



# CHESTERFIELD WFA

## Newsletter and Magazine issue 24

Patron –Sir Hew Strachan  
FRSE FRHistS

President - Professor  
Peter Simkins MBE  
FRHistS

### Vice-Presidents

Andre Colliot

Professor John Bourne BA PhD  
FRHistS

The Burgomaster of Ypres

The Mayor of Albert

Lt-Col Graham Parker OBE

Professor Gary Sheffield BA MA PhD  
FRHistS

Christopher Pugsley FRHistS

Lord Richard Dannat GCB CBE MC  
DL

Roger Lee PhD jssc

[www.westernfrontassociation.com](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com)

### Branch contacts

Tony Bolton  
(Chairman)  
[anthony.bolton3@btinternet.com](mailto:anthony.bolton3@btinternet.com)

Mark Macartney  
(Deputy Chairman)  
[Markmacartney48@gmail.com](mailto:Markmacartney48@gmail.com)

Jane Lovatt (Treasurer)

Grant Cullen  
(Secretary)  
[grantcullen@hotmail.com](mailto:grantcullen@hotmail.com)

Welcome to Issue 24 - the September 2017 Newsletter and Magazine of Chesterfield WFA.

**The next Chesterfield Branch Meeting will be held on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September with a 7.30 start**

Regular attendee at Branch Meetings but making his debut as a our speaker will be Alan Atkinson



### **“Propaganda – The British Way”**

Drawing upon his extensive researches for his MA Dissertation, Alan will explain how the British made great use to their advantage and exploited all opportunities to disseminate anti-Central Powers propaganda.

The Branch meets at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF on the first Tuesday of each month. There is plenty of parking available on site and in the adjacent road. Access to the car park is in Tennyson Road, however, which is one way and cannot be accessed directly from Saltergate.



## Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2017

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	3rd	Branch AGM Tony Bolton- <i>"1917 – an Overview of the Year"</i> . Book Sale – all at a pound !
February	7th	Niall Cherry – <i>Cambrai 1917</i> . Church bells rang out in Britain to celebrate the success of the British attack, but the Germans countered and soon all was back to square one. Why ? – and what lessons were learned
March	7th	Peter Hart <i>"Guns of Passchendaele 1917"</i> . On his talk Peter will cover guns and the Royal Artillery during the Third Battle of Ypres.
April	4th	Richard Pullen – <i>"Munitionettes"</i> By June 1917, roughly 80% of the weaponry and ammunition used by the British army during World War I was being made by women who became known as munitionettes. Richard explains their story
May	2nd	Malcolm Sime - <i>"Kaiserschlacht"</i> this presentation will examine the performance of the 66th (2nd East Lancs) Division and the British system of defence in depth on 21 and 22 March 1918, covering the political and military background, the quality and training of the troops involved, both British and German, the planning and implementation of the defences in that sector and the events of the first two days of the Kaiserschlacht.
June	6th	Rob Thompson – <i>Messines 1917</i> . It has been argued that the Battle of Messines was the most successful local operation of the war, certainly of the Western Front. Carried out by Plumer's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Army it was launched on 7 June 1917. Rob will explain why this offensive was a success.
July	4th	Charles Beresford - <i>The Forgotten Story of Derbyshire's Major Role in the Nation's Commemoration of the Great War</i> .
August	1st	Tony Bolton – <i>"Iraq Inquiry – 1917"</i> . The Mesopotamia Campaign was a major defeat for the Imperial Forces – Tony will explain why and the outcome of the subsequent inquiry
September	5th	Alan Atkinson – <i>"Propaganda – The British Way !"</i> Drawing on his researches for his MA, Alan will explain how the British exploited Propaganda to their advantage.
October	3rd	Murray McVey – <i>Battle of Broodseinde</i> was fought on 4 October 1917 near Ypres in Flanders, at the east end of the Gheluvelt plateau, by the British Second and Fifth armies and the German 4th Army. The battle was the most successful Allied attack of the Battle of Passchendaele.
November	7th	Arthur Lacey - <i>'Medical Anecdotes from the Great War- what did the RAMC do?'</i> An introduction to the RAMC history and organisation, but also about casualties, heroes and diseases with reference to individual soldiers stories as illustrations.
December	5th	Prof John Derry - <i>'Haig Reconsidered'</i> Sir Douglas Haig was the victorious commander of the BEF, but still divides opinion. Prof Derry will look at recent researches into his command.

## Issue 24 – list of contents

- 1 Meetings and Speakers Calendar**
- 2 Contents Page**
- 3 Personal Note from the Chair**
- 4 Secretary`s Scribbles**
- 5 Letter – Appeal for Information**
- 6 Announcement – Mark Macartney appointed Trustee of WFA.  
Stand to! and Bulletin back numbers availability**
- 7-20 June Meeting – Rob Thompson – Messines 1917**
- 21-31 July Meeting – Charles Beresford – The Forgotten Role of Derbyshire in the Nation`s  
Commemoration of The Great War.**
- 32-41 August Meeting – Tony Bolton – Iraq Inquiry 1917**
- 41 Letter - Loos `Big Walk` - 2018**
- 42 Battle of Messines & Tunnelling Company RE – Commemorative Dinner 3<sup>rd</sup> June**
- 43 Douglas Haig Fellowship – 9<sup>th</sup> June – Annual Luncheon**
- 44-48 Suffolk Branch Conference – 1917 – Becoming the Senior Partner**
- 49 Armed Forces Day – Retford - 17<sup>th</sup> June**
- 50 `Forgotten` Great War Hero Honoured in Leicester  
Worksop Armed Forces Day – June 24<sup>th</sup>**
- 51-52 Passchendaele Commemoration – Worksop – 29<sup>th</sup> July**
- 52-53 Road in Warsop renamed after World War One VC Winner**
- 53-57 The Village that Gave its Men to War**
- 57-59 The Chase Project**
- 60-62 Jon Cooksey – The Vest Pocket Kodak – from his talk at the York Conference**
- 62 WFA Branded Goods Advertisement**

## A Personal note from the Chair (17)



For the members and friends who attended the August meeting I owe something of an apology, as many of you know our scheduled speaker Alan Atkinson was taken ill shortly before the meeting and I rather hurriedly brought forward my Iraq Inquiry talk to fill the gap. I am pleased to tell you that Alan rattling from all his pills thinks he will be well enough to give his talk at the September meeting. I hope the sudden change did not cause too much disappointment.

In my last *Personal Note* column I talked about the Livingstone War Memorial in Zambia and mentioned it recorded the names of five Lt Colonels of British Army as distinct to local regiments, one of those names was Lt Col Lynch of the KOYLI. As luck would have it I bumped into Malcolm Johnson at the WFA York Conference in July. Malcolm, was one of my fellow students on the Birmingham M.A. course and as many of you will remember was a regular speaker here at Chesterfield in the early days of the Branch and has considerable knowledge on the KOYLI. In an exchange of emails he was able to tell me that the Lt Colonel Lynch recorded on the African monument was actually the C.O. of 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI and was so hated by his officers that on the eve of 1 July 1916 they refused to toast their C.O. and instead drank to 'When the barrage lifts'. Lynch and many of his officers were killed on the opening day of the Somme. Why he is recorded on the War Memorial at Victoria Falls however remains a mystery.

I would also like to wish the best of luck to the two Branch Members who are starting out on their Wolverhampton M.A. this month and those already on the course. I hope you get as much from it as I got from mine.

Well done to Grant who has managed to get his piece on the launch of Charles Beresford's book into the latest edition of Bulletin.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at the September meeting and please remember if you do not come to the meetings at Chesterfield but would like to give it a try, you can always give me or one of the Committee a ring (my number is on the front and in Stand To and Bulletin) we will be happy to meet you and introduce you to the Chesterfield Branch.

## Secretary's Scribbles



I go long walks with my two dogs every day and you see the seasons coming and going and now the autumn tints are on the trees and hedgerows – not to mention the evening light getting shorter each day. For our Branch, the summer has been a very busy period with the President's Conference in Birmingham, quickly followed by the National Conference, so well organised by the York Branch at the excellent facilities at Manor School just outside the City of York. Then there was the two Armed Forces Days, first Retford, then Worksop, both at which we were represented. There has been quite a lot of local news which I have covered in this issue, including the naming of a street in Warsop after a Great War Victoria Cross winner.

Unfortunately, we had to make a late change of speaker for the August meeting as Alan Atkinson – a familiar figure at many Branch meetings – had to call off as he was admitted to hospital the day before he was due to deliver his talk on British Propaganda in the First World War. Fortunately Alan's stay in hospital was short and we look forward to him coming along next Tuesday to make his presentation. Quite at the last minute, Branch Chairman Tony Bolton stepped in and delivered what was to have been his talk in September – *Iraq Inquiry 1917*. Tony, despite having to 'burn the midnight oil' to get his presentation finished gave his usual polished performance on a subject about which I am sure few of us knew much about. It was apt how he cleverly compared the Mesopotamia Inquiry of 1917 (of which he had an original copy with him – two shillings (ten pence) in 1917!) – with the multi million pound Chilcot Inquiry on the Iraq War which took years to carry out and produce its report.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a WFA member in Nottingham who kindly donated an almost complete collection of Stand To! and Bulletin magazines. Quite a few of the magazines have already found new homes (I circulated all on our mailing list advising of the availability) but there is a list of those still available to be found elsewhere in this Newsletter. The lady also donated a number of books which will appear on the raffle prizes table at Branch Meetings

I have completed the Speaker List for 2018 and this will be circulated shortly. There will be some new faces included in the line-up but as always there will be the 'Big beasts' of the Speaking Circuit – Peter Hart, Rob Thompson, to name but two. I would like to thank those who came forward with suggested names / topics for our Meetings. I hope nobody will be disappointed.

I will close these notes by offering my own, and the Branch's congratulations, to our Branch Vice Chair, Mark Macartney, upon his appointment as a Trustee of the Western Front Association – more about this elsewhere in this issue.

As we move into the latter part of 2017, I would like to thank all of you for your continued support at our Branch Meetings which I believe takes our attendances into the top half of the WFA Branch 'league table' of attendances.

Grant Cullen – Branch Secretary – 07824628638 – grantcullen@hotmail.com

We recently received this appeal for information on a Serviceman - can anyone help? Please contact Mr Clegg direct contact details below

Dear Sir

I'm writing to ask if you can help me trace the Army Service Record and the involvement in WW1 of my Father, William Clegg. He was born 07/01/1898 in Handsworth Sheffield and died 1989 in Bolsover.

He is not shown in the 1918, 1919 and 1920 Electoral Registers in Bolsover, Chesterfield but I would not expect to see him on the 1918 Electoral Register because of his age.

He was married 13/11/1920 and his Marriage Certificate shows his residence as Castle Lane, Bolsover, Chesterfield and his occupation as a miner.

Family members, myself included, recollect a large black and white photograph of my Father in Army uniform, but this has been lost. He only ever mentioned that he served as a Batman for an Officer taking messages to the trenches.

I've used Ancestry, FMP, The Long Lost Trail, Forces War Records, National Archives, together with many free sites, about 20 regimental sites and museums, Derbyshire records office, Chesterfield library.

David Tattersfield of the WFA has helped me so far with a possible reference of a William Clegg Medal Card. This has led me to an enlistment in the Sherwood Foresters in May 1917 of William Clegg 87091, renumbered 45296 when posted to the D Company in the 4th Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment on 30th May 1917.

My Father does not appear in the absent voters list of 1918 for the Bolsover and Chesterfield area. This was published by Wilfred Edmunds Ltd (now Derbyshire Times, part of Johnson Press) and they tell me at the moment they have not found any information on the 1919 and 1920 AVL's. The AVL for 1918 shows about 4,000 names of those who were away from home. Any information on the whereabouts of the 1919 and 1920 Lists would be very useful not just to me but to others also.

I have also searched local papers, British Newspaper Archives of that time to see if there is any information about my Fathers return from service also without any luck.

I'm sorry about the lengthy information but I hope this is useful. I would really appreciate any information or suggestions you might have to help me in my search.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards

Roy Clegg

Tel: 01427 884949

royclegg123@gmail.com





## June Meeting Battle of Messines - 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> June 1917 Presented by Rob Thompson



Rob began by saying that to all intents the Battle of Messines was a victory for the BEF - no denying that but over time , the more he studied the battle - and what came after it - he came to the conclusion which posed the question - was it .....

`A Masterpiece Battle and a False Prophet?`

Is it actually a warning... are we going too far and we cannot sustain this? Indeed does it foretell the misery of Passchendaele and Poelcapelle in October 1917?

Rob then, to set the scene, looked at the BEF method of 1915 to 1917. Operations were new - nobody actually knew what the method was - why? - because before the First World War they fought battles - as simple as that - as in South Africa - tactical battles fought by divisions. But events from 1914, through 1915, 1916 and now in 1917, the nature of the beast had changed.

A Deep and Empty Battlefield - technology and mass production had brought a new form of warfare whereas in the past you could see your enemy - the British artillery of 1914 was trained to fire over open sights, could see the enemy whereas by 1915 the enemy was hidden in trenches

- Range - guns did not fire in yards - they fired in miles
- Lethality - a rifle bullet could be fired over a mile and to put your head just a little above the trench parapet invited death
- Power of Defence - for the first time in warfare *defence* was more powerful than *offence* although all the indications had been seen during the Russo-Japanese war from nine years



- Previously when attacking Japanese troops had assaulted Russian entrenched positions sustaining horrendous losses. Now in The Great War the tipping point had been reached and defence - trenches, concrete, barbed wire, machine guns - could blunt any attack. When the trench lines first evolved in late 1914 they consisted of one or two trenches no more than a hundred yards apart, facing the enemy. Now in 1917 the defensive systems of trenches could be *ten to fifteen miles deep*.
- Logistics - the ability to supply the battlefield particularly a *static* battlefield meant that neither side could gain material advantage over the other nor thus it became.....
- An engineers war

What then was the response....*Artillery*...Need guns - lots of guns!

In 1915 Sir John French, the Commander in Chief of the BEF said breaking through the German lines was just a matter of the expenditure of massive amounts of ammunition - crude assessment - but he was more or less right. The British, used to a war of movement had a lot of light guns but were short of heavy guns of the type needed to destroy entrenched positions.

Rob then illustrated the growth in numbers and types of artillery available to the BEF immediately prior to the Battle of Messines - not the total across the entire Western Front

	1st April 1915	25 <sup>th</sup> June 1917
18 pdrs	625	3061
4.5 ins howitzer	116	948
60 pdrs	28	480
6 ins howitzer	32	792
8 ins	0	234
9.2 ins	8	190
12 ins	0	42
15 ins	0	10
Totals	799	5357

Even with almost 800 artillery pieces by April 1915, the artillery was not as effective as it should be - why - the shortage of shells!

Originally shell production was measured in 10s, then 100s, then tons, then hundreds of tons and by mid-1917 it was in thousands of tons, all of which clearly shows the expansion in output since the Ministry of Munitions took charge from the War Office.

### The Tool for the Job - Artillery!

- Depth and Power of Defences. Of course the Germans have not stood still what applied in 1915 and at the Somme in 1916 did not apply in 1917
- Defence in Depth. After the Somme, the graveyard of the German Field Army - they realised they could no longer have the `stonewall` rigid defensive lines with instant counter-attack - it was just slaughter. So, they created a new system called `elastic` defence on a deeper basis, a lightly held front zone, then progressively stronger positions or redoubts further back, all covered by artillery. The idea being that you draw

- the enemy in, out from their own supply lines, out of range of their artillery support consequently taking more and more casualties and becoming progressively more
- disoriented until at the right moment the Germans strike and the Allied troops are pushed back at great loss for little or no gain
- Over the Horizon (OTH) and Howitzer (plunging) Fire. BEF gunners were used to firing at targets that could be seen, now the targets are OTH - on the reverse slope of a hill or buried in a deep trench, places where they could not be observed from the BEF`s side of the line. That problem stimulated the need to find ways of finding the enemy`s guns leading to the development of `scientific` artillery
- Field artillery
- Medium and Heavy artillery
- Super-heavy artillery

**Scientific Art.** Courage and skill at arms starts to give way science - science had crested mass production, science had created new chemicals....and science was the means by which you could now locate the enemy

- Counter-battery fire - Enemy guns must be suppressed. If artillery is your most important weapon what is the enemy`s most important weapon.....artillery
- Locating the enemy
  - Maps. The maps of 1914 were beautiful, some dating back to Napoleonic times but they were completely and utterly inaccurate
  - Aerial photography. This was vital in creating the new maps which, as the Western Front was constantly changing had to be revised time and time again
  - Flash Spotting and Sound Ranging - problems with sharing of sound ranging intelligence
  - Calibration and meteorology - each gun fires its shell slightly differently so each gun has to be calibrated - and the weather affects gun performance - the shell flies through the atmosphere differently in wet weather compared to that of dry conditions
  - Predicted Fire - zenith of surprise
  - Camouflage

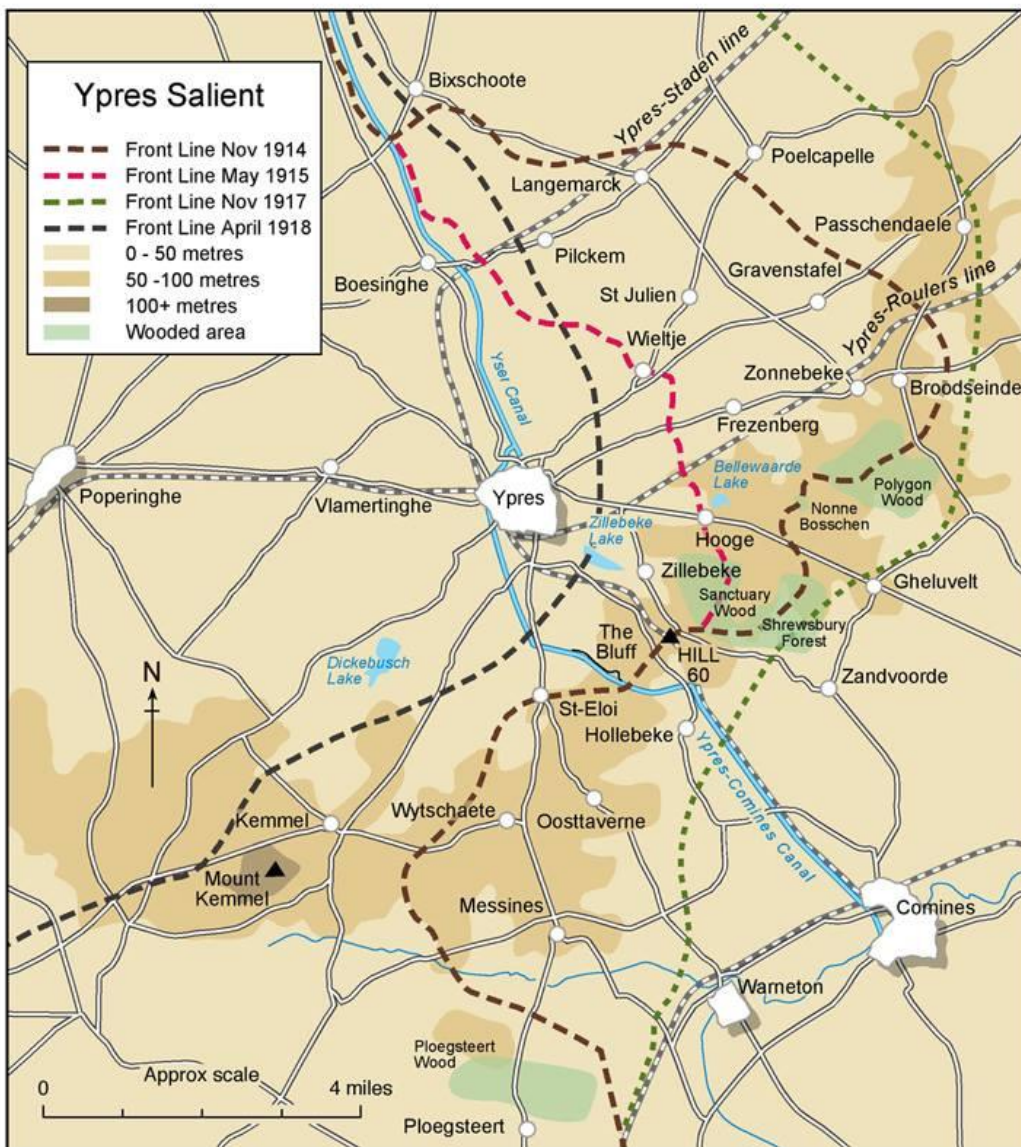
The continental armies had what the BEF did not have - numbers - the French and the Germans had million strong armies and when the BEF entered the war in 1914 and through 1915 they were `thinking small`. In these years there was a confusion of strategy and tactics and the BEF had a great amount of catching up to do. But, by 1917 the BEF understood this operational level and by 1917 deficiencies in artillery, shells, manpower and technology had been overcome - we have every single thing we need to win this war. The Germans?.....they had been declining for some time. This poses the question...Why did we not win the war in 1917?? Was Messines to be the first in series of victories which would see the war end in victory for the Allies in 1917?

### **Road to the Ridge**

The ridge is very important and did not just pop out of nowhere and was first identified as a key sector by Winston Churchill. In December 1914 he proposed a combined attack to recover the Belgian coast but at that particular moment it was a pipe-dream, the question is, why bother with Belgium at all? The answer is Belgium is important, in fact it is vital, it is the strategic crossroads of Europe. Why did Belgium exist at all? - the British *made* it exist because a buffer zone was needed between the Dutch in the north and the French in the south and we required a clear route for exporting into Germany and central Europe itself. The Germans knew this as well

and that is why they fought tooth and nail for it in 1914 and why Falkenhayn was so angry 1915 that the weight of the war was to be delivered against Russia. Had the Germans broken through at Ypres the way to the French channel ports was open - there was no defensive line, no ridges or other natural barriers. Any space east of Ypres and its salient is vital and conversely, if we get beyond the ridge it is a clear run down towards the crucial railhead at Roulers which supplies the entire German army in North West Belgium. In other words - you can get a strategic gain here.

So, the *potential* for this was phenomenal. Here was an opportunity to possibly win the war or change irreversibly change the nature of the war itself.



On 12<sup>th</sup> November 1915, Haig's Chief of Staff, Murray produced a General staff Memo proposing a combined attack either up the coast or a seaborne attack on Ostend.

Haig responded a month later making the following points,

- He was very keen on the idea and.....he sees clearly the strategic value of this particular area
- Proposed a surprise landing at Ostend.....but
- ....the coastal strip was too narrow and it would be needed to drain the inundated land caused by flooding of the Yser in 1914 to create a natural barrier against the advancing Germans
- It would take anything from 3 to 6 weeks to drain this land and make movement across it possible.
- This work and the time taken would warn the Germans that an attack was coming and allow them to have their defences ready
- Overall a good idea but it would not work in practice

It sets off the notion for looking for other ways of attacking this area...but how could it be done?

In January 1916 they start to `Think Big ` and Haig`s idea begins to form

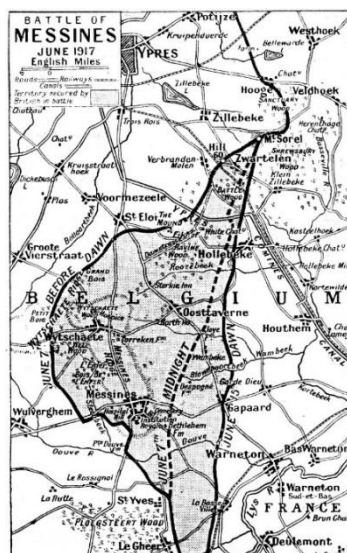
- A general advance north east of Ypres
- An amphibious plan to attack Ostend and clear the Germans from the coast
- No coastal attack until an attack north east from Ypres cuts off the supply lines to the Germans defending Ostend. This becomes the basis of the higher plan
- Rawlinson`s 4<sup>th</sup> Army moved to the Ypres salient and is slated to carry out this plan
- Plumer`s 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to support 4<sup>th</sup> army and support the French on 2<sup>nd</sup> army`s right flank. Up until this time Plumer`s record was fairly undistinguished. Rawlinson is tasked with creating a plan.

Rawlinson responds,

- Take Pilckem ridge, north east of Passchendaele
- Cross the Steenbeek ( stream) Take the north part of Passchendaele Ridge

Haig agrees, but sees Messines Ridge is the problem

- Haig emphasises need to push off Messines Ridge to Gheluvelt Plateau
- Plumer to take Gheluvelt - but in order to take Gheluvelt - Messines HAS to be taken
- Haig therefore agrees and extends plan to include Messines



From this it can be seen that any drive straight north east towards Passchendaele and beyond would be plastered by enemy artillery on the right flank. Therefore in order to neutralise those forces, Messines Ridge and the Gheluvelt plateau *have* to be taken before the main operation can take place - this is *why* this attack *has* to take place.

Rob then showed a composite trench map with contours superimposed - these give the impression that the area was quite `hilly` but in fact it was not - height was measured in tens of metres across the sector. He pointed out that if you take the Messines `ridge` you overlook the Gheluvelt plateau. In the Ypres area any `high` ground - even if it was only tens of metres higher than the surrounding land was a distinct advantage .

By spring 1916 the final plan emerges are firmed up and it must be considered that the BEF are part of an Allied army - a partnership where the French are the senior partners even although they have been seriously degraded during 1915 and 1916. In January 1916 Joffre, Commander of the French forces agrees that Flanders will be the main area of operations for the BEF followed by some `limited` Anglo-French operations on the Somme.

GHQ issues a memo on 5<sup>th</sup> March - 4<sup>th</sup> Army will attack north east of Ypres, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army will protect the right flank of 4<sup>th</sup> army by attacking at Messines. This will be coordinated by a coastal attack involving an amphibious assault at Ostend. The plan, in four phases was very complex. In effect there is a northern attack by 4<sup>th</sup> Army and a southern attack by 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, the gestation of a two stage attack - an attack which subsequently attracts much controversy because of the seven week gap between the southern attack and that in the north. This of course gives the Germans plenty of time to recover and prepare for the second stage

However events in early 1916 caused the shelving of the plans

- Germans attack Verdun on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2016
- On 27<sup>th</sup> March Joffre warns Haig he may have to commit to the Somme
- By April it is clear that the BEF must attempt to relieve the pressure on the French at Verdun by effecting a major assault at the Somme.
- 1<sup>st</sup> July - Battle of the Somme commences. This was not the place where Haig wanted to attack. Why did he not want to attack at the Somme? - there is nothing there - nothing of strategic value
- November 1916 - Chantilly Conference. It is decided that in the spring of 1917 the French will attack on the Aisne, the BEF on the Somme, part of an Allied joint effort and if this goes well, the main effort will be at Flanders led by the BEF. The plan is back on the agenda again!

Spring 1917 the plans are finalised - significant differences from those of 1916 - the main change is that the two northern armies will attack consecutively i.e. once one has made some progress, the second will launch its attack. The first attack will be at Messines Ridge, the second at Pilckem Ridge

- Plumer submits plan - he will take the Messines ridge crest and the villages that lie just behind it
- Haig`s reaction? - this is typical Plumer, he is being far too cautious, taking the ridge line and the forward slope over a period of days. Haig wants Plumer to advance to the Oostaverne line, and he wants this achieved in one single attack , a not unreasonable request considering the Oostaverne line lies only about 3000 yards from the ridge itself

- Haig has long standing doubts about Plumer. Plumer made his name in the South African war where he appeared profligate with his troops' lives, unlike his commands in the 1914-18 war where he makes every attempt to preserve the lives of his men.
- Haig believes he is too over cautious. Haig wants results. Given the circumstances Haig is probably correct. The BEF is at a peak and materially, it has everything it needs.
- Doubts resurface in May 1917. So is Plumer the man for this job?

The objective for June 7<sup>th</sup> 1917 is the German's first line. The second objective which will come a few days later is the ridge crest itself. Haig wants the troops to go further on that first day - why? If they stop on the first objective line, the Germans can regroup and reinforce their defences, plus they can launch counter-attacks from a strongly defended position.

April - May 1917 - preparation

David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister has no trust in British commanders, preferring to listen to the French, particular Georges Nivelle who has replaced Joffre as Commander in Chief of the French Army. Indeed DLG can be described as a Francophile and when Nivelle presents his plan, which he claims will 'win the war' - DLG endorses and supports what became known as the Nivelle Offensive. From the BEF's point of view the attack in the Arras sector goes quite well before the inevitable booging down. What is outstanding, however is the Canadian attack on Vimy Ridge, north of Arras, in what was known as a 'limited operation' and this became a 'blueprint' for future operations by the BEF. The artillery barrages were well organised, well-orchestrated and protected the attacking troops by succession of rolling barrages, whilst the heavier guns successfully suppressed the German guns with effective counter battery fire. This the BEF's first clear-cut victory of the war. Thus in the minds of GHQ and the British commanders they believe they have a way forward. Unsurprisingly therefore Messines comes to be viewed as Vimy Ridge with 'extras'

What must be borne in mind is that Messines is *not* to be viewed as an end on its own but rather to suppress the Gheluvelt Plateau, to prepare the way for the main drive out of Ypres salient to take Passchendaele Ridge, and open the way to take the important railway centre at Roulers.

It is here that we now have several controversies (1) why did Haig choose the cavalryman Gough and not Plumer to take charge of the main assault? (2) Why did Haig dramatically extend the depth of Plumer's attack - what was the point when from the top of the ridge the Oostaverne line could not be seen

1917 - 'Tortoise and Hare' - Plumer and Gough

Controversies -

- Why did Haig choose Gough over Plumer?
- Why did Haig extend depth of the Messines attack? From the top of the ridge the Oostaverne line could not be seen - so that line had to be taken
- Why wasn't Messines victory exploited? Go further? - Rob's answer - go further to where?

Rob pointed out that these three questions were central to the whole discussion or argument about the BEF in 1917, especially when we 'wash up' against the Passchendaele Ridge on October of that year.

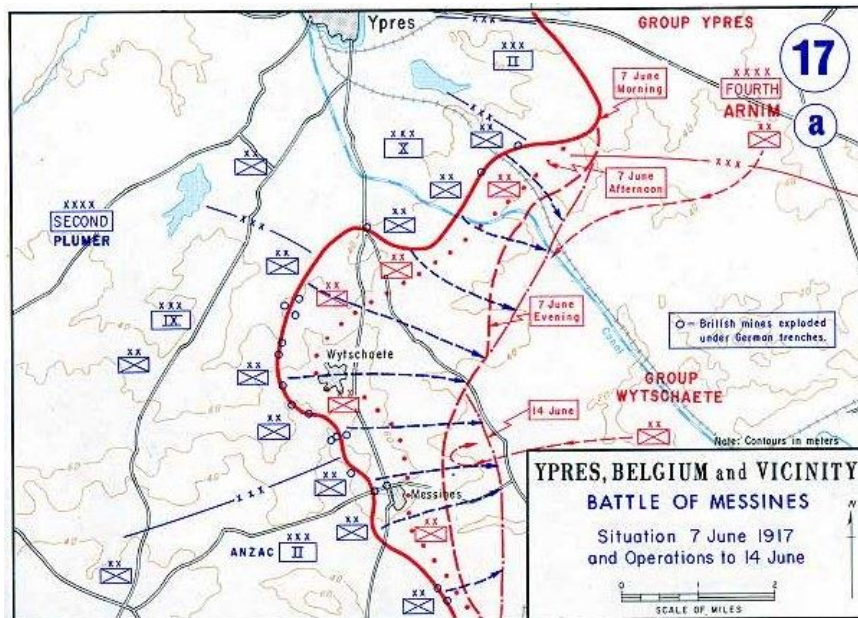
Plumer- Herbert Charles Onslow Plumer - 'Old Plum' - everybody's favourite general ?





In appearance he was the archetypal `Colonel Blimp` - moustachioed, rotund, red cheeked ! His entire post war reputation is based upon Messines. He was a careful planner - in Haig`s opinion too careful - a firm believer in the set piece artillery battle - artillery conquers, infantry occupies! Plumer had been in Ypres salient since May 1915 so he was well acquainted with the region. His Chief of Staff was, arguably the best of all CoSs, Charles `Tim` Harrington, they made an enormously successful team. What should be borne in mind though is the enormous advantages available to Plumer which were not available to Gough when he attacks further north. Plumer has a limited operation, not a staged advance or an advance seeking to allow exploitation. He is also attacking a salient - look at the a map of the Ypres salient it is like a big inverted `S` - in the north, the Ypres sector the British lines bulge into the

German occupied zone, but in the south, from St. Eloi. through Wytschaete, Messines and to Ploegsteert, it is the German lines bulging into those of the British - as shown in the following map.



He also had nineteen pre-prepared mines work on these had been underway since 1915 indeed one of the biggest problems had been keeping these dry so that they would go up when detonated. He also has good weather . He had outstanding observation over the battlefield from Mount Kemmel whilst communications, particularly railways were very good in this area and were subject to continuous improvement. Rob, on one of his `hobby horses`, pointed out that communications - logistics was of paramount importance - if you cannot move the shells, men and equipment to where they are required, then as an attacking force you are in trouble. So, in effect, Plumer had two years to prepare for this battle. It was also - and Rob took great pains to stress this - an extravagantly supported operation, as Harrington said `it was a marvellous time to be planning an operation, everything we asked for - we got`. Normally a commander only received a fraction of the numbers of men, tanks or guns that he requested.



Mount Kemmel

This prominent geographical feature lay only three miles from the Wytschaete - Messines road and afforded commanding views. Not only that, but you also got a brilliant place to hide your guns ! Here was located, on the east side of Kemmel, batteries of medium, heavy and super heavy artillery pieces. When comparisons are made between the attacks launched by Plumer and Gough, it must be pointed out that Gough has none of these advantages when he launches his attacks in July.

The importance of railways - of all gauges - in this area - cannot be underestimated as in the build up to the attack on the ridge 186000 tons of artillery munitions was brought up

Plumer also has Hill 63 - the summit of which was roughly level with the Ridge as photograph taken from Hill 63 from which Messines church can be seen.



This gives Plumer twin advantages - Kemmel which gives an outstanding panorama and Hill 63 behind which troops and materials can be corralled - positions which the Germans cannot really get to

Rob then focussed on the Mines which, compared with the artillery bombardment were a bit of a `minor` show - cue laughter from audience ! 19 mines , 500 tons of explosives were detonated - or, in modern terms half a kilo-ton, nuclear territory - indeed these were the largest man

made explosions until the Trinity nuclear tests of 1945. The detonation of the mines is perhaps the most memorable feature of the battle of Messines - not just for the destruction of the German line directly above each mine but for the shock-wave which ran right down the line, collapsing many dugouts, trenches and upturning concrete bunkers trapping the unfortunate occupants. It is estimated that the detonation of the mines cost the lives of a 10000 Germans although the actual figure will never be known - many being killed by the shock wave.

Moving on Rob discussed the artillery, or as he put it - `The God of War`. The artillery preparation - the Messines barrage plan - was known as the `magnum opus`. Remember in 1917 there were no computers, the orchestration of the guns was based upon pre-arranged timing and demands a great deal of faith in the artillery by the infantry. The preliminary barrage lasted 11 days, 2266 artillery pieces being involved, 756 `heavies` 452 4.5 inch howitzers - in total one gun for every seven and a half yards of ridge. 186000 tons of shells had been brought up, with 100000 tones being used in the first barrage, 3.5 million shells were fired on that first day - 7<sup>th</sup> June - at its peak one ton of shell per second was falling on the German lines. The actual ridge itself was reduced in size - as Haig said - its geography was changed !



Picture of annihilation!

So, at 3.10am on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1917 - it all kicks off - Rob quotes from Shakespeare`s Julius Caesar - *`Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war`*

What did Plumer have at his disposal in addition to the massive artillery resources we have just described ?

Second Army Order of Battle

IX Corps      X Corps      Anzac Corps      XIV Corps (Reserve)

Each Corps consisted of 4 Divisions - nominally about 70000 men per Corps but for this battle IX Corps had well over a 100000 men - making around 250000 men tasked with the taking of this ridge.

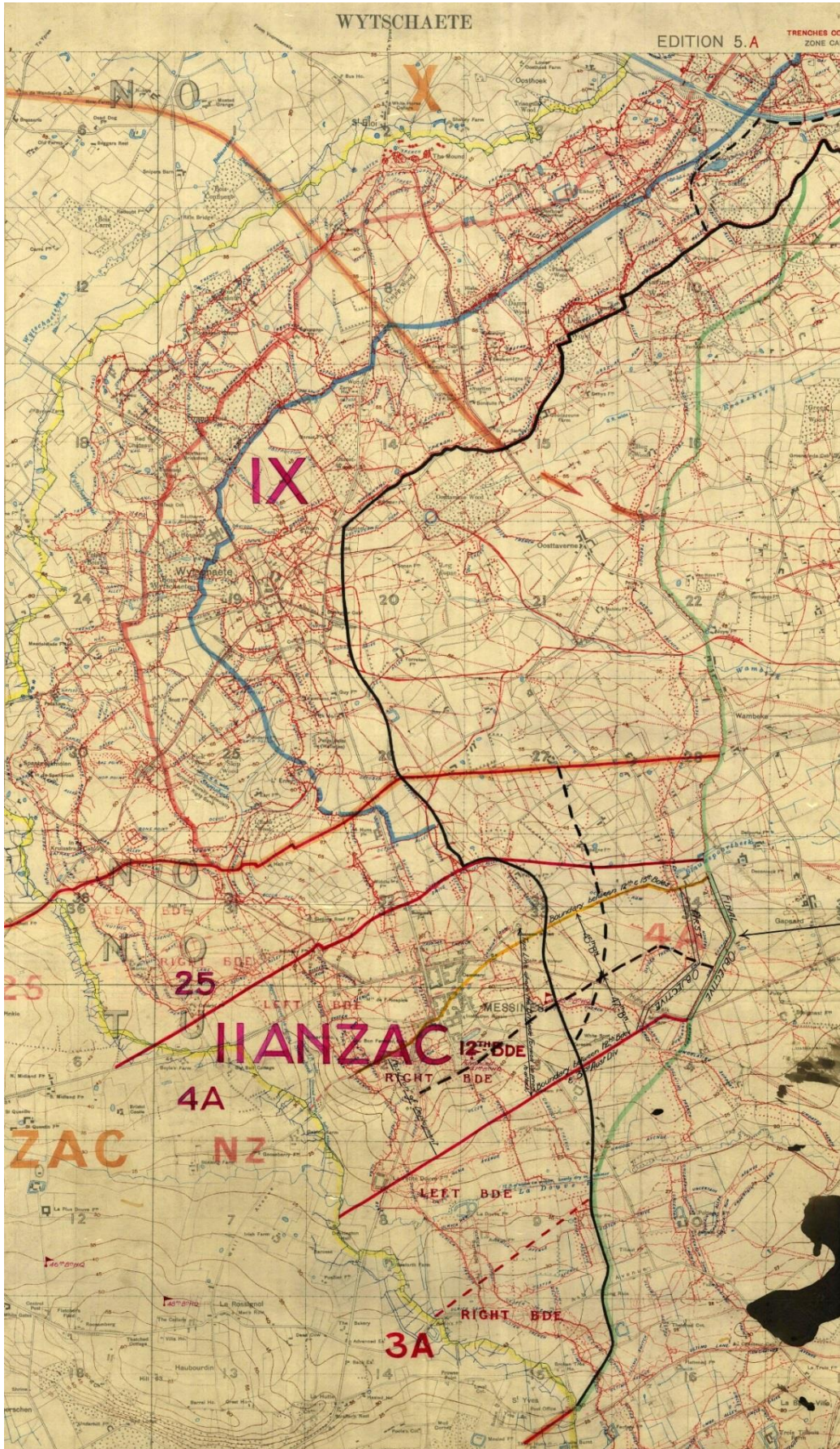
## Objectives

The first one is the Red Line - about 900 yards, the second the blue line a further 650 yards and then the black line at 2000 yards from the British line. Upon attaining the black line there was to be a pause to allow artillery and other support to be dragged forward. Then move again to the green line - at total of 3700 yards.



Rob then quoted Romans chapter 8, verse 22

`The groaning earth gives birth in pain to what has been formed within her`





Mines go up! To Rob`s knowledge there are no existing photographs of the detonation of the Messines mines. The mines do not go off all at once as planned, they detonate a bit out of sync, but that actually led to greater damage to the German defences. The British soldiers were told to initially keep at least 250 yards away from the crater areas to avoid poisonous gases and stones, earth - and other things - falling back to earth. Some men did indeed get hurt by falling debris

### The Attack!

Situation at 09.00hrs

X Corps - north sector

IX Corps - centre sector - most important area

II Anzac Corps - southern sector

II Anzac and X Corps are to protect the flanks of IX Corps who have 116000 men and 760 guns. Interestingly, 198 Vickers machine guns were employed in the barrage - why? When the Germans observed a creeping barrage coming towards them they know that, although they could not see them, directly behind the explosions of the creeping barrage there would be enemy soldiers, so they fired into that barrage knowing they would hit some of those troops advancing. So to keep the German defenders heads down the machine guns fired continuously 200 yards in *front* of the creeping barrage. In this particular barrage the 198 machine guns firing through it, fired somewhere in the region of 6 to 8 *million* bullets !.



On top of all that we have 192 trench mortars - not all the little 3 inch Stokes mortars - but a substantial number of 2 ins mortars firing a `toffee apple` bomb - a large spherical shell on a stick launcher.

This, artillery, machine guns, trench mortars gives some indication of the support that I Corps had.

What is the situation by 09.00hrs ?

IX Corps gets across the ridge but there is some very heavy fighting in X Corps sector around Dammstrasse and White Chateau and it takes two hours to take this position - something unheard of at, for example the Somme where it could take up to two *weeks* to clear a similar hold up.

There is a common perception, said Rob, that the Battle of Messines was low on the loss of human life - this is simply not sustainable - 3500 killed and 20000 wounded or missing presumed killed - although compared favourably with losses on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916

By 09.00 hours - Complete Success! The Ridge is taken in just under 6 hours. New techniques, developed at the Somme and Vimy Ridge have come into play, particularly the specialist platoons trained for taking out enemy pillboxes - not all of which had been destroyed by the artillery barrage - and which in earlier assaults had wreaked havoc amongst the attacking troops. What has been seen is *outstanding* artillery - infantry cooperation

The Germans did respond but they were not in a good way after the punishing barrage - it was the *violence* of the attack which left them stunned - indeed Plumer was expecting a German

counter-attack after the Black line was taken, hence the long pause between the Black Line and the assault on the Oostaverne Line as he was aware we would be at our weakest just after securing the Black Line and before guns, equipment and reinforcements had been brought up. To plough on and keep going forward would have been a mistake. Those counter attacks which did take place by the Germans were localised and broken up *relatively* easily as so much of their communications had been smashed to pieces. What counter attacks did take place, did not happen until about five hours after Black Line had been taken and by this time Plumer had pushed forward a number of heavy artillery batteries and these annihilated most of those engaged in counter-attacking

Attack on the Oostaverne Line, this is where things start going wrong - overall *not* a success and in fact the Oostaverne Line is not taken until 7 days later. In fact most of the 25000 casualties were sustained during this period. Why? - the ground was terribly cut up by the barrage - look at pictures showing the devastated land, how do you get guns, materials *and men* across this morass. Of course this had been a problem since the front settled into trench warfare and frontal assaults were made on trench lines. Rob then elaborated on the problems faced and the engineering resources, pioneer battalions etc that were available to each Division and Corps, to make it possible for heavy equipment - guns and their munitions - to be brought forward in sufficient numbers so that the attack could start again. Without engineers you don't get roads, without roads, without rail you cannot push your men forward. The more shells you use to destroy the enemy, the worse the problem gets! This was one of the principal reasons why the assaults in October and November during the Battle of Third Ypres got bogged down.

At 15:10 hrs, twelve hours after the initial assault had begun, the barrage lifted 100 yards and the Australians recommenced their advance behind it. It was scheduled to lift 100 yards every 3 minutes and the attack had to keep up with it in order to benefit from its protection. Keeping pace with the tanks the Australians moved across the forward trenches of the II ANZAC Corps and into no-man's-land where they were greeted by intense German rifle and machine gun fire. The Oostaverne Line that had been relatively lightly held during the morning was now well reinforced and strongly held.

As they approached the Oostaverne Line they were engaged from hedges, trenches and concrete blockhouses. For the Australians the Messines battlefield was their first taste of the German blockhouse or pillbox. These reinforced concrete structures, which could really only be destroyed by a direct hit with a heavy shell, allowed the German soldiers to take shelter during bombardments and then to emerge with their machine guns as the enemy advanced towards their line. Some had small slits in the concrete from which a machine gun could be operated, but others were totally sealed off except for a door at the back. It was essential to capture such positions as otherwise strong enemy detachments would be left in the rear of a swift advance. Four of these structures formed part of the defences of the Oostaverne Line in the area being assaulted by the Australians. Two were to the north of Hun's Walk, one beside the road and another one to the south. Rob then quoted from Charles Bean, AIF Official Historian,

*"Where such tension exists in battle the rules of 'civilised' war are powerless. Most men are temporarily half mad, their pulses pounding at their ears, their mouths dry & When they have been wracked with machine gun fire, the routing out of enemy groups from behind several feet of concrete is almost inevitably the signal for a butchery at least of the first few who emerge, and sometimes even the helplessly wounded may not be spared, ruthlessness is a quality essential to hand to hand fighting, and soldiers were deliberately trained to it."*

Whilst the Anzacs got into many of the German positions in the Oostaverne Line, the Germans held on in a number of places before finally abandoning these and slipping away to new positions on June 14<sup>th</sup>



Rob then wound up his presentation with two short tales of incidents at Messines, Lump Farm and the `Tale of the Little Red Lorry`

Lump Farm was key point of the German defence line, a heavily defended garrison of machine pill boxes. The 24<sup>th</sup> (Australian) Division and the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) division all claimed to have taken Lump Farm but subsequent historical research *probably* indicates that it was captured by the Irish. Why? - the 36<sup>th</sup> Division advanced, captured the farm and moved on to their net objective. They in turn were followed by the Australians but they found significant numbers of German defenders who had not been neutralised by the Ulstermen popping out from the pillboxes to confront the net wave of attackers who promptly killed or captured them, hence believing that it was they - the 24<sup>th</sup> Division who had in fact taken this redoubt.

Rob reiterated his point about the importance of logistics - in this war, which had developed during a machine age - it was all about movement, all about roads and rail. Messines was very much dependent upon the use of lorries, although the Messines Official Report would say otherwise - light railways. The problem with lorries was keeping them supplied with fuel and it was decided to make greater use of light railways with predominantly steam locomotives - coal fired - which could transport greater tonnage to the front. IX Corps sent all its lorries back to GHQ but almost as soon as they had done that they had to bring them all back as the light railways proved unreliable and just not up to the job of supplying the troops and often fell prey to German shelling who vectored in on their fixed lines. Anzac Corps and X Corps experienced exactly the same problems. 37500 tons of ammunition ended up being sent up to the front by XI Corps by lorry with a further 12500 tons by light railway. Lorries proved to be flexible compared to rail - the downside being fuel consumption of 4 miles to the gallon!. And - obviously - they have to be parked somewhere - not easy to park 10000 lorries. Roads - as Rob put it - a few Thorneycroft lorries could damage a road as much as a German shell - required massive amounts of roadstone and large numbers of pioneers and engineers to work on them. Normally 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had 4000 lorries but on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1917 they had 7500 of them! Even then that was not enough. That the roads to the Ridge be kept open became a priority over all others. Road repair even took precedent over casualty evacuation. So 2<sup>nd</sup> Army created a special road mending section. They had 24 lorries, each with a crew of eight men. These lorries had priority over ALL traffic. In order to ensure that priority and get them through road traffic control, checkpoints etc, this small fleet of lorries was painted bright red. The system worked so well any of these teams could arrive anywhere on the battlefield within ten minutes of being requested.

**So - VICTORY!**

`Proportional to the Objective Pursued` ??

Rob left us with this thought

*“ If you invested a million pounds and only made a return of a thousand pounds on that investment - would you consider that investment worthwhile”*

As is our practice Rob then submitted to a Q & A session with the members - more of a discussion really - to which he responded in his usual candid manner before Chairman, Tony Bolton, had to step in and wind up proceedings by inviting all in attendance to accord Rob a hearty Vote of Thanks.

## July Meeting

The July meeting was in the capable hands of Branch Member, Charles Beresford whose presentation was entitled `The Forgotten Story of Derbyshire`s Role in the National Commemoration of The Great War`

Charles must have been a proud man when he was introduced by Branch Chairman, Tony Bolton, to see before him a virtual `full house` of members and friends all eagerly anticipating a presentation with a very intriguing title.

In opening Charles said he would start by looking briefly at some of Derbyshire`s best known monuments and memorials before moving on to describe Derbyshire`s contribution, more particularly some individuals from the County to the National Commemoration of the Great War, but finishing with the invaluable contribution made by a group of working class men at a location in Derbyshire.



Charles said that when we think of commemoration of the Great War in Derbyshire, we tend to think of stone monuments, in particular such like that at Crich which in its heyday had a powerful light at the top which could be observed right across the county.



Some other memorials in the county have a religious theme, like that at Starkholmes (left), or that at Cromford (below).





There are those of a more secular nature like that in Charles` home town, Matlock Bath.

The figures were carved in Italy from Carrara marble, a material which has been used to good effect from Roman times



Then there is the fine memorial at Alfreton with figures cast in bronze showing a soldier protecting a child



The War Memorial in the city of Derby has a unique bronze figure which, upon unveiling, was described by a newspaper of the day purporting to show a grief-stricken widow holding in her arms her fatherless child



Charles then said that from time to time you come across quite unexpectedly quite a unique one like that to be found in the village of West Hallam, which shows machine gunners, not in action killing people but apparently depicted being instructed or trained. Quite a strange memorial, said Charles, in his opinion.

The foregoing illustrates the lack of uniformity of war memorials around, not just the county, but in the country itself, and the reason for this was the construction of memorials in cities, towns and villages was left in the hands of local committees, all of whom had their own ideas about how their war dead should be commemorated and indeed whose names should appear on the monument, indeed this led to anomalies like that of a Fred Arkwright whose name appears on no less than three war memorials ! There are also instances of names who should by rights have been

included but for whatever reason were not.

There was often arguments as to where a memorial should be situated in a town or village, indeed in Cromford, five poles were erected around the village and local residents could vote for their preferred location.

With respect to commemorations, there were two schools of thought, the first that there must be an imposing monument to honour our dead and the other, why waste money on stone monuments when you have all these wounded soldiers, widows and orphans and monies raised



would be better used as a relief of their distress. Long Eaton solved the problem by splitting the money they raised with £1000 being used for the construction of a war memorial and £2000 being allocated to a hardship fund.

In other cases it was decided to have a memorial hall or as in the case of Ashbourne a recreation ground with ornamental gates was dedicated in memory of those of the town who never returned. Charles said he wondered what had happened after the formation of the NHS in 1948 to the bed endowed in Derbyshire Royal Infirmary by several small villages who used their money raised in this practical way.

The Red Cross in Derbyshire came up with an idea that all 37 properties in the County which had been used as Red Cross hospitals in the war should have a memorial plate affixed when the buildings reverted to their original use. Charles then showed members one of these plaques which he had acquired at auction a number of years ago. It was very heavy for its size - it was made of lead! These plaques were designed by a chap called Percy Currie.

Moving on, Charles said, whilst up to this point his talk had been about Derbyshire, the main thrust was of course about National Commemoration and it was to this he would now take up.

In modern times, this Derbyshire lad, Paul Cummins, who is in fact from Chesterfield made a huge contribution to National Commemoration of the Great War.



Paul is, of course, the artist who conceived the monumental installation 'Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red' which was inspired by a poem of the same title, at the Tower of London which commemorated British and Colonial losses in the First World War with 888,246 ceramic poppies. Paul, a graduate of Derby University claimed to have found the poem in Chesterfield Library. It was believed to have been written by a soldier who was killed later in the war. Another version of its origin was that it was written by a woman whose soldier husband had been killed in the war and she, disguised as a man enlisted and she herself was subsequently killed. As Charles said, a nice story, but improbable, although Cummins has stuck to his guns on the source. The mystery doesn't end there as Chesterfield Library have never been able to locate the poem.

Cummins produced the flowers together with as many as 300 people of assisting in Derbyshire, while the setting of the work was designed by theatre designer Tom Piper. During the making of the work in his workshop, Cummins accidentally crushed his hand in an industrial roller. This left him requiring extensive surgery and resulted in the loss of a finger and use of his dominant hand. He said in interviews that was "overwhelmed" by the public response to this work, saying "I think that it is something everybody can relate to and they feel very personally about." However, he also received death threats for his work, stating that it was because the money was being donated to "war charities". In recognition of the success

of the work, both Cummins and Piper were awarded the MBE in the 2015 New Year Honours, Cummins' award being made "for services to art and First World War commemorations". Over 5 million people visited the display at the Tower of London and there were over 3 BILLION `tweets` around the world referring to the display! Early on in the planning they decided that the British poppy, like those of the RBL and Earl Haig Fund were not suitable so the ceramic poppies were actually modelled on a Canadian Poppy. Although Charles did not read the poem in its entirety, for the sake of our readers, I include it here,

### *Blood Swept Land And Seas Of Red*

The blood swept lands and seas of red,  
 Where angels dare to tread.  
 As I put my hand to reach,  
 As God cried a tear of pain as the angels fell,  
 Again and again. As the tears of mine fell to the ground  
 To sleep with the flowers of red  
 As any be dead My children see and work through fields of my  
 Own with corn and wheat,  
 Blessed by love so far from pain of my resting  
 Fields so far from my love. It be time to put my hand up and end this pain  
 Of living hell, to see the people around me  
 Fall someone angel as the mist falls around  
 And the rain so thick with black thunder I hear  
 Over the clouds, to sleep forever and kiss  
 The flower of my people gone before time  
 To sleep and cry no more I put my hand up and see the land of red,  
 This is my time to go over,  
 I may not come back  
 So sleep, kiss the boys for me

Charles then reminded his audience that there is a `spin off` from the Tower of London display at the Derby Silk Mill museum where there is a `weeping window` cascade of ceramic poppies which will be on display until near the end of July. Charles said the best time to visit was at night when it becomes something quite wonderful to behold.





Charles continued by saying he was pretty sure that no one present would know the connection between Derbyshire and the selection of the Unknown Warrior. There is a grave in the St. Margaret's Churchyard in the Derbyshire village of Carsington of Lt. Col, the Rev, Edward Anthony Sydney Gell, DSO, MC (1875 - 1951). He was descended from the Gell family of Hopton Hall. His father was naval officer who had seen action in the Far East who, on leaving the service became an Anglican vicar. At the time of Edward's birth he was a vicar in Wales and to ensure his son was not born in Wales sent Edward's mum across the border to give birth in The Green Dragon Inn in Hereford. When the Boer war came Edward Gell, who himself had entered the Anglican ministry, was a curate in Aston in Birmingham. Edward wanted to go to South Africa as a chaplain but this was not possible so he enlisted as a trooper in the South Worcestershire Yeomanry in 1899, indeed he managed to join as a trooper/chaplain. According to the Birmingham Daily Post, when Gell heard of the initial heavy losses being sustained by the British Army, he immediately relinquished his clerical duties and volunteered for the front. In South Africa though, he finds himself fighting as a cavalryman during the week and taking church parades on Sundays! He found though as a trooper mixing with the men, rather than a chaplain who would associate with the officers, he could do more Christian work. He was then put forward to be a proper chaplain to one of Lord Methuen's mobile cavalry columns. Methuen had already sent home two chaplains whom he considered too 'high church' as they had refused Holy Communion to men who had not been to Confession. Towards the end of 1900 in Krugersdorp in the Transvaal there was a large concentration of troops and to keep the men fit the officers organised all sorts of sports and races. The final of the heavyweight boxing competition was between a huge Australian....and Edward Gell. After fifteen rounds Gell was declared the winner to the great joy of the 'tommies' as the Australian had been 3 to 1 odds-on favourite! Lord Methuen, who had been present at the contest, summoned Gell and immediately appointed him chaplain and it was put into Command Orders that Gell was to conduct three services the following Sunday. At the first service at 08.00hrs, over 600 men appeared and when Lord Methuen arrived he thought they had all got the times wrong. Some of the men, particularly the Australians had never been to a church service before. With such numbers it was obvious that there was going to be insufficient quantities of communion wine but Gell, resourceful as ever switched to using beer put into wine bottles. Edward Gell was also a bit of an artist and painted many pictures, of which Charles showed a picture of one rural scene. After the Boer war ended, Gell remained firm friends with Lord Methuen who gave him a 'living' at Corsham in Wiltshire and even had a new vicarage built for him. Gell and Methuen remained close friends until the latter's death in 1932. Much to the regret of Methuen, Gell moved on, became an army chaplain and spent some years in Cairo.

Upon commencement of the war in 1914, Gell actually went to France and indeed sent in his resignation as a chaplain so that he could be considered for combat roles. Surprisingly, the Chaplain-General Taylor-Smith supported Gell's application and Gell subsequently took up a commission in the Fusiliers and in a letter to his parents at Hopton Hall Gell explained that he felt he could contribute more to the war office as a Staff Officer than as a chaplain. He was wounded at Beaumont Hamel in 1915 and was eventually attached to 7<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers as acting CO with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel thus becoming one of only three ordained clergymen who commanded battalions on the Western Front. There was Gell, Bernard Vann and Percy Beresford, whom Charles was at pains to point out was no relation of his. Gell was actually on leave on leave when the Germans launched their *Kaiserschlacht* but he raced back to the front, gathering up over a hundred stragglers in the process and was eventually captured on March 27<sup>th</sup>. We know a lot about the circumstances of his capture as all British officers who were captured had to file a report detailing the circumstances of their surrender upon their release when the war ended.

After repatriation, Gell was sent back to Germany as part of the occupying forces, a job he hated. He knew Fabian Ware and using this contact got a transfer to the Graves Registration and Enquiries Department. Charles then said that most of his audience would be aware of the circumstances of the selection of the Unknown Warrior, how on the stroke of midnight on the 7th November 1920, Brigadier Wyatt GOC British troops in France and Flanders went into the temporary military chapel at St. Pol to select one of four bodies gathered there having been exhumed by working parties from the battlefields of Ypres, Somme, Aisne and Arras. Most people have a vision of this chapel as being a ruin of some exotic church property when in fact it was a temporary wooden army 'hut'. Edward Gell's role in all of this was crucial, it was he who arranged for four parties of men to go to the four battlefields, select one from



each for whom identification by regiment, rank etc. was totally impossible, and bring them to St. Pol after which each party was dismissed to their billets so that none would know which body had been selected. Each body was laid on a stretcher was covered by a Union flag. Brigadier Wyatt later reported to the Daily Telegraph that at midnight Edward Gell contacted Headquarters at midnight on November 7<sup>th</sup> to advise that all four bodies were in place and that the men who had brought them in had been dismissed from this duty. With Colonel Gell, Wyatt entered the Chapel and selected one of the bodies, then he and Gell placed the body in the shell coffin and screwed down the lid. Interestingly, there is no mention of Gell being a clergyman as well as a serving soldier. This not the last we hear of Edward Gell and the Unknown Warrior as he joined the Imperial War Graves Commission as Assistant Director of Records. Gell also wrote a series of reports for the IWGC (now of course CWGC) in which he said that in the design of the cemeteries on the Western Front, it was not only the architects who played an important part, but engineers as well - it would not have been good if headstones had started to fall down after 20 or thirty years. One

only has to look at old churchyards to see headstones at angles all over the place and even fallen completely flat to see what he was talking about. In the war cemeteries a trench is dug at the back of a row of graves and into this trench is placed concrete beams in which there are sockets and once the earth and turf has been replaced headstones are slotted into the beams and cemented in place which will hold them upright and in place `in perpetuity`. Gell also considered that creating the cemeteries in this way would mean that never in the future could the land be used for anything other than war graves, such would have been the costs of digging out these concrete beams. In Charles`s opinion it also explains why the rows of grave markers always appear to straight and regimented with none leaning to the side or back/forward. In concluding this part it could be seen that the Derbyshire family, Gell, played an important part in the National Commemoration.

Moving on Charles said he would look at another `son` of Derbyshire who had left an indelible mark on Commemorations of The Great War - George Nathaniel Curzon of Kedleston Hall. Of course when you mention Curzon`s name the normal reaction is `wasn`t he Viceroy of India?`, which of course he was, as well as serving as Foreign Secretary (1919-1924) he was a member of Prime minister David Lloyd George`s inner War Cabinet. Very few people are aware, however, of Curzon`s major part in the National Commemoration of The Great War and the subsequent annual Services of Remembrance. Curzon was appointed Viceroy of India in 1899 and served as such until 1905. He was the youngest Viceroy in history and it was a role which suited his love of pomp and ceremony for India was, of course, the `Jewel in the Crown` of Empire. He had very much a sense of mission towards the Indian people but, despite being a traditional aristocrat and imperialist he worked assiduously to improve health of the Indian people and he also came down hard on any Briton, including army officers who were found to have ill-treated Indian nationals. A fact not so well know was his order for the Taj Mahal to be restored, it having fallen into disrepair. India gave him experience of organising ceremonies and here we see the he and his wife arriving at the Delhi Durbar of 1903.



It was this experience of organising the Durbar that made him the choice of Lloyd George and the War Cabinet to Chair a Committee to organise the National Peace Celebrations at the end of the war. They actually had their first meeting before the Versailles Treaty was signed. It was agreed to have Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July 1919 as a Bank Holiday and Curzon was appointed to organise a Peace Parade and this took place with many nationalities involved included Marechal Foch and General Pershing of the AEF. A major part of the day was a march past of the Cenotaph in Whitehall which was at that time a temporary structure of wood and plaster.

After the parade had passed onlookers had surrounded the cenotaph with piles of flowers and wreaths. Such was the success of this temporary monument that there was a national clamour for a permanent memorial and with a couple of weeks the Cabinet agreed to make the cenotaph permanent and Lutyens was appointed to create the structure. It was decided that the unveiling of the new stone cenotaph would take place on Armistice Day 1920 - 11<sup>th</sup> November, but the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey only received cabinet approval the previous September. Hence there was much work to get things ready of the internment on the same day and again it was down to the organisational skills of Curzon that all was indeed ready. The next picture shows the gun carriage with the coffin of the Unknown Warrior pausing beside the new stone Cenotaph on Whitehall. It was here that the coffin was met by the King who placed his own wreath on the coffin. This done, the King unveiled the cenotaph which had been draped in a Union Flag. Despite the pre-eminence of the Church of England the simple service at the Cenotaph was largely secular and the monument itself was never dedicated by the clergy as it was to represent fallen soldiers of all faiths and religions, or indeed no religion at all.



There was no sound from the vast crowds, just muffled sobbing and the gentle clip=clop of the horses hooves. The service over, the gun carriage made its way to Westminster Abbey and it is here that Curzon comes into his own again with his plans which struck a chord with the British public . The coffin was carried through the north transept door with a guard of honour of 100 recipients of the Victoria Cross. In addition Curzon stipulated that places in the Abbey were not to be given to society ladies or wives of dignitaries but rather to selected widows and mothers of the fallen. There was in fact 100 women who were not only widows but who, in addition to their husbands, had lost their only sons. It was very much a British affair, there was no representatives of any foreign government. The interment was a very touching ceremony, which was recorded, the first ever sound recording in Westminster Abbey.

The following painting shows the King and the Official party.



The ceremony at the cenotaph and subsequently at Westminster Abbey aroused such strong feeling that Curzon was given one more task and he devised a two minutes silence and a haunting playing of the `Last Post` at the remembrance service, the next year and hereafter. Concluding this part of the talk about Curzon, Charles said there was something of the showman about him although there too was an aristocratic arrogance which can be seen in contemporary picture. His final act of organising was his own funeral in 1925 with his coffin being made from the same oak tree on Kedleston Hall estate as that which had encased his beloved wife Mary on her death in 1906 and they were interred together in All Saints Church.

As an aside Charles drew members` attention to a Luytens War Memorial which is located at Derby (Midland) Railway Station



The final part of Charles`s talk on Derbyshire`s contribution to the National Commemoration of the Great War was not about an individual but about a long standing Derbyshire industry - quarrying. Now, to most people, if asked about the Great War headstones or grave markers, the answer would be they are of Portland Stone as indeed most of them were. The Graves Commission actually experimented with over

30 different types of stone to find a material that would prove to be the best and most long living in varying environments. Of all the stones supplied to the IWGC - at least 120000 came from Derbyshire specifically from the Hopton Wood Quarry.



Charles showed a picture of the quarry today which became worked out in the 1920s.

Most of the stones cut at Hopton as gravemarkers went to France and Flanders but Charles says he believed that some went to Mesopotamia (now modern Iraq).

The Hopton Wood quarry had in fact been owned by the Gell family in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who had constructed the Via Gellia to connect the quarry with Cromford Wharf, which Charles thought a coincidence given Edward Gell`s place in history much later. Hopton Wood Quarry stone was also used for flooring and fireplaces at Kedleston Hall - home of George Curzon!

The Hopton Quarry Company was a big company having its own railway branch line connecting with the Cromford to Buxton railway. Charles then showed several pictures of the quarry - pointing out the huge scale of the enterprise in relation to a tiny figures of a workers on the working face of the quarry. Quarries were dangerous places to work and the newspapers regularly reported fatal accidents







The quarry had closed during the war but re-opened in 1920 and its first order was for headstone blanks (unfinished) - 200000 of them. The next picture showed some of these stones lined up for shipment.

In 1926 the Company received an order from the IWGC for production of finished stones for Australian graves and stonemasons came to area from all over the country to work on this contract.

A general view of the works

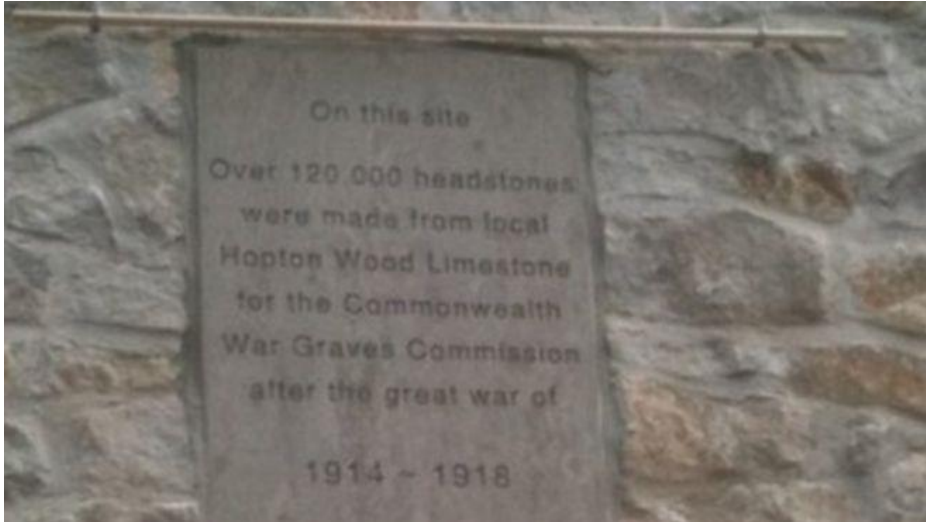


In 1928 the Prince of Wales visited the works to see for himself the production of the headstones whilst staying at nearby Chatsworth. He was particularly impressed by a pantograph engraving machine which allowed a disabled e serviceman to trace over a drawing of, for example a regimental badge which in



turn directed an engraving tool which copied the badge on to the stone tablet. With such ingenious machines, it was possible for over 300 headstones to be completed each week.

The stonemasons could also include personal messages on individual stones - as Charles said most of us will have seen such as these on visits to war cemeteries. Up to 66 letters could be engraved and each letter cost 3 ½ d which perhaps explained why not all grave markers have personal messages.



All that now remains as a reminder of the production of memorial stones produced for Great War graves is this stone plaque affixed to the remains of one of the original quarry buildings. This plaque was erected in 2014.

This concluded Charles`s presentation and after a question and answer session, Charles was accorded a very hearty vote of thanks, at the conclusion of which all those in attendance responded enthusiastically

XX

### August Meeting

Our scheduled speaker for the August meeting, Alan Atkinson, had the misfortune to be admitted to hospital 24 hours before he was due to deliver his presentation on *Propaganda - The British Way*. After a number of `phone calls our Branch Chairman, Tony Bolton said that he, if he `burned the midnight oil`, would be able to bring forward the presentation *Iraq Inquiry - 1917* which he was due to deliver at the September meeting. Despite it being a fine summer evening and a number of our `regulars` being away on holiday, it was still a healthy attendance which greeted Tony Bolton when he opened the meeting in our traditional fashion.

### “The 1917 Mesopotamia Commission and the Resignation of Austin Chamberlain as Secretary of State for India”

Tony began by saying that if he had been making this presentation a number of years ago he would have begun by showing where Mesopotamia - now known as Iraq - was, but as Iraq has, for the last twenty five years or so, rarely been out of the news this is not necessary. In 2003 the UK joined with the US in an invasion coalition of Iraq and since then there has been a political furore as to whether the then Prime Minister Tony Blair misled the country by going to war and last year, after 7 years of investigation and deliberation Sir John Chilcot delivered his report which had been commissioned by Gordon Brown in 2009 when he was Prime Minister. The Chilcot enquiry cost £13 million, ran to 12 volumes containing 2.6 million words and, if anyone

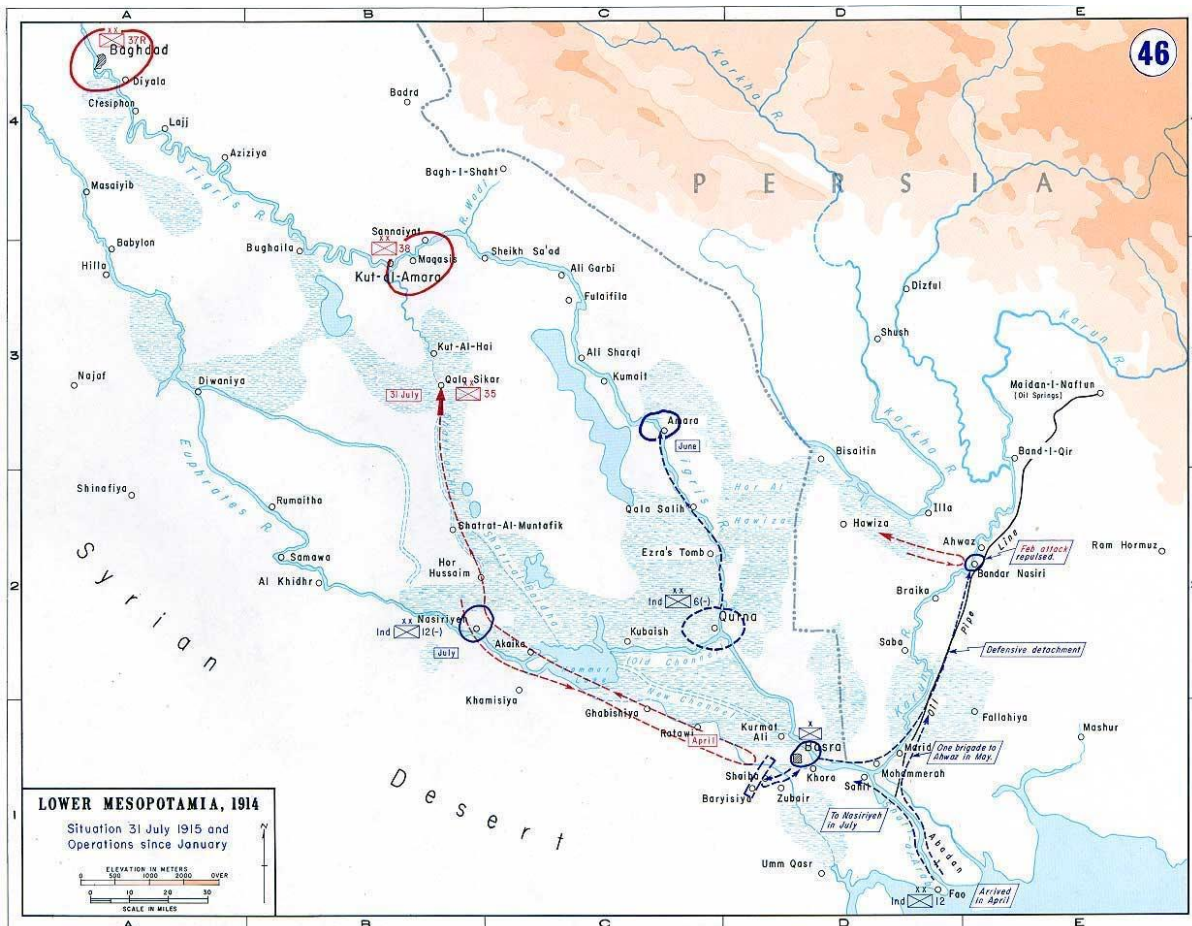
wanted a hard copy, they would have to pay £767 for the privilege! There was of course an earlier Iraq Reports by Hutton (2003) and Butler(2004) These reports had echoes of an earlier 1917 Inquiry which was to be the basis of Tony`s presentation. To contrast with Chilcot that report - of which Tony had a copy available if any member wished to peruse - consisted of 188 pages and was available from His Majesty`s Stationery Office in 1917 for the princely sum of two shillings (10p)

That report itself actually consists the three reports - the main Mesopotamia Commission Report, the Vincent-Bingley Report and it also contained a minority report by Commander Josiah Wedgwood.



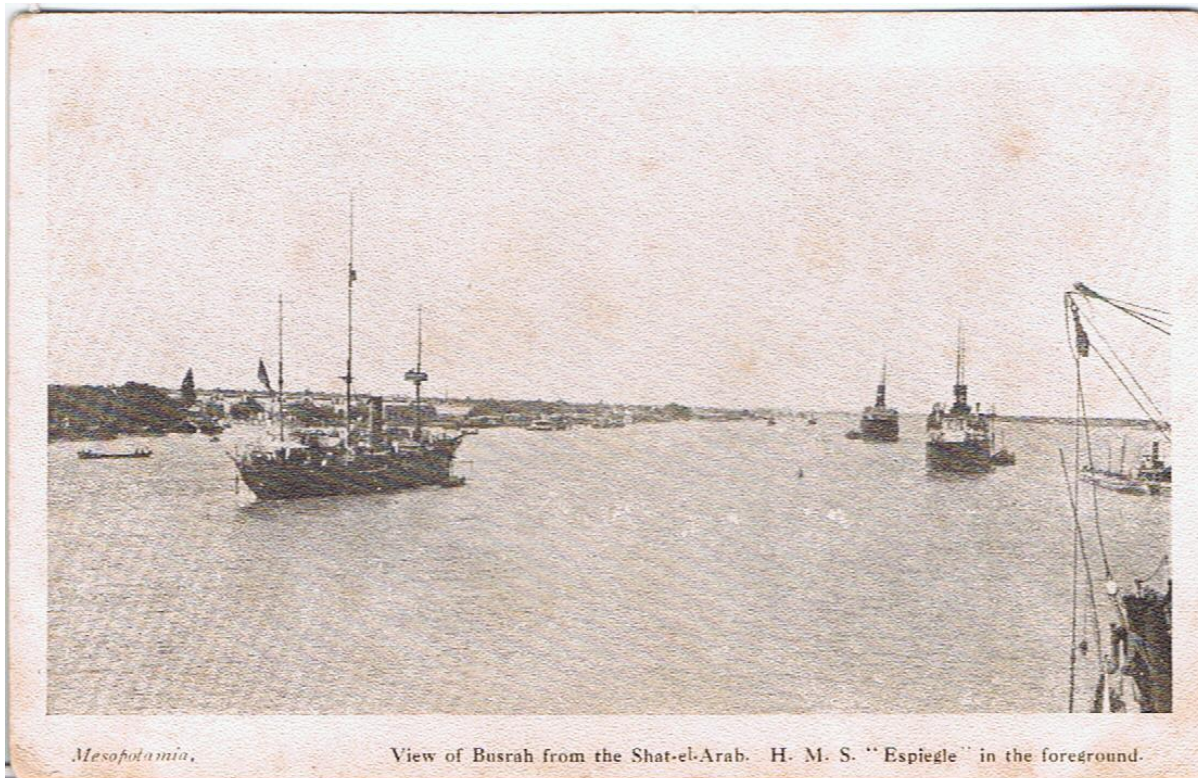
Wedgwood had a naval background, he had commanded armoured cars around Antwerp in Belgium in 1914, had been to Gallipoli and was at the time of writing the report was serving as a Liberal Member of Parliament, although he later joined the Labour Party.

In 1914 the country of Iraq was known by the classical name of Mesopotamia, the name literally meaning `the land between the two rivers` - the Tigris and the Euphrates.





If anyone in Britain in 1914 gave any thought to Mesopotamia it was probably about the port of Basra which was the port from which Sinbad was supposed to have sailed in the Tales of the Arabian Nights. It was also the supposed site of the Garden of Eden. Pre-war construction by Germany of the Berlin to Baghdad railway saw Britain buy up all the land at the head of the Gulf to deny that railway any opportunity of extending from Baghdad and constructing a new port at the head of the Gulf. The Admiralty, under First Lord Winston Churchill had some knowledge of Mesopotamia as it was here that the Anglo Persian Oil Company had their principal oilfields, indeed the Admiralty became chief shareholder in that Company in 1912. The Anglo Persian Oil Company later became BP. Their refinery was at Abadan Island on the Shatt-al-arab waterway, right on the border between Persia (modern day Iran) and Iraq part of the Ottoman Empire. That border and where it runs in the waterway is still contested to this day. In 1914 the vulnerability of the Abadan refinery was obvious. In 1914 when the Indian Army Force `A` departed for Europe, 5000 men, the 16<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade, their equipment and transports, detached from the main convoy and under the escort of HMS Ocean a pre-Dreadnought battleship, proceeded up the Persian Gulf and anchored off Bahrain island because at that time Britain was not at war with the Ottoman Empire.



*Mesopotamia,*

View of Busrah from the Shat-el-Arab. H. M. S. "Espiegle" in the foreground.

HMS Espiegle, a Persian Gulf sloop was anchored off Abadan Island to deter any Turkish incursions. On November 6<sup>th</sup> 1914, the day that war was declared between Britain and Turkey, troops were put ashore at Fao at the head of the Persian Gulf and after a skirmish with Turkish forces, the transports proceeded up the Shatt towards Abadan Island. It was then decided to reinforce the 16<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade and the 6<sup>th</sup> (Poona) Division under the command of General A A Barrett was despatched. After several short, nasty battles, the Turks withdrew and Basra was occupied on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1914. At that point the Indian Expeditionary Force had achieved all the objectives set them by the British and Indian Governments. To call Basra a `port` was a bit of a misnomer as ships had to anchor in mid-stream, unload to lighters which ferried troops and materials to the shore.

At that time the Indian government had a political officer accompany their forces, Sir Percy Co being that appointee with the Mesopotamia Force and it was his job to make a public

announcement on the occupation of Basra, but he had some difficulties with this. The local tribal leaders wanted to know if the British forces were staying as they did not want to throw in their lot with the British, only for the British to withdraw, leaving them to the `tender mercies` of the returning Turks. Tony pointed out similarities with the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003 - militarily a success - but no follow up political plan. The Treaty of London, signed at the start of the war between the Allies had declared that there would be no annexations made during the conflict. So Britain could not say they were going to stay in southern Iraq or if / when they intended to withdraw. Co-produced what was in fact quite a clever declaration called the Basra Declaration, which said nothing but sounded as if the British forces would be staying. It pleased nobody, back in Britain the politicians weren't happy and the Arab Bureau in Cairo were horrified and a vendetta built up between Cairo and the Mesopotamia Force. TE Lawrence, who was attached to the Cairo office was quite scathing about `Indianisation` of Iraq. The Indian Government, as privately set out by Cox, had no intention of stopping at Basra but intended to go all the way to Baghdad, drive the Turks out and return Iraq to the situation of being the `breadbasket` of the middle east it had once been - a not unlaudible aim - had he been public with it. Having taken Basra, they had the `tiger by the tail` - they could not just sit there, so it was decided to have limited expeditions to expand the area of control, thereby securing Basra from attacks by the Turks. The first of these took place on December 8<sup>th</sup> when Qurna an important post at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates, was captured.

Back in India they had to decide what they were going to do and the plan evolved was to reinforce the division in Iraq by creating a second Indian Corps (the first Indian Corps was in France). On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1915 the Second Corps of the Indian Army came into being commanded by General Sir John E Nixon who was, to use the terminology of the time - `a thruster !`. The Corps consisted of Barrett's 6<sup>th</sup> Poona Division, the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 6<sup>th</sup> Indian cavalry Brigade. Nixon arrived with instructions that he should investigate the possibility of moving on Baghdad.

Attention now switches back to London and in May 1915 Prime Minister Asquith is coming under pressure, things are not going well in France and the Gallipoli landings were not going to deliver any immediate success. There was the shell crisis, the resignation of the First Sea Lord, Jackie Fisher and all this created a press clamour and at the back of his mind, Asquith, who was a very canny politician realised that, as a result of the 1911 Parliament Act, the length of a Parliament had been reduced from seven to five years and that meant that, unless the Opposition agreed, a General Election would have to be held no later than January 1916, war or no war. The last thing Asquith wanted was a `khaki` election. So, using the Shell Crisis and the other pressures, he was able to sell to his own Liberal Party the idea of entering into a coalition with the Unionists (Conservatives). Eight Conservatives, including Austen Chamberlain entered into the first coalition government in May 1915 that group being led by Bonar-Law. It is a measure of the balance of power in that coalition when you consider the ministries given to the Conservatives - Chamberlain, India; Bonar Law, Colonial Secretary; Balfour, Admiralty (replacing Churchill) ;Long, Local Government Board; Carson, Attorney-General; Selbourne, Agriculture and Fisheries; Curzon, Lord Privy Seal; FE Smith, Solicitor General and Lansdowne, Minister without Portfolio. Asquith managed to `sell` this to his own party, the only `costs` being the loss of Haldane and Churchill - the `price` demanded by the Conservatives.

Austen Chamberlain was 52. He was born in Birmingham, the second child and eldest son of Joseph Chamberlain, then a rising industrialist and political radical, later Mayor of Birmingham and a dominant figure in Liberal and Unionist politics at the end of the 19th century. His mother, the former Harriet Kenrick, died in childbirth, leaving his father so shaken that for almost 25 years he maintained a distance from his first-born son.



Austen Chamberlain was a very efficient Member of Parliament and he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer in Balfour's last pre-war Unionist government. In 1911 he was a contender for leadership of the Unionist Party but his support for Tariff Reform - and here history seems to be repeating itself - threatened to split the party in two. His opponent in the contest was Walter Long an anti-tariff man, and Chamberlain portrayed himself as a selfless politician prepared to put party before self by offering to withdraw from the leadership contest if Long did likewise. This left Long with no option but to agree and this left the way open for Bonar Law to become leader of the party.

Churchill, always one for a nice pithy comment said 'Austen always played the game - but always lost it!' Tony said this just about summed up Austen Chamberlain - he was a 'nearly' man.

Chamberlain replaced Lord Crewe as Secretary of State at the India Office and his first job was to notify the Viceroy of India to tell him that there was to be no change - he would continue to play the safe game - no 'adventures'.

Tony then put up a slide showing a diagram of the India Office and how India was actually governed.



In India the top man was the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge. There was an anomaly in that when an Indian Army was employed in Western theatres of operations, it came under the command of the War Office - any operations in the east were controlled by the India Office i.e. under Chamberlain which included operations in Mesopotamia. Hardinge was Viceroy until April 1915, a position of tremendous power in India.

Several weeks before Chamberlain took over at the India Office Major General Charles Townshend arrived in Mesopotamia and took over command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Poona Division from Barrett, effectively becoming Nixon's number two. Townshend's first job was to assess what was necessary to push the Turks further back up the Tigris as the forces in Qurna were being harassed by snipers etc., and indeed the Turks made concerted efforts to attack Basra itself.

On the day that Chamberlain took office as Secretary of state of the India Office, there was a letter from Nixon asking permission to advance up the Tigris to Amara which would help to control the Arab insurgents who were being supplied by the Turks. Chamberlain asked for more information before he would grant permission but before his telegram had reached India it was already too late, as Townshend in his operation to clear Qurna, routed the Turks and was hotly pursuing them towards Amara. Townshend and the senior naval officer, a guy called Nunn, put together a fleet of ships - 'Townshend's Regatta' the lead ship of which arrives at Amara more or less at the same time as the retreating Turks of whom several thousand surrender when Amara is taken. Chamberlain therefore had no decision to make, the advance had just happened. Nixon then removes most of his river transport back down the Tigris, to its confluence with the Euphrates,

where troops under General Gorringe secure the Euphrates flank and capture Nasariya on July 15 after really quite severe fighting. Now being in possession of Amara and Nasariya Nixon and his staff persuade themselves of the need to take Kut. Nixon orders the transports to return and instructs Townshend to move on Kut. The first Battle of Kut takes place on September 28<sup>th</sup> 1915 and once again Townshend's 6<sup>th</sup> Poona Division smashes through the Turks, pushes them out of their positions and back towards Baghdad. He pursues them for 60 miles upriver to a place called Azizaya and at that point Nixon says to hold on as his orders do not allow for any advance beyond securing Basra and its hinterland. However, some worrying signs are beginning to appear, the troops are very tired having been in theatre without relief since the beginning, conditions are very trying with the high summer temperatures. Health problems arise in these conditions with sky high sickness levels. Townshend stops at Azizaya and desperately tries to feed and supply his troops with totally inadequate river transport. Tony then made the point that river transport was the only feasible means of moving anything in the region of Mesopotamia. The rivers flooded twice a year - once when the rains came and second, when the snows melted in the mountains. At these times everything was inundated for miles around. There was no stone from which roads or railways could be constructed - it is an alluvial plain - hence all transport was by river boat. The Mesopotamia Commission Report concluded that at no time after the advance went upstream from Qurna, was river transport adequate. Townshend, now 250 miles upriver, had the same number of boats as he had when he was only sixty miles upstream, was attempt to keep the same number of troops supplied, and was now beginning to struggle significantly.

Back in London, however, things don't look quite the same, the War Committee debates Mesopotamia in October 1915 at a time when all other theatres of war are in chaos, France and Flanders, Gallipoli, and conclude that the only area where things seem to be progressing satisfactorily is Mesopotamia and Nixon confidently advises that he can take Baghdad. The Committee look at the unbroken string of successes that the Mesopotamia forces are enjoying. On October 6<sup>th</sup>, after a Cabinet meeting, Chamberlain sent a 'clear the line' message to Nixon asking him what additions he needed to his current force to take and hold Baghdad. Nixon's response is to say that he can do it now, I have enough troops to take Baghdad but back in India there are concerns that any force which could take Baghdad could be cut off there and recommended a further two divisions were necessary to hold the city. The cabinet then start to discuss - not what forces are needed to take Baghdad - but what is needed to subsequently hold it. At no point after Nixon responds to Chamberlain's message was it ever considered that they might not take Baghdad. Meanwhile, back in France the Indian Corps are showing signs of stress and there is a view that they will not be able to stand another European winter in the trenches. It is decided that the Indian Corps will be withdrawn from the Western Front, sent back to Egypt and hence to Mesopotamia where they will be the garrison divisions which will hold Baghdad but behind all this was the spectre of withdrawal from Gallipoli and the ramifications for the muslim world of what that might mean. If Britain is seen to pulling out when faced by a muslim power what effect will that have upon the muslims in India?

Even when the politicians made their decision and said, as long as you think you are strong enough, then you can advance on Baghdad. This instruction was made on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1915 but Townshend still cannot move, for as soon as a supply ship appears, the troops eat most of the provisions and he cannot build stocks for any advance. On November 11<sup>th</sup> Townshend eventually makes the start of his advance and between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November, he fights a brutal battle at Ctesiphon with the Turkish forces covering Baghdad. These were not the Turkish troops encountered up until now, these men were fresh, well trained regulars, not the local militias. During this battle the British forces sustained 5000 men wounded out of a force of around



13000. The Turks probably sustained losses of double that but despite penetrating the old Turkish front line the British troops could make no further advance and the idea of a retreat became a possibility. It is really the 5000 wounded that becomes the story of Ctesiphon. In the rush to build up supplies for the advance, medical supplies were well down the list of priorities and the Medical Officers at Ctesiphon were short of even the most basic of medical supplies, this despite the warehouses in Basra being filled with these essentials, they could not be moved to the troops. Many of the wounded lay out in the open for four days and those that were collected were taken on unsprung animal carts to be deposited on the riverside, the idea being just to get them downriver as fast as possible, back to Basra. Barges which had just arrived bringing mules were pressed into service as transport for the wounded, there being no time even to clean these of the mule dung before the wounded were loaded into the open steel barges and sent off downstream.

Tony then read an extract from the testimony to the Inquiry of Major Carter, commander of the hospital ship *Pirella*, lying at Basra. He described the appalling conditions on board two barges which had arrived - wounded men packed to overflowing, no protection from the elements - and lying in their own dysenteric excrement.

An accusation made about Nixon, was that, although he was sick at the time, a message was sent under his name to Chamberlain advising that the wounded had been evacuated `well`. Subsequently, based on this information, Chamberlain made a statement to this effect in Parliament.

The Indian Divisions from France were hurried to Mesopotamia but they arrived piecemeal and again the limited amount of transport available meant that it was fighting men only who were transported upriver to try and break the siege of Kut. Medical units were again left in Basra and again the wounded had to suffer the agonies of being sent back to Basra from the front without even basic medical care. As is so often the case, the country reacted by sending, not only the two Divisions from France but several brigades from India and Egypt, as well as the 13<sup>th</sup> (New Army) Division was sent from Gallipoli.

Between January and April six very valiant attempts were made to lift the siege on Kut. The weather was truly appalling, flooded trenches, with men often being drowned, conditions which were seen later on the Western Front in Flanders in 1917.

No story of British `derring-do` would be complete without the `forlorn hope` and in April 20<sup>th</sup> a steamer, the *Julna*, with sandbagged and with rudimentary armour plating, manned by a volunteer crew attempted to break through to Kut with desperately needed supplies. At midnight the steamer ran into Turkish cables stretched across the river and was subjected to intensive fire. The *Julna* was beached and those few men left alive were taken prisoner. The *Julna`s* skipper, Cowley was shot by the Turks and he and Firmin, who had commanded the force and had been killed in the engagement were awarded posthumous VCs.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> Townshend surrendered. Until the surrender of Singapore in a later war, the surrender at Kut was the largest ever surrender of British troops. 13000 were marched into captivity, less than half survived to return home.

Back in the UK rumours started to filter back, particularly about the `treatment` of the wounded but the censorship was draconian and every effort was made to ensure that the truth did not get back to Britain. However, some wounded officers did get back to Britain and were quite happy to talk to anyone who would listen about the appalling conditions. Lord Selbourne, one of Chamberlain`s Conservative colleagues, whose son had been killed in one of the relief attempts, passed on his son`s letters describing the conditions to Chamberlain so he became

aware through unofficial channels as to what the situation was really like and subsequently hounded the Viceroy for more detailed information as to what was happening. Finally on the 31st March 1916 at Chamberlain's insistence the Vincent-Bingley Commission which included a member of the British Red Cross was appointed and they started to investigate and write up their report which was considered by all to be a fair and in depth report as to what had gone on. Asquith was coming under pressure from Parliament and the Press whilst waiting in the wings was his nemesis David Lloyd George.

The official Opposition, if there can be such a thing in a coalition was Sir Edward Carson.



Carson had held office in the Coalition but had resigned over another issue and was determined to hold Asquith to account and led the Parliamentary challenge to Asquith over Mesopotamia and this dragged on and on. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1916, Bonar-Law, for the government, finally agreed that he would place the papers pertaining to Mesopotamia before the House and this decision was met by absolute horror. Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary, was appalled and badgered behind the scenes at the War Office and at the Admiralty to get the decision reversed. Finally Asquith, on the 18<sup>th</sup> June Asquith stood up in the House and, citing security reasons, refused to release the papers. However, the furore did not die down and in mid-July the War Committee agreed to the Mesopotamia and Dardanelles Enquiries and a Commission of Enquiry was enacted by Act of Parliament in August 1916.

The enquiry took evidence and was complete by the end of 1917 - not like the seven years on the modern Iraq Enquiry. Finally, at the end of 1916, Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister. Lloyd George reshuffled the Cabinet and Chamberlain was told he was to retain the India Office thereby becoming the longest serving minister in a single office in the whole of the First World War.

Whilst the Committee was taking its evidence things moved on in Mesopotamia with General Maude taking Baghdad on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1917 and pushed on. On 23<sup>rd</sup> of May the Home Secretary received the report of the Commission - a copy of which Tony showed to those in attendance. The War Committee asked Lord Curzon to read the report and report back to them which he did on June 5<sup>th</sup> Curzon told Chamberlain that he was the only Official who came out of this affair well. Time and again it was raised in the War Cabinet - can publication be avoided - as there was no doubt that it would have a negative effect given its damning nature. Finally Cabinet had the choice - publish or face a confidence vote in the House. Lloyd George decided not to risk facing such a motion in the House and the decision was made to publish. It was placed before the House on June 14<sup>th</sup> 1917 but not released to the Press until eleven days later.

When Austen Chamberlain received his copy he said it was the saddest, most appalling document he ever had the misfortune to read. Criticism of Chamberlain was limited to his use of private telegrams and letters where he should have sent these openly and in public form. Despite this there was nothing in the report that warranted his resignation. Despite this, a sizeable number of politicians in the House were demanding that heads must roll.

On the day before the two day debate in the House, Rudyard Kipling published his poem 'Mesopotamia' - published jointly in the *Morning Post* and *The New York Times* and its line "They shall not return to us, the resolute, the young, the eager and whole-hearted whom we gave: But the men who left them thriftily to die in their own dung," caught the mood of the public.

When the report was published the Cabinet realised they would have to say what they were going to do about it and through May, June and into July, Cabinet meeting after Cabinet

meeting they debated what they were going to do about it. They came up with the idea of punishing the RAMC officers by sacking them or forcing them to resign under the auspices of the Army Act, Royal Warrant, Article 527. That was fine until they told the Army Council and the Judge Advocate General told the politicians that they simply could not do that as the Cabinet did not have the power to sack people - only the Army Council had that power - and the Army Council, having looked at the report concluded that it did not constitute a fair trial. Evidence had been given under oath but interviewees were not represented; they were not given the benefit of reading the evidence before it was published and basically it was felt that no prosecution, based upon that document would succeed.

This left the Government with two choices,

1. Do nothing - take no action
2. Look around and find another way to punish those found to be culpable

They came up with an obscure precedent which had been used the year before involving General Jack Cowans who had been accused of being unduly influenced by Lady Denbigh over the appointment of a young officer. Using this, the Cabinet told the Army Council they could investigate non-military people, which of course meant Chamberlain, Hardinge and other non-military people named in the report. The Army were aghast at this as they were, in effect, being told to investigate a Minister of the Crown and responded by saying they wanted a written instruction from the Prime Minister telling them to do this. Cabinet refused so the Army Council said no, we will not do this. In the four day run up to the Parliamentary debate there were four Cabinet meetings - two exclusively devoted to the question as to what to do with the Commission`s report.

Finally the Cabinet agreed to write a preamble to the instruction to the Army to investigate the findings of the report involving non-military people.

Whilst all this is going on the `mob at the gates` is howling for the blood of those whom they felt were responsible for the Mesopotamia debacle and a government who did not seem to be able to answer the basic question - what are you going to do about it ?? The clamour increased in Parliament and Chamberlain, whatever else, was an astute politician, and he could see how things were developing and his friends were saying to him, `we know you will do the right thing`. The expectation was that he would resign even though he was one of the few persons to come out of the Report`s findings with an untarnished reputation. The other big issue in the India Office was early stage planning for Indian self-government and he knew, because of the furore, he would not be able to see this through. On July 11<sup>th</sup> Austen Chamberlain tendered his resignation to the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, who at first refused to accept it, but finally did after Chamberlain`s insistence. At 7pm on July 12<sup>th</sup>, Chamberlain rose and addressed the House of Commons. The House was full, and his speech was frequently interrupted by loud cheers from all sides. His resignation was the scrupulously honourable thing to do. Edwin Montagu succeeded Chamberlain at the India Office, a position he held until March 1922. The next day it was announced that there would be no further enquiries into the Mesopotamia `affair`. Austen Chamberlain`s resignation allowed the government to put the matter behind them. Much to the disgust of the Conservative members of the Coalition, Lloyd George, brought Winston Churchill back into government as Minister of Munitions.

Over the next few months the Army Council exonerated most of the soldiers, including Nixon, the view being that if we penalise Generals for taking risks how can we ever sustain the Empire.

In April 1918, however, Chamberlain returned to government, this time with a seat on the War Cabinet, a position he retained until the end of the war and he went on to have an illustrious

parliamentary career in the inter-war period, including Chancellor of the Exchequer for a second time and Foreign Secretary. A winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, he was, briefly, leader of the Conservative Party although he was the only Conservative Leader, up until William Hague, not to become Prime Minister.

The Chilcot Report on the modern Iraq war, does, like its predecessor in 1917 seems to offer disappointment.

Tony then wound up his excellent presentation by saying at least the 2 million words of the Chilcot Report will keep historians in jobs for years to come.

We then, as is our custom, handed the meeting over to the members, to question the speaker. A question was asked that after all the dust had settled was anyone penalised for their shortcomings in the Mesopotamia Campaign. Tony` s reply was that Surgeon General HG Hathaway who had been responsible for care of the wounded during the campaign was stripped of his Services Pension as it was considered he could have been more proactive in his duties. The meeting concluded with a question as to whether the blame for the disaster at Kut should be attributed solely upon General Townshend, to which Tony responded by saying in his opinion, whatever one thought of Townshend as a person and many did not like him, to lay the blame for the failure of this campaign cannot be laid solely at his door.

A most enlightening presentation, delivered in his usual confident, flowing manner and we record our gratitude to Branch Chairman, Tony Bolton, not only for an excellent talk, but being able to present it at such short notice.

XX

Branch Chairman, Tony Bolton received the undernoted just before this Newsletter / Magazine was finalised. Would any members be interested in taking this on as a Branch Project, maybe actually taking part in the 26km walk itself ? If so have a word with Tony or any other member of the Committee.

*Dear Tony*

*If it has not already happened, then the latest edition of the WFA Bulletin (108) should be hitting your doormat at any time soon. On the penultimate page The Durand Group have a poster calling for interest in **LoosBigWalk2018**, scheduled for the weekend of 22-23 September 2018. We're not looking for anything other than interest at this stage but we would invite you and your branch members to visit the website: [www.loosbigwalk2018.net](http://www.loosbigwalk2018.net) to find out a bit more about what we are proposing. Both the poster and the FAQs can be downloaded from the site but I have also included them with this email.*

*On the basis that some of your members might not be able to actually do the walk, but might still be able to contribute in other ways, we are also asking you to give real consideration, whether on an individual or a branch basis, to supporting one of several educational **KEEPS**, spaced throughout the Loos Salient on the weekend, wherein information and facilities will be available for walk participants. It would be a great opportunity to tell the story of those regiments and battalions from your branch area that fought the 1915 battle and the subsequent operations to defend the salient up until the armistice in 1918.*

*We hope that, subject to availability, part of the walk will also include a 1km section of the Hulluch tunnels. The FAQs give details of how we see this working in practice and answer most of the initial questions people might have regarding the walk.*

*Best wishes, Andy, Andy Prada Event Organiser: LoosBigWalk2018 [contact@loosbigwalk2018.net](mailto:contact@loosbigwalk2018.net)*



### **350 Field Squadron (Explosive Ordnance Disposal)**

Battle of Messines and Tunnelling Companies RE  
(Commemoration Dinner)  
at the Army Reserve Centre, Chilwell, Nottingham.  
Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017



Branch vice chair Mark Macartney (accompanied with his partner Jean Walker) had pleasure in accepting a personal Invite to attend the above function from the Commanding Officer of 350 Field Squadron (RE)

350 Field Squadron RE (based at Chetwynd Barracks in Nottingham and Wallis Barracks in Chesterfield), held a Dinner Night to Commemorate the Battle of Messines and the vital part played in it by the Tunnelling Companies of the Royal Engineers. As 350s recruiting area includes the former mining communities of Notts and Derbys, the event paid particular homage to the miners who served in the Tunnelling Companies - as well as the involvement of the Sherwood Foresters in the Battle of Messines.

This was as local an event as could be made possible, as well as adhering to the protocol of having a number of senior military figures present.

Mark said that it was an honour to have been invited to attend, At the Pre Dinner reception in the Officers Mess Mark had the Branch Pop up banner on display and literature, such as leaflets explaining the WFA, plus membership applications and membership deal giving him an opportunity to meet everyone at the pre dinner drinks reception and explain who he is and his links to Chilwell. This was a means to spread the word about the WFA.

Also on display was information boards about the tunnellers and the Birmingham Pals, A Living History group also had someone in uniform in the Mess with a collection of weapons. All in all, there'll was plenty to stimulate the minds of the guests and get them 'into the zone' for the evening. During the meal (between courses) Sergeant Brazier gave brief talks about the Tunnellers' and the Royal Engineers. And finally all attendees were gifted with a slate coaster to commemorate the Event

THE 2017 DOUGLAS HAIG FELLOWSHIP LUNCHEON -9<sup>th</sup> June at Cavalry and Guards Club

Branch Vice Chair Mark Macartney, attended the above function where he was joined by many friends old and new including speakers Peter Hart and Charles Messenger.

A good attendance was present to enjoy this fantastic annual event.

The Lunch was preceded by a drinks reception enabling friends to renew friendships and make new ones.

During Lunch a Polo trophy was on display, won by the then Lieutenant General Sir Douglas Haig.

Following lunch, the rather wonderful Alexandra Churchill, (see photo under) the Haig Fellow for 2017, delivered her address 'Constitutional Monarchy and Command: George V and his Generals'.



Alexandra Churchill has published a number of books about the First World War. Her first book, *Blood and Thunder: the Boys of Eton College during the Great War* was published in 2014. This was followed by *Somme: 141 Days, 141 Lives and Dark Winter*, the first in a planned series of novels set during the period. She has been involved in a number of television programmes covering the conflict including the BBC's *Timewatch* series together with projects covering the air war and the war underground. This year will see the publication of *Passchendaele* and in 2018 a book examining the part played by George V during the war.



Formalities over the majority of attendees gathered at the ever popular local 'Rose & Crown' pub, where an attempt to put the 'world to rights' carried on.



The Western Front AssociationSuffolk BranchSaturday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017Waterfront Building Suffolk University Campus Ipswich1917 Becoming the Senior Partner

Branch Vice Chair Mark Macartney attended the above Function, along with many more all with the same interest and dedication in the Great War.

As always very Informative, educational, thought-provoking stuff, presented with both humour and respect. A massive thank you goes to all speakers. Also the Branded Goods Stand was present and as usual manned by Mark himself,

Really good day extremely interesting speakers with lovely presentations. Good company, good venue, lovely refreshments and first class organisation.

Well done to all involved in the organisation of the event, hard work but definitely worth the effort

Taff Gillingham (WFA Suffolk, chairman welcomed all, thanking everyone attending, Taff said he hoped everyone had a good day, and then introduced the first speaker (Professor Alexander Watson)

Three excellent Speakers

**Professor Alexander Watson 'Turning Point: The War Beyond the Western Front, 1917'**

**Dr Tim Gale 'The French Army in 1917'**

**Rob Thompson 'Messines and the Third Battle of Ypres' –**

Afterwards a Panel session took place where the three speakers were joined by Professor Peter Simkins, Peter Hart and Francois Wicart answering questions put to the Panel.

All speakers covered their “specialist subject” admirably but under is some info and points relating to the speakers and those subjects.

## Speakers' profile pictures



**Alexander Watson**  
(Turning Point)



**Tim Gale**  
(French Army)



**Rob Thompson**  
(Messines)



**Ian Hook**  
(UK War Memorials)

## The Panel



### **Professor Alexander Watson:**

Alexander Watson is Professor of History at Goldsmiths, University of London. He has published widely on East-Central Europe and Britain during the First World War. His first monograph, *Enduring the Great War. Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), was awarded the Institute of Contemporary History and Wiener Library's Fraenkel Prize. His second book, *Ring of Steel. Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London: Penguin / Allen Lane, 2014) is a broad history of the First World War written from the perspectives of its instigators and losers. This book was winner of the 2014 Wolfson History Prize, the 2014 Guggenheim-Lehrman Prize in Military History, the Society for Military History's 2015 Distinguished Book Award and the 2015 British Army Military Book of the Year. The *Sunday Times* named it 'History Book of the Year' for 2014.

*Professor Watson said in his presentation that the Allies should have won the War in 1916-but they didn't, he said 1917 was the most important year in the War, saying the Somme was expected to end the War, The year 1917 was a crossroads of the First World War. Thanks to revolutionary upheaval in the east and a 'sea change' in the Atlantic, this was the year in which Germany nearly won, and then decisively lost the war. His talk outlined the dramatic strategic situation in early 1917, when revolution in Russia and the western Allies' strategic bankruptcy offered the Central Powers their best ever chance at total victory. It then explored how Germany squandered the opportunity and sealed its own defeat with the launch of a catastrophically ill-judged and ruthless submarine blockade against Britain. The war beyond the Western Front was all-important in 1917, resulting in the emergence of new superpowers in east and west, and impacting decisively on both the First World War's outcome and the wider twentieth century. Concluding Professor Watson said look at the title of our today's event "Becoming the Senior Partner" well in 1917 Britain became the Junior Partner.*

**Dr Elizabeth Greenhalgh** was scheduled to present her talk on “The French army in 1917” Unfortunately, she has been in hospital and is unable to make her trip to Europe. Suffolk Branch have sent their best wishes on behalf of everyone and hope that she makes a speedy recovery. Dr Tim Gale took Elizabeth's place.

### **Dr Tim Gale**

Dr Tim Gale was awarded his PhD by the Department of War Studies, King's College London for his work on French tank development and operations in the First World War and he is now one of the leading experts on this aspect of armoured warfare. He has contributed chapters on the subject to several academic books and he has made a special study of the career of the French First World War general Charles Mangin. His book *The French Army's Tank Force and the Development of Armoured Warfare in the Great War* (Ashgate/Routledge) was published in 2013 and was followed by *French Tanks in the Great War* (Pen & Sword, 2016). He is currently researching a book on the Battle of Cambrai.

Dr Gale's talk was called 'From Catastrophe to Renaissance? The French Army in 1917'. In his talk Dr Gale discussed how the French army entered 1917 with new hopes, offered by the new c-in-c Robert Nivelle, that were dashed by the failure on the Chemin des Dames, resulting in widespread disorder in the army. However, the replacement of Nivelle by Petain meant that the army entered 1918 once again with new hopes but this time the army was in a position to realise its aspirations.

Now it was time for a fantastic lunch which was enjoyed by all (the picture does not justify the means),:



After Lunch and before the final presentation by the “Accidental” Military Historian Rob Thompson, An unprogrammed bonus! Ian Hook of the UK War Memorials project speaks about the project before our afternoon session A lot of information was stated here, but in brief, On lost memorials,, 71619 Memorials actioned, 3000 approximately to do, 973062 names so far, 22272 images to go onto the register.

### **Rob Thompson**

Rob Thompson, an “accidental” military historian who prior to becoming an independent military historian taught at the “War Studies Group” (Birmingham University). Finding himself in a Twentieth Century Military History class as part of his undergraduate degree, he elected to present a paper on “Lions Led by Donkeys”, only to be surprised by what he discovered. This was the first step on his road to card-carrying revolution. He now writes about the role of logistics and engineering in the development of BEF's operational method on the Western Front and sits on the Anglo-French ‘GHQ Project’ Committee as a historical advisor. He is co-organiser of ‘Not So Quiet on the Western Front: The New Military History of World war one’. He is currently writing a book on the development of the British Army's logistical system during the Great War, as well as a historical advisor to Bolton Wanderers Football Club Great War Centenary Project. He recently appeared on BBC Television's “Great War Railways” programme alongside Michael Portillo. Rob is a regular speaker on the “Western Front” circuit, His beautiful Italian partner of 27 years patiently waits for the return of the man she once knew whilst his two delightful children continue to develop their capacity to sneer at their fathers failings. His self-deprecation clearly hides a towering ego and an unshakable belief that he, and he alone, is destined to rule the world, He is also very tall.

Rob's opening comments “ they made a Desert and called it victory”, The BEF at Messines 1917, Masterpiece Battle (or what) The depths and Empty Battlefields, Range, Lethality, Power of Defence,

Logistics, This was an Engineers War, The road to the ridge 1915-16. 1916 Haig is thinking BIG, Spring 1916-final plans emerged, Spring 1917-The Final-Final Plan, Haig has long serving problems with Plumer (too cautious), some statistics covered by Rob in different areas/time frame are stated under: (Artillery – The Gods of War)

We Need Guns – Lots of Guns  
Artillery Expansion 1914 – 1917

	<u>1 April 1915</u>	<u>28 July 1917</u>
18 Pounder	625	3061
4.5 Howitzer	116	948
60 Pounder	28	480
6" Howitzer	32	792
8" Howitzer	0	234
9.2 Howitzer	8	190
12" Howitzer	0	42
15" Howitzer	0	10

Scientific Artillery

Counter Battery Fire; Enemy Guns must be suppressed  
Locating the Enemy; Maps  
RFC & Ariel Photography  
Flash Spotting & Sound Ranging.  
Calibrating and Meteor  
Predictive Fire – Zenith of surprise.

1916 – Shelving Plans – Making Plans

21 Feb 1916 - Verdun  
27 Mar 1916 -Joffre warns Haig he may have to commit to Somme  
4 Jun 1916 – Flanders Plan scaled down.  
Jul 1916 – Flanders Plan shelved as Somme develops.  
Nov 1916 – Chantilly Conference,  
Spring attack by French on Aisne and BEF on  
Somme as part of Allies Assault  
Summer, main effort on Flanders led by BEF

The Mines – We shall change geography

19 Mines  
500 tons (half million pounds) Explosive  
Largest single man made explosion until Trinity nuclear test until  
July 1945  
Most furious element of Messines  
Not necessarily the most important element



### Messines Artillery Preparation

Preparatory Bombardment - 11 days – 26 May to 6 June

2266 Artillery Pieces,

1158 18 Pdrs

352 4.5 Wowitzers

1 gun per 7.5 yards

144000 tons Ammo Dumped,

86000 tons for main barrage

3561,530 shells fired

1 ton per second fired,

After the final coffee break a Panel session took place (Chaired by Taff Gillingham) where the three speakers were joined by Prof Peter Simkins, Peter Hart and Francois Wicart in this lively session.

Although Taff, Prof Peter Simkins and Peter Hart need no introduction their biography is under; and as is Francois Wicart

**Peter Hart:** Being a well known jovial but sincere “chappie” Peter has been Oral Historian at the Sound Archive of the Imperial War Museum since 1981, His publications include “1918: A Very British Victory” and “Gallipoli” and “Fire and Movement” ; the BEF and the campaign of 1914.

**Peter Simkins** President of the Western Front Association (WFA) and was a founder member of the Suffolk Branch. Formally Senior Historian at the Imperial War Museum. He is currently Honorary Professor of Western Front Studies at the University of Wolverhampton and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, as well as a member of both the Army Records Society and the British Commission for Military History. Author of the definitive text on Kitchener’s Army, and many other publications. he has recently published “From the Somme to Victory”: “The British Army’s Experience on the Western Front 1916-18” He lives in Cheltenham. He is a jazz pianist and record collector and also a long suffering fan of Ipswich Town.

**Taff Gillingham:** a Military Historian specialising in the British Army between 1899 and 1960. He was co-founder of The Association for Military Remembrance (The Khaki Chums) , a group of historians, authors and collectors who study the life of the British Soldier during the first half of the Twentieth Century, . He has worked as Historical Advisor on many film and television projects. And with colleagues, he is building a unique First World War visitor centre at Hawstead, near Bury St Edmonds. He is currently Chairman of Suffolk WFA.

**Francois Wicart** Francois Wicart is a French national, who studied at both French and British Universities before qualifying as a conferencier for the French Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 1981. He was for a time head of the volunteer restoration team for the French Ministry of Historic Building, where he specialised in medieval fortification. He was lecturer on military history and guided battlefield tours for thirty years. He has published various articles on the Battle of Verdun, as well as on nineteenth and twentieth century fortification.

After the Panel session they joined Trustees, appointees and members to a lovely meal at the Novatel Ipswich where the world was put to rights.

## ARMED FORCES DAY – RETFORD

Kings Park (Retford) Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2017



ARMED FORCES DAY  
SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

Retford

**ARMED FORCES DAY**

armedforcesday.org.uk

incorporating the  
**RETFORD GUIDES CARNIVAL**  
**KINGS PARK, RETFORD**  
10.00-15.00, SATURDAY 17 JUNE 2017

09.30:	Raising of the Union Flag, Market Square
09.30-10.30:	Free Veteran's Breakfast Club, Kings Park
10.00-15.00:	Armed Forces Day event, Kings Park
10.45:	Guide Parade leaves the Market Square
11.15:	Inspection by Civic Dignitaries, Kings Park

Branch Vice Chair Mark Macartney once again attended this Event, where he “flew the flag” and spread the word for the Association, handing out a few Membership Application Forms and explained where the nearest Branches were (there is none in Retford) in a very hot sunny Saturday afternoon. Retford Armed Forces Day Committee were thrilled with their 2nd Annual Armed Forces Day event held in Kings Park on Saturday 17 June 2017. The day began with a short ceremony at the War Memorial involving raising of the Armed Forces Day Standard on Retford Town Hall, at 09.00. A number of military units were in attendance throughout the day, as was the Retford Branch of the Royal British Legion and several Armed Forces charities. Veterans were, once again, offered a free breakfast, served between 09.00 and 10.30. All veterans were welcome to attend. Retford Army Cadets, Retford Air Training Corps Club and other youth groups also took part in the events. Retford Guides also held their annual carnival in cooperation with the Armed Forces Day celebrations.



And to end the day off in style, Mark's partner (Jean) won the “name the (RAF) Teddy, (Jeanne)



## Forgotten WW1 hero who 'never existed' honoured in Leicester



**A World War One veteran who took part in a daring attack to stop German vessels entering the English Channel has been honoured with a new headstone.**

Pte Archibald William Toach, from Leicester, was badly injured during the Zeebrugge Raid, in April 1918, but lived for another 10 years. He did not have a military burial and his grave remained unmarked. David Humberston, from the Western Front Association, said there had been little record he had ever existed.

### 'Back to life'

Pte Toach, who lied about his age to fight in the war, received severe injuries to his right arm, from which he would never fully recover. However, despite his disability he saved two children from drowning in Bournemouth, shortly before he died aged 28. Mr Humberstone, who tracked down Pte Toach's unmarked grave, in Belgrave Cemetery, Leicester, said providing a headstone for the soldier would "bring him back to life". "He should be better remembered," he said. "A lot of men's [graves] were like this, unmarked. Only a few dusty records said he existed at all. "The injured, those suffering from wounds, tended to get missed. They didn't have the support they would get now." A new headstone was unveiled by representatives of the Friends of Belgrave Cemetery and the Leicestershire & Rutland branch of the Western Front Association, at Belgrave Cemetery on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> July.

**David Humberstone will be a speaker at a Chesterfield Branch meeting in 2018**

XX

## Workshop Armed Forces Day - June 24th

The Branch had a presence at this, the first ever Workshop Armed Forces Day, organised by Workshop Royal British Legion. Although it seems to have been a wet summer this day was warm and sunny. Branch Secretary, Grant Cullen was ably assisted on our stand on the day by members Jon-Paul Harding, Roger Avill and Jane Lovatt. We had a display of models, books, medals and other ephemera which attracted a lot of attention - particularly as we were situated in the Clubhouse close by the bar.....and the loos ! Well everyone needs the loo at some time !.

During the day we were visited by author (and WFA member) Carole McEntee-Taylor who writes both military history and historical fiction. Her First World War books include The Battle of Bellawarde 1915 and a biography of Herbert Columbine VC.

Such was the success of this day, Workshop RBL are already planning another Armed Forces Day in 2018



**Worksop Royal British Legion & Crossing Church Centre**  
**Passchendaele Centenary Commemoration**  
**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

My wife and I attended the evening of Commemoration & Remembrance which began at the Worksop Memorial Garden, close by the Worksop War Memorial on Central Avenue.

David Scott, Chairman Worksop RBL, welcomed all present. The purpose of this part of the Commemoration was to plant crosses, each with the name of a Worksop man - 48 of them - who fell in the service of their Country at the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917. Councillor Maddy Richardson, Chairman Bassetlaw District Council, laid the first cross, followed by the other guests, members of other organisations and members of the public. Once all the crosses were in place, David Scott, spoke the fourth stanza Binyon`s poem `For the Fallen`. Last Post was played, followed by a minute`s Silence, then Reveille. The Rev. Geoffrey Clarke, of The Crossing Church and Centre, closed this short ceremony with a prayer.



The Civic Dignitaries stand in front of Worksop`s 1914-1918 War Memorial Wall after the laying of the crosses.

At the conclusion of the service, all were invited to attend the Service of Commemoration at the Crossing Church.

After the opening hymn the Rev. Geoffrey Clarke welcomed all in attendance then asked Bob Illett of the Western Front Association to set the scene by describing the developments leading to the Battles of Ypres in 1917 through to the conclusion of those battles in November of that year.

When Bob concluded the Mayor of Worksop Councillor Sybil Fielding read John Macrae`s poem *In Flanders Fields*.



The service continued with hymns, bible readings and poems, whilst the minister, the Rev. Geoffrey Clarke - who is Chaplain to the Worksop RBL and 303 (Worksop) Air Training Corps - gave an address entitled *'Stuck in the Mud'*.

After prayers, the Chairman of Nottinghamshire County Council, Councillor John Handley gave a concluding word of thanks to all who had organised the event.

The Circuit Choristers then sang Binyon's immortal poem to a tune composed by Edward Elgar.

Then came the most moving part of the evening's ceremonies. The Act of Remembrance

Members of 303(Worksop) Air Cadets read out the names of the 48 men in whose memory we had just planted crosses in the Memorial Garden. As each name was read out another member of the Air Cadet's party lit a candle in Commemoration of each individual.

A bugler played Last Post, followed by a two minute silence then Reveille.

RBL member Adie Platts then read the Kohima Epitaph

`When you go home, tell them of us and say,  
For their tomorrow, we gave our today`

This was followed by the National Anthem, closing hymn and the Blessing by the Rev. Clarke.

All then retired to The Crossing Centre Café for tea and coffee

XX

### **Road in Warsop renamed Robert Bye Way after VC-winning soldier.**



A road has been renamed after a Victoria Cross-winning soldier - but the sign does not mention his medal. Sgt Robert Bye won the award for storming a series of German strong points at the start of the **battle of Passchendaele**, 100 years ago. He moved to Warsop in Nottinghamshire and its inner relief road will become Robert Bye Way in his honour. Organisers said the sign did not carry the letters "VC" to reflect his modesty about his wartime exploits. Mr Bye, who was born in Pontypridd and served with the Welsh Guards, was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions at the Yser canal on 31 July 1917 - the first day of the three-month battle. His company came under machine-gun fire from a heavily fortified system of blockhouses. He single-handedly destroyed one blockhouse and led men to take several more,

capturing 70 enemy soldiers. Mr Bye came to live in Warsop in 1925 with his wife Mabel. They had two sons and two daughters.



Project co-ordinator Adrian Hardy said Mr Bye's surviving daughter Mary Moody described him as a modest man who hardly ever spoke about his VC - the highest award available to the British and Commonwealth armed forces for gallantry in action with the enemy. "But we felt it was right that he should be remembered in the town he made his home," Mr Hardy said. "He was a big part of the community; he was a special constable and helped the British Legion." Mr Bye was also awarded the Legion d'Honneur by the French government. A plaque is planned for Warsop parish church. Mr Bye, who worked at Warsop and Welbeck collieries, died in 1962.

XX

The undernoted article appeared recently on the BBC website.

### The village that gave its men to war





**Brimington near Chesterfield in north-east Derbyshire, sent hundreds of its men to fight in World War One. Fifteen of them were killed at Passchendaele. Now, a couple from the village have traced out the lives, and graves, of those who died on the battlefield 100 years ago.**

Charles Hurst and Fred Hobson were friends, bound together by their lives in Brimington, a busy working-class village where they lived during the early 1900s. They worked in the same production shop for the Staveley Coal and Iron Company, and played cricket together. Most notably of all, both stepped forward on the same day in March 1917 to enlist, and fight for their country. After basic training, they both joined The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment on 20 July, just before the Battle of Passchendaele. That battle began on 31 July 1917, and is one of the most-remembered battles of World War One. An estimated 320,000 men were killed and wounded on the Allied side, and the conditions were nightmarish. Some parts of the muddy battlefield were so deep that men drowned.

Fred, 23, got married five days before signing up. We don't know if Charles, 22, was there, or if he was Fred's best man, but it seems possible. What we do know is that these two young friends, who worked, played sport and went to war together, died together at Passchendaele on 12 October, and that their bodies have never been found. There are no photographs of them, but their names are engraved on the Tyne Cot Memorial in Belgium.



We only know all this today because of Sally and Stuart Mullins, a couple from Brimington who have spent years bringing to life those men who sacrificed theirs. "Stuart had an uncle who died in World War One, and another in World War Two," says Sally. "In 1998 I got hold of an aged computer and started tinkering around on the internet, looking for information on his relatives. Then I just began looking into soldiers from Brimington." Sally, 64, says she and Stuart, 70, have worked as a team on their relentless research. Stuart describes his wife as "research", and himself as "logistics".



Sally's starting point was the village's war memorial, containing 120 names. She says the number of those killed is actually higher, but for various reasons some were not included on the memorial. Many more men were left maimed by the fighting. Using the plaque's names as a base, Sally traced the soldiers' histories, using military records online. Her task was not made easier by some vague names, such as F Brown. And to complicate matters, some names were misspelled. Charles's surname of "Hurst", for example, is recorded as "Hirst". She also spent hours at Chesterfield library, squinting at microfiche replicas of local newspapers, booking the one computer attached to a printer and "spending a fortune" on printing out military records, and newspaper pages containing notices of a soldier's death on a battlefield. .



800 of Brimington's young men went to fight in World War One, and among the many stories Sally has unearthed is one involving four brothers from the village. Private George Bradshaw, 27, joined the Sherwood Foresters in 1915 and saw action in the Balkans and France before his battalion was moved to the Ypres area in 1917. He was awarded the Military Medal for bravery on 16 August 1917 but was killed at Passchendaele on 19 October, leaving behind a wife and young son. He is buried in Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium, but his headstone only became engraved with "MM", to mark his medal, after the Mullins spotted that it was missing and reported it. George's brother John was shot in the ankle in 1915 and died in the Battle of Arras in April 1917, while another sibling, Thomas, died in Belgium in October 1914. Just one brother, Len, who served in India and France with the Yorks and Lancs regiment, survived the war. There is no record of the boys' mother in the local archives, or of how she coped with such a terrible loss to her family.





Mention must be given to one of Brimington's residents, Fred Greaves, who won a Victoria Cross for his bravery at Passchendaele. Although born elsewhere in Derbyshire, he loved living in the village and remained there after the war until his death in 1973.

What's also come to light is how the young men of the village at the start of the 20th Century, who worked in mines and did back-breaking factory work, were clearly as fit as a fiddle. "Our local schoolboys' football trophy was the Clayton Challenge Shield - it was the prestigious competition of that era," says Sally. "By 1913 Brimington boys had won the shield four times in eight years. "Unfortunately by the summer of 1917 and Passchendaele, at least seven players of the old Brimington teams were already dead, killed in action in earlier arenas of the Great War."

Years later, armed with an updated computer, Sally has now painstakingly pieced together enough information to run a Brimington History website and self-publish a memorial book of all the village men lost to the war. She coos and rubs her palm lovingly over the page of one soldier as she talks about him.

Since August 2014 she has been printing out a list of the soldiers who died in the corresponding month 100 years ago, during World War One. This goes on display on an altar at one of Brimington's churches, where it is read out by the rector at the start of each month.



Not only have the Mullins made a huge effort to remember Brimington's boys on paper, they have travelled extensively around Belgium and northern France to find their graves.

Sally and Stuart, who are attending the 100-year commemorations being held at Passchendaele, have been making about four visits a year to the region. They started in 2004, driving themselves around with maps and their own, Brimington-inspired itinerary. Once, they covered a 1,000-square-mile area in a week.

They seek out the well-known cemeteries containing thousands of soldiers, as well as tiny plots with a few dozen bodies laid to rest, ones not usually found on battlefield tours. It's in all these places that they find the men from their village.

Stuart says upon reaching the grave of any of "our lads", the couple feel "heartbreak" and sometimes become tearful. He also says they follow the same ritual each time.

Stuart reaches out his hand to demonstrate and speaks with a Derbyshire accent, warm and comforting.

"We always pat the headstone and say 'We're here, lad. We're here.'"

XX

## ***The Chase Project***

Staffordshire County Council, the New Zealand Government, New Zealand Defence Force, Wolverhampton Western Front Association and The Chase Project military research group are working together to commemorate the time the New Zealand Rifle Brigade (NZRB) was based on Cannock Chase, Staffordshire during the Great War.

In June 2016, having seen one of the impressive New Zealand First World War Trail 'Ngā Tapuwāe' ("In the Footsteps") steel information panels ([www.ngatapuwa.govt.nz](http://www.ngatapuwa.govt.nz)) at Messines in Belgium, Richard Pursehouse and Lee Dent of The Chase Project/ Wolverhampton WFA discussed the possibility of one of these panels for Cannock Chase with Stephen Dean, the Principle Archaeologist for Staffordshire, who had overseen the excavation of the Messines Model in 2013 at Cannock Chase. The 'terrain model' had been constructed as a training aid by the New Zealanders in 1918, four months after they had captured the Belgian village (June 1917).

This ambitious 'crowdfunding' appeal to raise funds for a similar panel on Cannock Chase, which will be positioned outside the County's Great War Hut (an original hut from the Great War camps on Cannock Chase) at Marquis Drive Visitors' Centre, Hednesford, already has a pledge of £1,000 from the New Zealand Government.

Constructed of 10mm folded 'Corten' steel, with an iconic 'silver fern' shape cut out of the base representing marching soldiers reflected in water, the 1.5 metre wide panel will incorporate information about Apps, websites, downloads of information, travel guides and interactive maps. Several of these panels have already been installed in places significant to New Zealand during the Great War - Gallipoli, The Somme, Messines and Passchendaele.

If the crowdfunding appeal is successful, the panel will highlight the time the New Zealand Rifle Brigade (NZRB) spent on Cannock Chase between 1917 and 1919, and will include information on the training undertaken, the terrain model of Messines, Freda the Great Dane mascot of the NZRB, and the close ties between the people from nearby towns and the men who came from so far away: a bond which has remained unbroken to the present day.

The Cannock Chase panel will form part of the international network that also covers the departure of troops from New Zealand as well as the battles in Turkey, France and Belgium. Lee and Richard feel this is a fantastic opportunity to promote awareness and understanding of the Western Front - the underlying ethos of the WFA.

The story of the annual Anzac ceremony that first took place in 1918 (there are 73 New Zealanders buried in Cannock's CWGC cemetery), the recently discovered Stafford Shooting Shield given to the NZRB in 1920 (which is still competed for in New Zealand) and the Flag Exchange ceremony

in May 1919 (the NZRB departed from Cannock Chase the following month) will also be incorporated.

Already the idea has the support of local MPs including Amanda Milling, Michael Fabricant and Jeremy Lefroy (plus Daniel Dalton MEP), historical societies, The Dolores Cross Project (as Cannock CWGC was the first cemetery in the world her Dolores Crosses were placed on NZ graves) in New Zealand ([www.dolorescrossproject.org](http://www.dolorescrossproject.org)), the Western Front Association (UK and NZ) and the Royal British Legion.

Lee, Richard and two friends from Cannock Chase were invited to the Messines centenary ceremonies by the New Zealand High Commission and while there they placed a Royal British Legion wooden cross on the grave of Thomas Jackson of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion Australian Imperial Force who was killed at Messines. Jackson came from Cannock Chase, the family living a few hundred yards from where Richard lives today, and is also commemorated on Cannock's war memorial. We also placed a WFA wreath on the grave of Thomas Barratt VC, and at the Messines Stone of Sacrifice.

The aim is to run the appeal until Christmas 2017 and it is hoped the panel will be installed for the end of May 2018 - the centenary of the construction of the Messines model on Cannock Chase.

Anyone interested in this story and would like more information or pledge a donation can contact Lee and Richard - [thechaseproject@gmail.com](mailto:thechaseproject@gmail.com) and they will note your pledge (no payments at the moment).



The New Zealand Rifle Brigade on Cannock Chase



The NZRB Farewell Flag Exchange in 1919



Lee Dent and Richard Pursehouse



The Messines model at Cannock in 1920



## Jon Cooksey - The Vest Pocket Kodak



Jon, of course is Editor of the renowned WFA journal *Stand To !* and was a last minute addition to the speakers list at the York Conference, presenting a paper based upon his latest book *'The Vest Pocket Kodak and the First World War - the Camera and Conflict'* He is a leading military historian who takes a special interest in the history of the world wars and the Falklands War. He is the former editor of *Battlefields Review* and his articles have appeared in many of the foremost military magazines and in national newspapers. As an experienced battlefield guide, he regularly leads tours to the battlefields of both world wars as well as the Falkland Islands. His TV and radio appearances include the Channel 5 programme on the 1914 Christmas Truce and and Great War soldier Ronald Poulton Palmer and Gallipoli Victoria Cross winner Frederick Potts for the BBC. His books include *The Barnsley Pals*, *Flanders 1915*, *Calais: A Fight to the Finish* and *3 Para Mount Longdon - The Bloodiest Battle*.



Jon began by saying that The Great War was very much a letter writing war but most of us are familiar with the stock images that appear in books and articles from time to time from the archive of stock images of the Imperial War Museum. But what about those photos that we have never seen.

The **Vest Pocket Kodak** camera was a best-selling folding camera series made by Eastman Kodak(Rochester), from 1912 to 1926. They were the first cameras to use the smaller 127 spool film. A strut folding variant had a f/6.8 72mm achromatic meniscus lens, hidden behind a mask that allowed a max. aperture f/11. It had to be loaded through the top with both film spools at once. It had the small three-blade variant of Kodak's ball bearing shutter No.0. Folded it was really handsome, not bigger than most modern compact cameras or iphones. By `vest` the meaning was of course American for `waistcoat`

It first appeared in April 1912 and cost \$6 or £3 10/-. It revolutionised the amateur photography market and sparked a craze for photography.



By 1914 sales in the UK run to 5000 and many were taken by members of the BEF when they embarked for France and Belgium at the commencement of the war.



The instruction manual was published in English, French, Italian - and German.



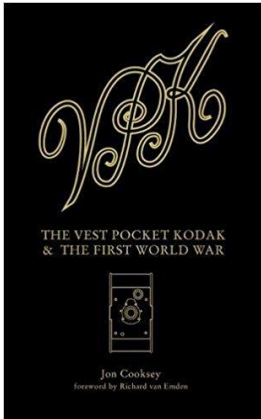
One of the first action shots of the war is one which has been reproduced many times - a sharpnel burst above a supply wagon with an officer sustaining a head wound was taken by a vest pocket camera and appeared in the War Illustrated magazine in November 1914

When pictures of the Christmas Truce taken by these cameras started appearing in newspapers and magazines early 1915 the military authorities decided to clamp down on the possession in the field of cameras and film and it became a field court martial offence.

Of course this did not stop the use of and the taking of photographs as so many men wanted a record of `their` war and photos appeared not just those taken on the Western Front but in other theatres - Salonika, Gallipoli Egypt and Palestine.

He recalled how he recently rescued a collection of photographs which had been taken by a Vest Pocket Camera and were about to be dumped in a skip following a house clearance - how many images have in fact been lost in this way, he asked

Jon then went on to use examples of early `fake news` where careful selection of sections of a print, together with the descriptive commentary, completely changed what the original photograph had shown.



Jon`s book, 96 pages, published by Ammonite Press in May is available from the usual outlets and is good value at less than £10 per copy.



## WFA BRANDED GOODS

<div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">  <p><b>Polo Shirt</b> <span style="float: right;">£17</span> Gents (code 569M) Russell Classic Cotton Pique Polo Shirt (100% ringpop cotton) (all sizes) Ladies (code 569F) Russell Ladies Cotton Pique Polo Shirt (100% ringpop cotton pique) (sizes 8 - 18)</p> </div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">  <p><b>Sweatshirt</b> <span style="float: right;">£18</span> Gents (code 762M) Russell Jerzees Raglan Sweatshirt (50% polyester/50% combed ringpop cotton) Ladies (code 55180) Fruit Of The Loom Lady Fit Lightweight Raglan Sweatshirt (80% cotton Belcare® yarn/20% polyester) (sizes 8 - 18)</p> </div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">  <p><b>T-Shirt</b> <span style="float: right;">£15</span> Gents (code 215M) Russell Classic Heavyweight Combed Cotton T-Shirt (100% combed ringpop cotton) (all sizes) Ladies (code 155F) Russell Ladies Lightweight Slim T-Shirt (100% ringpop cotton)(sizes 10 - 16)</p> </div> <div>  <p><b>Fleece</b> <span style="float: right;">£25</span> Gents (code RG122) Regatta Thor 111 Fleece Jacket (100% polyester anti pill fleece) (all sizes) Ladies (code RG123) Regatta Ladies Thor 111 Fleece Jacket (100% polyester anti pill fleece) (sizes 10 - 20)</p> </div>	<div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">  <p><b>Rugby Shirt</b> <span style="float: right;">£26</span> Gents (code FR100) Front Row Classic Rugby Shirt (100% cotton) (All Sizes Available) Ladies (code FR101) Front Row Ladies Classic Rugby Shirt (100% cotton) (all sizes)</p> </div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">  <p><b>Breathable Jacket</b> <span style="float: right;">£42</span> Gents (code 510M) Russell Hydro 2000 Jacket (Hylon talson with PU Coating) (all sizes) Ladies (code 510F) Russell Hydro 2000 Jacket (Hylon talson with PU Coating) (all sizes)</p> </div> <div>  <p><b>Kustom Kit Short Sleeve Corporate Oxford Shirt</b> <span style="float: right;">£25</span> Gents (code K109) Easy iron fabric. Button down collar. Left chest pocket. Back yoke with centre pleat and hanging loop. Curved hem. Available in long sleeve K105. Collars 14-14.5-15-15.5-16-16.5-17-17.5-18-18.5-19-19.5-20-21-22-23 Ladies (code K701) Easy iron fabric. Tailored fit. Button down collar. Back yoke. Curved hem. Available in long sleeve K702 and 3/4 sleeve K710. 85% cotton/15% polyester. Weight: 125 gm</p> </div>
---	--

Gents sizes: XS S M L XL XXL 3XL 4XL	Ladies sizes: 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28
Chest (to fit): 34/36 36/38 38/40 40/42 42/44 44/46 46/48 48/50	Chest (to fit): 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50

Order all the above clothing (Polo/Sweaters/T-Shirts/Oxford Shirts/Fleeces/Rugby Shirts & Breathable Jackets) direct from the supplier stating that you are member of the Western Front Association to:  
**Unit 95a, Tulketh Street, Southport PR8 1AW**  
 Telephone 0800 169 2228 or 01704 873301 Email: [sales@westcoast-embroidery.co.uk](mailto:sales@westcoast-embroidery.co.uk)  
 Payment is by Credit Card, Bank Transfer or cheque only.  
 Note: an order form and cheque payable to West Coast Embroidery must accompany orders by post

					
<b>Mug</b> £10	<b>Lapel Badge</b> £2.50	<b>The Official WFA Tie</b> £9	<b>Official WFA Baseball Cap</b> £8	<b>Messenger Bag</b> £27	<b>Shoulder Bag</b> £25



**Bookmark** £1.60



To order the above (non clothing items) go to the E-shop on the Website or:  
 Contact: Sarah Gunn, Office Administrator, BM Box 1914, London, WC1N 3XX  
 Tel: 020 7118 1914 Email: [office@westernfrontassociation.com](mailto:office@westernfrontassociation.com) [www.westernfrontassociation.com](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com)