... "I, Herbert Gardner, swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and dignity against all enemies, according to the conditions of my service"². (quoted from the Attestation Form above)

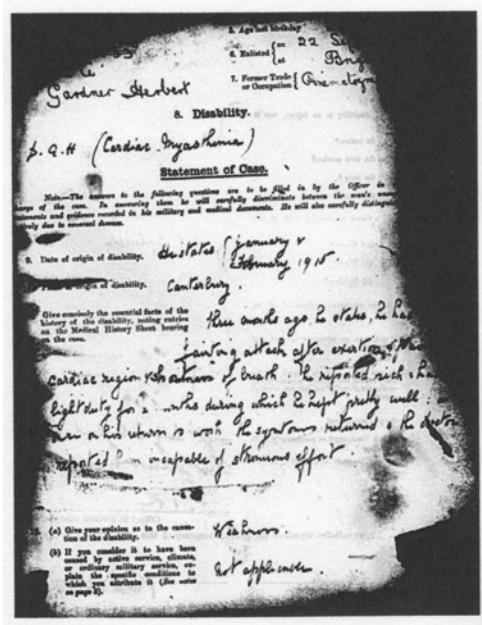
Although the Attestation form, in essence, remained the same, over the years there were more than ten different varieties of this document.

Herbert was now 2033 Private H Gardner in the Sussex Yeomanry.

His medical examination reveals that his height was 5 feet 10 and a half inches and his weight was 148 pounds (just over 10 and a half stone). His chest measurement when fully expanded was 35 inches and he had acceptable eyesight.

It is worth explaining here that the poor condition of his documents is due to fire and water damage as the result of German bombing in September 1940. It is a miracle that they exist at all since 60% of service records were destroyed.

Herbert received some of his training in Canterbury and was doing well, having



Herbert's Health Report
 (www.Ancestry.co.uk
 Military Records)

been promoted on 7 January 1915 to the rank of Corporal. However, it seemed that his military career was about to come to an end. In January and February he increasingly experienced shortness of breath during exercise – and he collapsed.

The doctor diagnosed cardiac myasthenia – from the Greek, meaning weakness of the heart muscle – a condition which could cause sudden death.

It was decided to restrict him to light duties at home for two months. Perhaps because of his health problems, his rank reverted to Private. On 25 May 1915, when he was re-assessed, it was thought that though not aggravated by "intemperance" or misconduct", his condition might be permanent.

Whether or not they considered invaliding him out of the Army, it did not come to that.

Indeed, it may have been that his condition was misdiagnosed because the records I have seen

make no reference to any recurrence of symptoms.

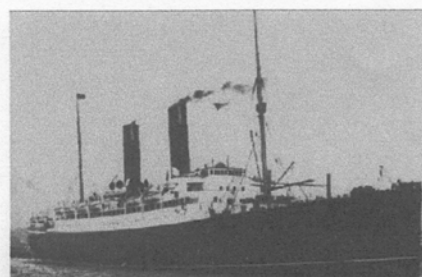
Private Gardner was posted on 29 June 1915 and again on 20 March 1916 but to where I have not discovered.


Herbert was still a Private when he boarded the troopship "Franconia" at Devonport on 8 July 1916. Nine days later the ship arrived at Alexandria and Herbert's regiment joined the Yeomanry base at Sidi Bishr. On 22 July they joined the 1/1st Sussex Yeomanry at El-Ferdan.

Less than three months later, the "Franconia" was torpedoed and sunk by submarine UB47 commanded by Wolfgang Steinbaur in the Mediterranean en route between Alexandria and Marseilles. There were no troops on board but 12 crew members died. Three hundred and two other persons survived.³

No letters or diaries written by Herbert seem to exist of his time in Egypt and Palestine but something of what he experienced may be

Franconia



Name	Franconia
Type	Troopship
GRT	18,510 tons (one of the largest ships hit)
Country	 British
Built	1911
Builder	Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Ltd., Newcastle
Operator	Cunard Steam-Ship Co., Ltd., Liverpool
History	Built as an ocean-liner. Operated from February 1915 as a

Troopship "Franconia"
 (www.uboard.net/ww1/ships)

gained from the letters of Private Reg Sims of "D" Company 1/4th Royal Sussex Regiment, British Expeditionary Force, who went there in January 1916.

He describes sleeping in a hammock on board ship and he thought that the inoculations against typhoid and cholera were "an excellent thing".⁴ He records

how three motor ambulances were needed when they arrived because so many men fainted in the heat – and water in a bottle left outside under an aluminium cover would boil. (WSRO RSR MS4/76-79)

All this suggests that Private Herbert Gardner was a lot more robust than might have been supposed.

The only illness he is recorded as having been admitted to hospital for "in the field" is tonsillitis. This was at Matruh on 8 September 1916. He was "discharged to duty with unit"⁵ on 12 September 1916.



Herbert's Casualty Form
 (www.Ancestry.co.uk Military Records)

He was granted a Good Conduct Badge on 22 September 1916, the second anniversary of his enlistment. A soldier was normally entitled to wear an inverted chevron on his sleeve for each complete year of service.

On 16 December 1916, Herbert was transferred to the 16th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment, given a new Army number and promoted. No longer 2033 Private H Gardner but 320212 Lance Corporal H Gardner.

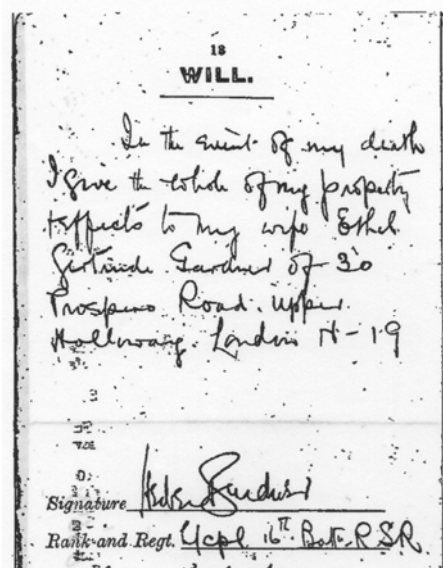
On 26 September 1917 he again had tonsillitis and this time he took longer to recover, not returning to his regiment until 11 October 1917. The battles of Beersheba and Sheria were about to begin and, like many other soldiers in the theatre of war, Herbert made his will. An Army "Informal Will" was a standardised document using the simple words "In the event of my death I give the whole of my property and effects to...name and

relationship...of...(address)..."⁶ written in the soldier's own hand. Below, Herbert put his signature, rank, regiment and the date, 30 October 1917.

A covering War Office document, dated almost two years later, stated that "within the meaning of the Wills Act, 1837" Herbert's will had been "recognised by the War department as constituting a valid will".⁷

Interestingly, there are a few lines included with the will telling us that his SBR size 3 had been tested in a gas tent. SBR stands for Small Box Respirator, designed in 1916 and in use from the end of that year. It filtered dangerous gasses through a canister of charcoal and gauze impregnated with neutralising chemicals. Everything was carried in a square bag which also contained strips of sticking plaster for emergency repair to the hose and mask.

With his regiment involved in the Battle of Sheria at Wadi Union, Herbert was about to reach the peak of his military career. OC (Officer Commanding) "B" Coy



Herbert's will
 (www.probate search.service.gov.uk)

(Company) Captain Edwards had seized the high ground 200 yards immediately in front of him in order to "pursue the enemy with fire". Quoting from the War Diary of 6 November 1917, "OC "D" Coy Lieutenant HOPKINS seized the corresponding high ground to his front with the same object. For the next 10 minutes"

(between about 08.20 and 08.30) "L.c. GARDNER (Range Taker "B" Coy). gave ranges and observed most efficiently, displaying great coolness under heavy enemy M.G and Rifle fire". ⁸ M.G is short for machine gun.

On 7 November 1917 Herbert was shot in the chest and a lung was damaged. He was treated at 65th CCS (Casualty Clearing Station).

A week later his records show that he was awarded the Military Medal which is for "acts of bravery and devotion to duty under fire".⁹ The MM was the "other ranks" equivalent to the Military Cross. It was established on 25 March 1916 but back-dated to 1914.



Herbert's medals
 Military Medal British War Medal Victory Medal
 (photographed at the Redoubt, Eastbourne by the author)



Herbert's Military Medal
 (photograph by Bob Dewson at the Redoubt Museum, Eastbourne)

0800 The Battn. had seized the high ground in Squares U.10 & 9, the whole Battn. in the line. Shortly after this an enemy M.G. was found to be enfilading the 229th. Bde. and L.C. BROOKS "C" Coy. on his own initiative moved his L.G. forward to a most exposed position & from there silenced the enemy M.G. and remained there until his gun was put out of action. About this time O.C. "B" Coy. Capt. EDWARDS seized high ground 200 yds immediately in front of him in order to pursue the enemy with fire. O.C. "D" Coy. (Lieut. HOPKINS) seized corresponding high ground to his front with the same object. For the next 10 minutes L.C. GARDNER (Range Taker "B" Coy.) gave ranges and observed most effectively, displaying great coolness under heavy enemy M.G. & Rifle fire.

0830 The enemy, having collected reinforcements, made a determined counter attack supported by

War Diary entry
 (WSRO RSR MS 7/25)

The MM, circular, made of silver, 36mm in diameter was inscribed on the reverse "FOR BRAVERY IN THE FIELD" surrounded by a laurel wreath and surmounted by the Royal Cypher and Imperial Crown. It was discontinued in 1993 and the Military Cross has been awarded to all ranks ever since. Announcement of the award was published in the London Gazette, which was usual. Like all who served between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918, Herbert also received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, awarded together, as was usual. The latter was a bronze disc, 36mm in diameter. It was not awarded singly but to all those who received the 1914 Star or the 1914-15 and to most of those who were awarded the British War Medal.

The British War Medal was a silver or bronze disc, 36mm in diameter. On it St. George is seen riding a horse that is trampling on Prussianism. Together, the Star, the British Medal and the Victory Medal are nicknamed "Pip, Squeak and Wilfred". Herbert did not receive "Pip" because he did not serve abroad before 31 December 1915. On 24 May 1918 Herbert was appointed Acting Corporal but, for some reason, this rank reverted to Lance Corporal about a month later.

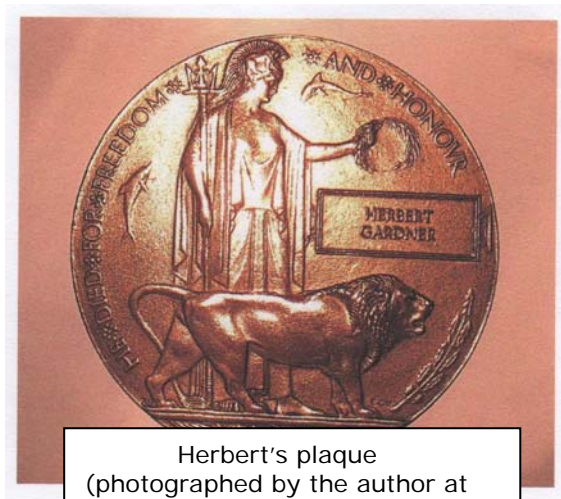
Up to this point in my researches I had no idea what he looked like, then, during a visit to the West Sussex Record Office in Orchard Street, Chichester, I struck gold. In the "Records of the Royal Sussex

Regiment", a catalogue edited by A.E. Readman, BA, there was a reference to Herbert which told me they had a photograph in their archives.

Perhaps one cannot learn much about a person from one image but I like his steady gaze and dark, un-English eyes.

Besides the picture, his small bundle of documents included a photograph of his grave, a printed memorial signed by King George V and a Commemorative Scroll (which I have used on the title page of this case history).

A footnote in the catalogue told me that his Military Medal was in the medal collection at the Royal Sussex Regiment Museum in the Redoubt at Eastbourne. When I phoned the Redoubt I was warmly invited to go and not only see all his medals but to photograph them as well. One item I had not expected to see was a bronze plaque, the size of a saucer and heavy, which showed Britannia, with a lion before her, holding a laurel wreath over Herbert's name (no Army details)



Herbert's plaque
 (photographed by the author at
 The Redoubt, Eastbourne)

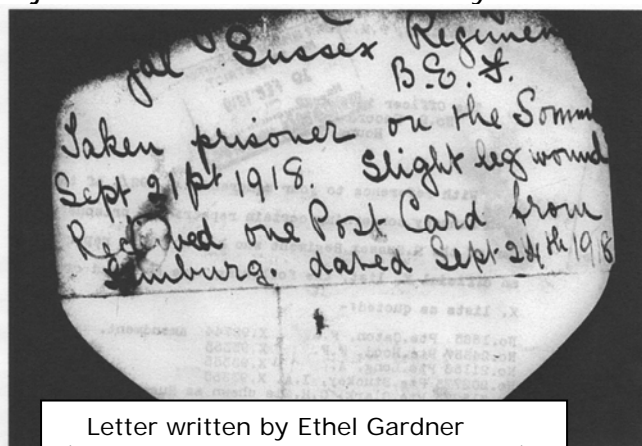
This plaque was often described as the Dead Man's Penny or the Death Medal as it was only awarded posthumously.

The Museum's entire collection was being carefully cleaned, by volunteers, to their original brightness before being returned to glass-fronted display cases or smoothly opening drawers.

At some point in 1918, Herbert was posted to Northern France to an area that had been the site of a battle fought between the British Expeditionary Force and a vastly more powerful German Imperial Force on 26 August 1914. It had been in German hands ever since.

Just before a big effort to win it back, Herbert was given about 21 days leave "In the Field". He returned to his unit "In the Field" early in August 1918.¹⁰

There was desperate fighting in September and October 1918 during which the objective was achieved but many British soldiers were killed, wounded or missing.



Letter written by Ethel Gardner
 (www.Ancestry.co.uk Military Records)

Ethel Gardner received news on 24 September 1918 that her husband had a "slight leg wound" and had been taken prisoner on 21 September.

Nothing more was heard of him for months.

In February 1919 it was clear that he had not been repatriated with others on the Royal Sussex Regiment casualty list.

Eventually, a compassionately worded letter from Lieutenant-

Colonel L. Impey, secretary of the Central

Prisoners of War Committee, reached Ethel saying that "we cannot help feeling.....he may have died of his wounds". Assuring her that "all possible enquiries will be made" and that she "would be advised immediately" of any

information, he concluded "Please accept our deepest sympathy in your suspense".¹¹

News came in response to an enquiry in the "People" in the form of a letter written by Sergeant Leslie Stone of the 16th Royal Sussex Regiment now himself back home in Lewes. He knew Herbert Gardner and had been taken prisoner on the same day.

He, too, had been injured and been taken to the large German Hospital at Le Cateau. Not seriously hurt, he was able to walk so he searched the wards for "some of our boys and I eventually found L/C Gardner (sic) who was in bed with a bullet through his leg. He was quite cheerful".¹²

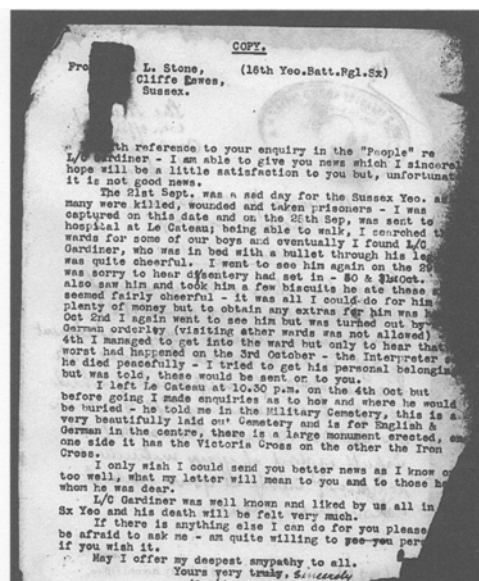
Sergeant Stone visited Herbert on 29 and 30 September and on 1 October, taking him some biscuits. Herbert had dysentery. When the sergeant went to the ward again on 2 October, the German orderly turned him away.

On 4 October Stone managed to get into the ward only to be told by an interpreter that the Lance Corporal had died peacefully on 3 October, and he ended his letter saying, "L/C Gardner (sic) was well known and liked by us all.....his death will be felt very much".

Before Sergeant Stone left the hospital he found out that Herbert was to be buried in Le Cateau Military Hospital, which had been built by the Germans in February 1916 with separate plots for the dead of both sides.

Although the majority of the graves (thousands) were of German soldiers, there were hundreds of Commonwealth graves and commemorations besides the graves of 34 Russian prisoners of war who died in captivity.

The copy of Sergeant Stone's letter is undated but it is obvious from Ethel's letter of 3 March 1919 to the officer in charge at the Records Office in Hounslow that she was still not sure of her husband's fate. She asks for the sergeant's address



Letter from Leslie Stone
 (www.Ancestry.co.uk Military Records)



Le Cateau Military Cemetery
 (www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery)

so that "he may possibly be able to give some information".¹³

It is not clear just when she was told that Herbert had died many months before but his effects were still being returned to her in August and September 1919.

Ethel was about 37 when Herbert died. She had no children. She never remarried and she died in Worthing in 1971, aged 90.

The First World War lasted 4 years, 3 months and 7 days. Lance Corporal

Herbert Gardner MM served for 4 years and 12 days.

The location of his grave in Le Cateau Military

Cemetery, Le Cateau –Cambresis, Nord–Pas –de-Calais, France, is Plot I.B.157

Information Sources

With thanks to Fran Stovold, Curator of the Redoubt Fortress Military Museum (Royal Sussex Regiment), Royal Parade, Eastbourne for allowing me access to Herbert Gardner's medals.

¹ From Herbert Gardner's Service Records WO363 via Ancestry.co.uk, document no.0384

² From Herbert Gardner's Service Records via Ancestry.co.uk doc.no. 0384

³ From www.uboa.net/ww1/ships

⁴ From the papers of Private Reg Sim West Sussex Record Office RSR (Royal Sussex Regiment) MS 4/76-79

⁵ From the Casualty Form, above, document 0395 from Herbert's Service Records via Ancestry.co.uk

⁶ From Herbert's will, shown above, www.probatesearch.service.gov.uk

⁷ From www.probatesearch.service.gov.uk

⁸ War Diary for 16th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment (WSRO RSR MS 7/25)

⁹ War Diary entry from WSRO RSR MS 7/25

¹⁰ From Herbert's Service Records via Ancestry.co.uk document 0395

¹¹ From a letter to Mrs Ethel Gardner from Lieutenant-Colonel L. Impey via www.Ancestry.co.uk doc.no.0413

¹² From Sergeant Leslie Stone's letter doc. no.0405 among Herbert's Service Records via Ancestry.co.uk

¹³ Letter from Mrs Gardner to the Records Office, Hounslow doc. No.0406 Herbert's Service records

