

Do You Remember Paddy Doolan?

By Brian S. Osborne

There were two Paddy Doolans. The first, the soldier, I came to know well. But there was another Paddy, and he's the one I'm writing about to try to elicit responses from alumni who might remember him. Hence my title: Do you remember Paddy Doolan?

I first encountered William Patrick (Paddy) Doolan while writing *Kingston: Building on the Past* with my colleague, Donald Swainson of the History Department. This was intended as a community history, a study and celebration of the city in which we live and work. To that end, we attempted to tell a story that emphasized the role of people and institutions that figured in developing Kingston's unique sense of place. To our mind, individuals such as John Stuart, Molly Brant, and D.D. Calvin needed to be highlighted as much as such defining institutions as Queen's, RMC, and the penitentiaries. The study of people in place was the theme of our book.

In an attempt at personalizing the experience of ordinary Kingstonians in the "Great War," I turned to a collection of postcards, photographs, personal papers, and books my wife had discovered while

Illustrations above (clockwise from top): Paddy Doolan; Paddy's famous milk bottle; Paddy's invitation to meet the King.



renovating a house on Macdonnell Street. These belonged to one William Patrick Doolan, a Kingstonian who volunteered to serve overseas in the First World War. From this material we traced the odyssey of one ordinary soldier from Canada, to Europe, and home again.

Born in Birmingham, England on December 22, 1889, Paddy was living in 13 Clergy Street West with his wife Alice when war broke out. As early as 1909, Paddy, a tanner by occupation, enlisted with the local militia unit, the 14th Princess of Wales Own Rifles. On July 3, 1915, Paddy Doolan signed his

"Attestation Paper" for service with the "Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force." He was in England by April 1916 and a postcard from Liverpool assured his wife, "Arrived safely. Cannot cable. Don't know where we are going."

He was soon to find out. Paddy first served with the 39th at West Sandling as Sergeant but at his own request, he reverted to the rank of Private to join his home town battalion, then in action in the trenches of France. He was very much in the war. Wounded in the hip, shoulder and face in 1916, promoted back to Sergeant in 1917,

he was awarded the Military Medal in 1918 for "conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty...great initiative and daring...great determination...gallantry and personal bravery [sic]."

But on May 12, 1918, Paddy was wounded yet again, invalided back to Britian, and had recuperated sufficiently to receive his MM from King George V at Windsor Castle on August 27. Returning home to Kingston later that year, he was honorably discharged on February 21, 1919. Paddy continued his military affiliation as a prominent member of the local Militia and a leader of those working to erect a war memorial. But, like many other returning veterans, he sought out new opportunities, and through night classes and correspondence courses Paddy educated himself for a post-war career.

Recently, three of Paddy Doolan's former colleagues — Professors Wally Breck, Ken Russell, and Walter Smith — introduced me to the second Paddy Doolan, Paddy the technician.

It appears that some time in the 1920s, Paddy was engaged by the Chemistry Department as departmental technician. Until his first retirement about 1954 (followed by a few years of recall in 1957-58) Paddy ran the "prep" room for the first-year labs and demonstrations. He'd learned his craft under Professor A.C. Neish, who, like many instructors of the day, favored the Faraday style of instruction, which emphasized display and demonstration. This suited Paddy down to the ground. The first-year lecture theatre became his stage and he occupied it front and centre with efficiency, showmanship, and a well-honed sense of humor.

It's generally agreed that past students seem to remember far more about Paddy's demonstrations than they do about the professors' lectures. The faculty may have been in overall charge of the courses but the demonstrations were Paddy's. After years of careful practice, he had mastered the art of successful experiments. Not only

did his demonstrations always work, they also guaranteed much amusement, and occasionally high drama and excitement.

I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when Paddy demonstrated his phosphorus and potassium chlorate experiment to a class of firemen on a course at Queen's. Imagine the scene: Paddy standing behind three piles of chemicals — small, medium, and large — each intended to be ac-



A postcard Paddy sent home from Scotland

tivated sequentially; an array of enthralled firemen-students watching intently; and suddenly, a gigantic BANG as all three piles exploded at once, clearing the lecture theatre of instructor and firemen, and leaving behind three craters in the bench surface. Who could ever forget that demonstration?

Wally Breck recalls another incident when he and Paddy were instructing a class on the properties of a mixture of hydrogen and chlorine gases. As usual, Paddy was in control. A test-tube full of gases was ignited and WHAM! It sailed into the air to be caught adroitly by Wally, accompanied by the applause of the students. WHAM! The second test-tube sailed into the air and landed perfectly in a nearby crock as if it had

been aimed there. But there the luck ended. WHAM! The third test-tube shot up like a rocket, smashed into the banks of fluorescent lighting above, and showered both Paddy and Wally with shards of glass. The students cheered.

But not all the faculty were enamoured with Paddy's control of the laboratory displays. Dr. McRae, then head of chemistry, married late in life and returned from his honeymoon hoping, no doubt, that these recent events would go unnoticed. Much to his chagrin — but to the great amusement of students in class and faculty peeping through various spyholes — his lecture was interrupted by a clothesline of ladies' underwear which mysteriously descended behind him. Dr. McRae had but one word for his technician: "Judas!"

Known as "Pat" to other technicians, "Paddy" to younger faculty and students, and "Doolan" to the Head and senior faculty, as a person, Paddy was highly regarded by all. No doubt, it was his friendship and willingness to help others that resulted in the departmental tradition of a bottle of Irish for Paddy on St. Patrick's day. He was sorely missed by faculty and students alike on his retirement in the 1950s, and many kept in touch with him until his death on March 11, 1976.

To quote one of his former colleagues, "Everyone knew Paddy! Whatever else they may have forgotten, they all remember Paddy." And that's the point of this article.

If any alumni have stories to tell about Paddy and those early days in the chemistry department we'd very much like to hear them. Some memorabilia exist: Paddy's famous milk-bottle still survives after decades of use for his hydrogen demonstration and there's a snip-pet of film.

But if any of you know more, please get in touch with Ken Russell in Chemistry. Who knows, it might lead to an annual Doolan lecture — and demonstration!

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