

History on the Hill – Christchurch Remembered

Report 2

Tanks in Christchurch from 1918

The Southern Command School

Robin Harley

2018

**Funding raised by
The National Lottery**

and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



Tanks in Christchurch from 1918

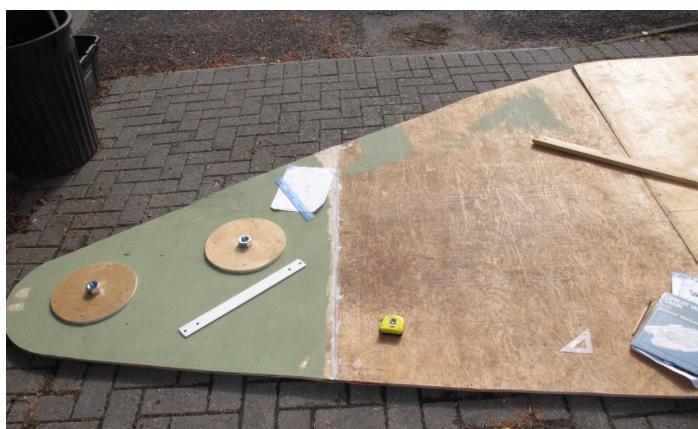
The story of tank advancement during this period, is intertwined with the history of Royal Engineers and their presence at their depot based at Christchurch Barracks. Following the discovery of a tank image taken in Christchurch in 1919 and presumed to be taken on St Catherine's Hill (see Glneg 77), we wanted to somehow bring this connection to life as part of the biennial on-site history day.



Glneg 77, scan from glass plate negative (Red House Museum) c1919

It became clear that getting an actual/replica tank onto the top of the Hill was both logistically difficult and beyond our financial means.

We therefore took on the challenge of constructing a 1:1 'stage prop' style replica of one side of a Mark V tank, in time for the event in 2015 and with little budget, building it from found materials (mainly donated plywood sheets).



Working on the Mark V back end and sponson, August 2015



Finished Mark V plywood side model, September 2015 - Jess Tilley

There were issues with the model however and during the planning for the event in 2017 it was decided to include a modest materials budget in the bid for National Lottery funding to refurbish and remodel the tank (which had been stored in a damp building for two years).

It was assumed that the tank was present in Christchurch during the First World War but during the research phase of the project in 2017, when the original scans from glass plate negatives were found, it was realised that the tank in the image was actually a Mark V** (double star). These were built to overcome some of the insufficiencies of the earlier Mark V and Mark V* tanks; *out of an initial order of 700, only 25 of these were delivered by January 1919* (source <http://www.tanks-encyclopedia.com/>) and therefore were not ready until after WW1. Two of these went to the Royal Engineers Depot in Christchurch (10516 and 10517).

This is also supported by the Imperial War Museum Film Archive:

*IWM 1197 – Tanks Medium B and Mark V** (10516 & 10517) in Bridging Exercise - tank bridging trials at Christchurch, Dorset (then Hampshire) late 1918. © Imperial War Museum, see:*
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060000186>

Additional footage of a Mark V** tank (not in Christchurch) is added for completeness, see:

*IWM 1193 – The trench-crossing abilities of the Mark V** (10261) and Medium C tank compared in earlier models, Britain, late 1918. © Imperial War Museum <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060000182>*

The tanks even appeared at Olympia from 26 June 1919, rehearsing in advance at Christchurch. (*The Sketch* 25 June 1919), see:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/transcript/g6cs1s3t.htm>

<https://www.illustratedfirstworldwar.com/item/tanks-in-the-attack-at-olympia-realism-in-the-naval-military-and-air-ilno-1919-0705-0017-001/>

The presence of tanks in Christchurch was linked to their obvious value for the movement and lifting of heavy equipment, amongst other engineering tasks:

...it was therefore decided in 1918, to form three special Royal Engineer Tank Bridging Battalions...the first mechanized Royal Engineer units and their formation was instituted at Christchurch in October 1918. The formation of the battalions was overtaken by events and two units were disbanded even before the Armistice. See: One More River to Cross by Joiner, J.H., Chapter 5, The Early Years at Christchurch (ISBN: 9780850527889)
<https://bit.ly/2HYVai5> (preview)

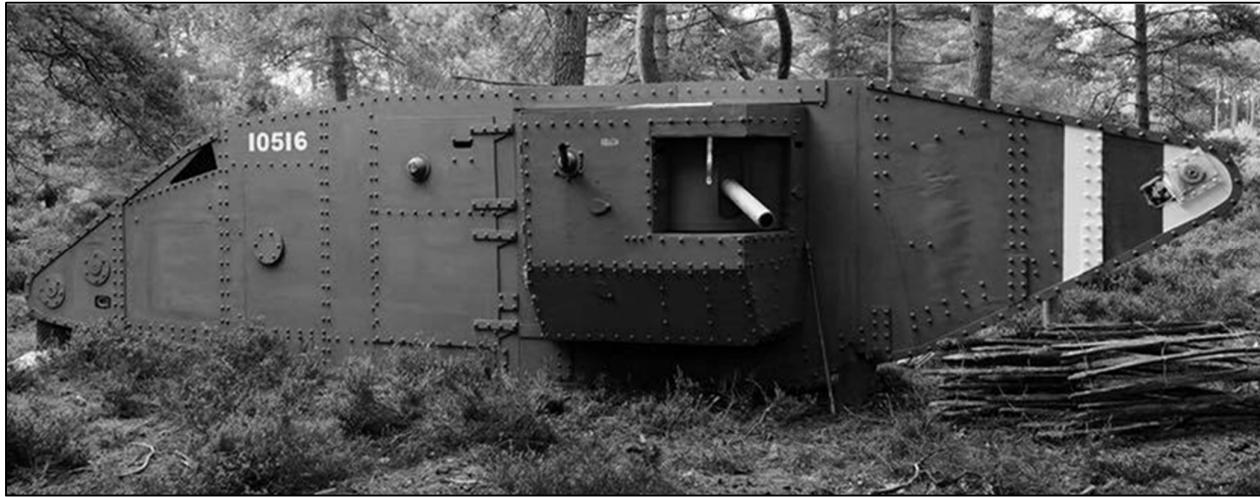
Between WW1 and WWII Christchurch depot became, first: the EBC (Experimental Bridging Company RE) on 28 February 1919, next, the EBE (Experimental Bridging Establishment) in August 1925 and then MEXE (Military Engineering Experimental Establishment), largely (and famously) concerned with the development of portable military bridges, such as the Inglis and Bailey bridges. Tanks were used to test the strength and move bridges, see:

<https://www.thinkdefence.co.uk/2011/12/uk-military-bridging-equipment-pre-wwii-equipment-bridging/>

*The connection between tanks and the Sappers is a long one. Many of the pioneer Tank Corps officers were Royal Engineers, notably Swinton, Elles and Martel who, in 1918, developed a Royal Engineer tank based on the Mark V**.* (source <http://www.d-daytanks.org.uk/regiments/royal-engineers.html>)

The Tank Museum at Bovington still has a Mark V** tank on display – Ol’ Faithful (10704) see:
http://www.tankmuseum.org/museum-online/vehicles/object-e1949-325#anchor_identification

Following the above discoveries and that the original design was incorrect, further adaptations to the model were therefore necessary, including overall lengthening, new back end and the addition of a side door. The correct numbering was also added. This model was erected and displayed at Christchurch Junior School and the Friends of St Catherine's Hill, History Day in 2017.



Modified Mark V** version, September 2017 – Paul Stewart

As part of the National Lottery Funded project, Craig Wilson, a local artist was also commissioned to produce a series of paintings, to commemorate the use of St Catherine's Hill during the First World War, including a reproduction of the original photograph (see Glneg 77 above) of the tank (thought to be) on top of the Hill.



Painting in progress, Craig Wilson

Mark V** tank (10516) on the Hill, acrylic on canvas, Craig Wilson 2017

The original glass plate negative was from a series showing 10516, two more of which are shown below, for the sake of completeness.



Glneg 34, scan from glass plate negative (with kind permission from Red House Museum, Christchurch).



Glneg 49, scan from glass plate negative (with kind permission from Red House Museum, Christchurch).

The Southern Command School for Instruction in (Military) Engineering, Christchurch

Although little evidence remains now, St Catherine's Hill formed part of the training ground of the Royal Engineers' Southern Command School, which was based at Christchurch Barracks, in the area of the current Bailey Trading Park on Barrack Road. The barracks were originally built in the late 18th Century for cavalry use but later became an artillery and engineering barracks. See: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1108216>

Much of the available information on the School during the First World War comes from the records of the New Zealand Engineers, who trained there. Local author Clement Wareham gives a comprehensive account of their history during this period, including the connection to St Catherine's Hill. See: *The Echoes That Remain: A History of the New Zealand Field Engineers During the Great War at Gallipoli, France and the Hampshire Town of Christchurch*, February 2013 (ISBN: 9781897887967).

New Zealand was a relatively recent member of the British Empire (following the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840). British settlers were therefore mainly first or second generation, some of them only recent arrivals at the outbreak of war and were no doubt keen to serve their ancestral homeland. They were joined by more than 2000 Māori soldiers. See: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/maori-in-first-world-war/introduction> and <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH1-Effo-t1-body-d15-d6.html>

A declining mining industry in the south west of England and high demand for miners, particularly following the discovery of gold in Otago in the 1860s led to many emigrating in this period. See: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/home-away-from-home/where-did-they-come-from>. The skills of miners were obviously useful in trench warfare and many engineers, particularly within the Tunnelling Companies came from a mining background. See: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/specialist-units/tunnelling-company>

Just over 100,000 New Zealand troops served overseas from 1914 to 1918 from a population of barely one million. Of those, about 18,000 died and 41,000 were wounded. (*Neill Atkinson, Chief Historian, NZ Ministry for History and Culture.* https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10821840)

The official history of the New Zealand Engineers during the Great War has a chapter dedicated to the reserve depot in England: *In June some 150 Engineers, Signallers and Tunnellers arrived in Sling [camp in Salisbury] from Egypt, and were immediately posted on to Christchurch, where they shared Jumpers Camp with the Australian Engineer Depot. Trench works and mining were carried out on St. Catherine's Hill, a large shingly knoll on the out-skirts of Christchurch, and a very pleasant spot for the purpose, though entirely unlike anything ever seen later in France or Flanders. The full story can be read here:* <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH1-Engi-t1-body-d14.html>.

The NZ Engineers Reserve Depot was established in Christchurch in January 1917, initially under the command of Major Percy St John Keenan <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/660763/5>; from August 1917 the men were under the command of (then Major) Lt. Colonel George Barclay. His story is told in more detail here: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WC19190801.2.72>

The busiest that the NZE depot reached was during July 1918 when 31 officers and 598 other ranks were stationed in Christchurch. (The Echoes that Remain).

Craig Wilson, also captured and has brought to life this use of the Hill, within his paintings:



"Trench works", acrylic on canvas, Craig Wilson, 2017



"the daily presence of large bodies of interested fair spectators is reputed to have had a stimulating effect on the work of the susceptible sappers", acrylic on canvas, Craig Wilson, 2017



Early sketch, Craig Wilson

Although the scope of this project is quite small, we wanted to provide further information on a few of the many soldiers connected to the Reserve Depot and the Hill and to show their different backgrounds and ancestry. Hopefully this will help recognise and remember their service as well as stimulating further research. Particular thanks must go to Sue Baker Wilson in New Zealand who is the researcher for the New Zealand Engineers Tunnelling Company (NZETC) and directed me to many of the stories.

4/861 Sapper Walter ‘Wallie’ Richard Aubrey Williamson, NZ Field Engineers

Service record: http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE24541771

The above painting shows how the Hill was a popular destination for local young ladies. Indeed, *Sapper Walter Williamson met his future wife, Miss Annie Bolton [Bridle], at St Catherine’s Hill when she and some of her friends came to talk to the toiling engineers. (Clement Wareham)*

His occupation in New Zealand was as a bricklayer and he was living in Barbadoes Street, Christchurch, New Zealand when he signed up in 1915. Research carried out by Philip Tate has found that Walter was born in Llantrisant in Wales on 2 July 1885 and died in Winchester in 1944 at the age of 58. He married Annie Kate Bridle at Christchurch Priory on 7 November 1917 – one of 17 marriages of New Zealanders at the Priory in the wartime period (*Clement Wareham*). Annie was born at Stanpit on 4 December 1890 and died in Southampton in 1977. They lived for a while in Fitzgerald Avenue in Christchurch and had four daughters and two sons, including twins Gwyneth and Gwynfa (*Phil Tate*).

6689 Sapper Austin Bede Whitehair, Australian Commonwealth Military Forces

Austin ‘Gus’ Bede Whitehair was a compositor at the Sidney Morning Herald before enlisting on 28 December 2015. In an article in the Herald on 30th October 1916, he mentions being moved down to Christchurch; according to him ‘one of the best spots in England, in sight of the Isle of Wight’.

See: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15675089>.

He was amongst the 7th Field Coy Engineers, Reinforcement 4, embarking from Sydney on 11 March 1916. See: <https://www.aif.adfa.edu.au/showUnit?unitCode=ENG.FCE7R4>

and <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=8386080>

He remained in service until the end of hostilities, leaving England on 16 June 1919 and was awarded the military medal on 13 December 1917 for his work at Zonnebeke.

See <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/15738163/1263198>

His photograph can be found here: <http://ww1nsw.gravesecrets.net/wh.html>

37200 Acting Staff Sergeant Thomas ‘Tommy’ Frederick Scales, NZ Army Service Corps

Thomas was an Englishman enlisted and appointed as a ‘cinema expert’ for NZ units in England on 27 April 2017 and given the temporary rank of Sergeant. See: <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/632921>

His role was to arrange and supervise the installation of cinematographs (film camera and projector) at camps and hospitals for entertainment, selecting and arranging programmes and taking pictures of life in Camps and any special events of interest to New Zealand. See: https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=63601

He had previously worked for British Pathé, which already had a relationship with the NZ government and transferred across several cameramen in an agreement where the Government had all rights to material shot, whilst

Pathé could also use it in their newsreels. <http://anzacsightsound.org/videos/early-newsreels-a-1915-pathe-animated-gazette>

Although based at Sling Camp in Salisbury, we know that Thomas visited Christchurch and St Catherine's Hill because of a series of photographs that were taken on site. Due to a series of his images we know for example that Light Railway training took place on St Catherine's Hill, as discussed in the first report. See: <https://bit.ly/2EValp5>

After discharge in February 1919, his subsequent career as a cameraman is outlined here:
<http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsongreen/search/index.php/person/815>

An example of one of his films of King George V inspection troops, prior to signing up with the NZEF:
https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=65909

NZ hospital footage:

https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=65265

A unique film of a Maori haka filmed in Boscombe, is also likely to be his work:

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-zealand-maoris-haka-for-deserving-charity/query/maori>

37693 Sapper Thomas (Tommy) Thompson Caldwell, NZETC, 5th Tunnelling Reinforcements

<http://www.nztunnellers.com/roll/main.php>

'Tommy' Caldwell was born in Buckhaven, Fife, Scotland on 11 Feb 1884. A coalminer by profession, he signed up in March 1917, having lived in New Zealand for eight years and was resident in Hamilton on the North Island. See: <https://bit.ly/2ALmsg7>. He arrived in Christchurch, UK in July 2017 and was posted to France on 11 August. He wrote several letters to Bert and Sophie Gill, friends back in Hamilton; Sophie was also listed as his next of kin. 62300 Henry Herbert 'Bert' Gill was conscripted after Tommy, later dying of wounds in October 1918. (*Sue Baker Wilson*). In his first letter from Christchurch, after three days, he wrote "*the boys who are here, reckon this camp is the best in England*", although he is yet to go out, most of the other Engineers are out every night as apparently "*this is a great place for girls, so that is the attraction and the NZE get a good hearing by what I hear and see*", he goes on to say "*it is disgraceful to see young girls going into pubs. I know I would not want to see a sister of mine going into a pub.*" He also mentions writing to an Uncle in Dover that he intends to visit. *Henry Herbert Gill Papers. Letter 24-07-1917. Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira. MS-1130-F4.*

He was discharged in April 1919 after nearly 2 years , being no longer physically fit for war service, this was due to having 'flat feet' (pes planus) which made marching too painful. This originally prevented him serving in the infantry, although he was still passed fit for the Tunnelling Company.

4/1602 Sapper Harry Brown, NZETC, 1st Reinforcements

Harry, a veteran of the Boer War and a goldminer in Waihi, was posted to the NZE Depot in June 1916 as part of the 1st Reinforcement group when the Tunnelling Company main body left for France. He was drafted to France on 26 August 1916. His date of birth was listed as 14 January 1876 but in fact he was born in 1857, so that when he signed up in 1915 he was actually 58, rather than 38! (*Sue Baker Wilson*). He was charged with being absent without leave while at Christchurch and was given 28 days detention whilst in Hornchurch for attempting to release a prisoner, threatening to strike a Warrant Officer and insubordinate language. His medical file describes him as 'fit as a miner' but eventually he was discharged due to deafness and being overage. He died on 21 January 1934 and has living direct descendants in Australia.

http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE10782809

<https://bit.ly/2BcUXF2>

37563 Sapper Daniel Flanagan, NZETC, 4th Reinforcements

Daniel was another miner, born on 19th October 1886 in New Zealand, his parents having emigrated from Ireland. He enlisted on 3 January 1917 and received his training at Christchurch during May 1917. He died on 8th May 1918 from

pneumonia after exposure to mustard gas at Étaples and is buried in the cemetery there. More details about Daniel and his picture, can be found via the links below.

<https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/562061>

<http://media.api.aucklandmuseum.com/id/media/v/320484?rendering=original.jpg>

http://keteselwyn.peoplesnetworknz.info/soldiers_of_selwyn/topics/show/25-daniel-flanagan

<http://media.api.aucklandmuseum.com/id/media/public/4bf2d293-53e1-479a-891d-645e9bd5b14f/original.jpeg>

16/810 Private Tuheke 'Teuhe' Matenga, NZ (Maori) Pioneer Battalion (2nd Maori Contingent)

Born in 1895 Tuheke was only 20 years of age on enlistment. He originally travelled to Egypt in 1915, was posted to France and wounded in action in June 1916. After hospital treatment in France and convalescence in England, he was reattached to the Pioneers. He got in a bit of trouble whilst at Codford Camp for minor offences, including telling a falsehood and being absent without leave. He arrived at Christchurch Depot on 24 April 2018 but went missing on the night on 5 May; it was assumed he was absent without leave again. However, his body was eventually found floating in the River Stour on 14 May 1918. He was buried in Brockenhurst cemetery.

http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE10750906

37585 Sapper James Young, NZETC (4th Reinforcements)

James was a tunnel worker born on 12th December 1875 in Moffat, Scotland. He signed up on 2nd January 1917, age 41, after 9 years residence in New Zealand. He was previously rejected for military service due to defective vision in his right eye but deemed suitable as a tunneller. He was posted to Christchurch Depot on 2nd May 1917 and to France on 4th June 1917. He survived the war and was discharged on 5th August 1919. He died on 3 March 1955.

http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE21259949

<https://www.sooty.nz/NZTC4th.html>

35659 Sapper Alexander Charles Taufa Goedicke, NZETC (4th Reinforcements)

Alexander, an apprentice engineer from a steel construction company, grew up in Auckland but was born in Tonga on 6th April 1896 and was one of 94 Tongan men (mainly expatriate Europeans) who served during WW1. His father Frederick 'Fritz' Theodore Goedicke (later titled Count van Asten) was one of many Germans who emigrated to the South Pacific area, spending time in New Guinea and Australia before settling in Tonga, marrying a Tongan (Ana Muunga Helu) and having two sons. Interestingly he was a close boyhood friend of Kaiser Wilhelm II, although in 1884 he became a British citizen. His life story is well worth reading about:

<https://www.geni.com/people/Frederick-Goedicke/6000000029084033032>

http://www.omsa.org/files/jomsa_arch/Splits/1986/196204_JOMSA_Vol37_1-2_22.pdf

[http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-320846707/view?sectionId=nla.obj-340412361&partId=nla.obj-320878067#page/n49 mode/1up](http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-320846707/view?sectionId=nla.obj-340412361&partId=nla.obj-320878067#page/n49	mode/1up)

Alexander enlisted on 19th September 1916 and with James Young and the other 4th Reinforcements he was marched into Christchurch on 2nd May 1917. It appears he received punishments of 168 hours detention and docked a day's pay on the day he embarked to France.

http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE24362837

He embarked for New Zealand on 1 April 1919 from Glasgow. After the war he returned to his previous workplace and completed his apprenticeship as a boiler maker. He was also a volunteer for the Order of St John becoming a Superintendent and was inducted as a serving brother in 1963. He died on 3rd March 1966.

12047 Sapper Harold Bernard Jellyman, NZE No. 3 Field Company

Born in 1894, Harold was one of nine children and arrived in Southampton, England on 7 August 1916 and marched out to Christchurch the next day. His story is told here: <http://www.theprow.org.nz/people/harold-bernard-jellyman/#.Wuhlsy4bMkK>

He was killed in action on 16 Feb 1917 at Messines in Belgium. A touching tribute was left by his family in their local paper, the Nelson Evening Mail: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NEM19180216.2.20>

4/1320 Sapper James 'Jim' Williamson MM, NZETC

http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE10230826

James was born in Auckland, NZ and worked for the borough council as a road contractor. He was not initially able to enlist, despite many attempts, due to health grounds. He eventually found a favourable doctor who passed him fit and despite being 38 years old was able to enlist for the Tunnelling Company in October 1915. He kept a diary, a copy of which is held at the Imperial War Museum

(See: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030011373>)

Amongst the first group of NZ soldiers on the Western Front, he saw action in Arras and was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field, when he helped rescue a British Officer stuck in no-man's land. His photograph and story can be found in more detail here:

<https://ngatapuuae.govt.nz/stories/sapper-james-williamson>

<https://discover.stqry.com/v/avondale-racecourse/s/423837cc7cd845c34dd1c8c6a5361ea2>

Due to a recurring (and pre-existing) hernia problem (complaining often of not being able to shovel) he returned to England, arriving in at the NZE depot in Christchurch in September 1917. He was eventually discharged in February 1918 and returned to New Zealand.



The flag of New Zealand flying over the Mayor's Parlour in Christchurch, Dorset 2017 – Robin Harley



Presentation of print to NZ High Commission - Ceilidh Dunphy



Badges, button and titles from New Zealand Engineer's Uniform – Robin Harley

Acknowledgements:

The above would not be possible without information and kind support from Sue Baker Wilson, Clement Wareham, Michael Andrews, Phil Tate, Stephen Lowy, Rick Sharp, Sue Newman, Paul Williams, Roger Donne, Craig Wilson, Lawrence Shaw, Simon Bumpstead, Helen Upcraft and Amanda White.