

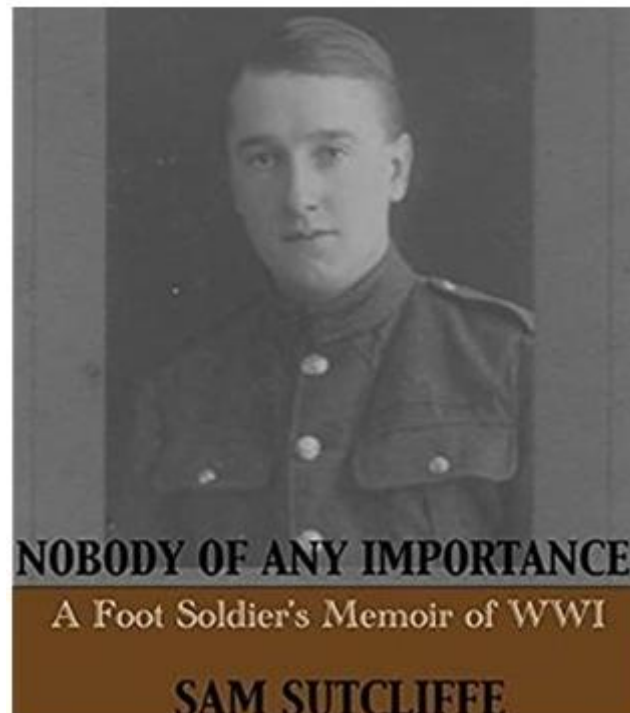
Branch Newsletter – August 2023

September Meeting – please note the revised date of Saturday 16th and mark your diaries.

Next Meeting:

Will be on Saturday 12th August at St Peter's Collegiate School, Compton Park, Compton Rd. West, Wolverhampton WV3 9DU. 2.00pm for a 2.30 kick-off.

Our speaker today is Phil Sutcliffe, with "*A Foot Soldiers Memoir- Part Two, 1917-1919*".



Geoff Noon – an appreciation by our Chairman Alan Angell:

“The branch was formed in 1982, and Geoff joined shortly afterwards. He was also one of the earliest members of the WFA nationally.

Geoff became chairman in 1993, and held the post until 2001. He added the role of speaker finder to his duties from 1994 until 2000. With his friendships and contacts Geoff was able to invite many of the finest speakers to the branch. As a consequence, branch attendances increased considerably under his guidance and leadership.

Geoff was also a gifted speaker in his own right. I vividly remember his talk on trench diseases, lice and a myriad of other maladies which infected both trenches and occupants.

I had only just joined the branch myself, being very impressed by his presentation and knowledge. He was also friendly and approachable, with a willingness to help new members.



Geoff organised the branch Western Front tours from 1998-2000, covering the Somme, Ypres and Arras. He also did two trips to Gallipoli.

Geoff was a regular attendee at the branch until recently, and joined us on three battlefield tours along with his son Stephen.

He took great pleasure in being able to go underground at the Glory Hole at La Boisselle. This was due to his father's connection with the site from his service in the Royal Artillery during the Great War. Geoff was also immensely proud of the plaque and rose bush in memory of his father at Lochnagar Crater. He showed me the location on one of the branch tours.

On a personal note I feel very privileged to have known Geoff, not only for his friendship and knowledge, but also his willingness to share this expertise with others.

My own favourite memory was when Geoff spoke on a branch tour on the outskirts of the village of Flers. We were focusing on the tank attack in 1916 when Geoff asked if he could add a little story of his own. He then proceeded to tell us the story of Swanky Sid. This was the GOC of 41st Division, Sidney Lawford. Their memorial stands in Flers.

This will forever remain one of the highlights of my branch trips, and an abiding memory of Geoff's warmth and knowledge.

With the loss of both Geoff and Rob Thompson in such a short time, the WFA have lost two giants of knowledge and expertise, both blessed with the ability to share this and help others to understand and appreciate events during the Great War.

We will remember both of them with affection and gratitude.

Alan."

I wonder what's buried under Tipton Park?

[Nothing like this, I'm sure....](#)

Richard Pursehouse has found this interesting item:

[The Military Grave Cleaner](#)

Thanks to John Scott for this story:

Thomas Clayton Wallace Lewis was the son of Arthur and Alice and husband of Dorothy. He joined the army as 69255 private T C W Lewis in the 5th Reserve Cavalry (10th Hussars). He was discharged on 28th February 1919 as no longer fit for war service, K R Para 392 xvi. Thomas died of Tuberculosis on 27th January 1921 in Edge View T B Hospital. The family story is that he caught Meningitis from his horse and his widow Dorothy had to fight for a pension due probably because he died just under two years after his discharge. His pension card shows that he was awarded a weekly pension of 40/- for him and 17/6 for his wife and child.

His grandson Robin Charlwood lives in the USA and wished to visit Thomas's grave. He contacted our church and I became involved as I have been producing a data base on the Kinver men and have also produced a web site to remember them. Robin was visiting the continent on business and came to Kinver on Tuesday 20th June. His nephew Ashley and partner met up with him and I picked them up as arranged from Dunsley Hall Hotel where Robin was going to stop the night. When I met them Robin stated that he would have liked to have known which sanatorium Thomas was in, I said nothing. As I drove them through Kinver I pointed out the road to the church but told them that I wanted to show them something first. I then continued to Edge View Home as it now is. As we approached I gave Robin an envelope with something to read. It contained Thomas's death certificate which states that he was in Edge View Hospital. They were really glad that they now not only new but actually had visited the place. The certificate also gave the name of the person who registered his death. This was Thomas's brother in law that they did not know existed. We then went to the Church and met up with a friend who was also involved in the planning of the visit. They were amazed at how clean the headstone was after over 100 years and thanked

me as they already knew that I was a volunteer for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. I produced a poppy wreath for them to lay on Thomas's grave. Afterwards Robin wanted to treat us to a meal and we went to the "Dick Whittington" this is now called the "Manor House". Ashley is thinking about bringing his daughters to visit their Great Grandad.



Chris Twiggs has supplied a supplement to the talk he gave us on the men of Clark Road a while ago:

From Clark Road to clerking. The Story of Michael R L Wood

"I recently gave a talk to the Wolverhampton Society about the men from Clark Road in Wolverhampton who served in the Great War. Some members may remember that I gave a similar talk to the branch at the first meeting as we emerged from the Covid lockdown. At the time I had identified 13 men who had served in various capacities. The day before the recent talk I discovered number 14 and the day after the talk the Tipton Tyro, Andy Johnson, unearthed a fifteenth resident.

Among the audience at the Wolverhampton Society meeting was Chris O'Brien, a former Maths teacher at Wolverhampton grammar School and now the Archives Administrator. Chris was able to provide me with some further information about some of the men who had also been pupils at the Grammar School. One of these men was a character I had been keen to find out more about but had so found very little. This was Michael Royden Leslie Wood. On the 1911 Census Michael was recorded as living at the family home at No 2 Clark Road.



No. 2 Clark Rd today

He described his occupation as a Music Hall comedian. My efforts to find out more about this aspect of his life came to nothing. However, my main focus was on his military service.

Michael enlisted on December 9th 1915 and was posted to the 21st London Regiment on August 27th 1916. He eventually attained the rank of Lance Corporal. His entire war service was spent as an office clerk at various establishments around London. The reason for this was made clear from his surviving records which focus on his medical status. It was clear that he was in no way fit for frontline service due to an existing heart condition which had first been diagnosed in 1906. This condition was given as the reason for his discharge from service as permanently unfit when his time in the army ended in March 1919. His case is a reminder that not everyone who served was "in the trenches", or indeed close to them behind the lines. In the age of total

warfare someone has to stay behind and deal with the paperwork. Admittedly not very exciting but absolutely vital if the cogs of the logistics machinery are to be kept functioning.

Thanks to Chris O'Brien's efforts a clearer picture about Michael Wood's professional life has emerged. Michael had been a pupil at the Grammar School between 1899 and 1904. By 1911 he was performing under the stage name of Leslie Conway and was described in The Stage as a "Long, Lean Comedian and Eccentric Dancer". An advertisement from 1915 has him described as "The Skinny Scream".

He married a fellow performer, Maud (sometimes known as Midge) Van de Peer in Ludlow in March 1914. She then changed her stage name to Midge Wood. She was a male impersonator. The couple continued to make a living from performing, especially in Staffordshire and the Black Country until Michael's war service interrupted matters. After the war they resumed their activity in the entertainment business and the 1939 Register of England and Wales shows them residing in Manchester. Sadly Midge died in 1941. Michael remarried in Oxford in 1943. His second wife was Elsie Ballinger, a Music Teacher according to the 1939 Register of England and Wales. Elsie had performed with Michael in a panto in 1928 and gone on to perform with Michael and Midge in the 1930s. Interestingly she came from an entertainment background as her father, Fred, performed as part of Fred Austin's Merrie Middies and Scarlet Cloakes Concert Party. They were very much seaside performers appearing at a number of venues along the Sussex coast. Michael died in Brighton in 1974, and Elsie, also in Brighton, in 1986.

The one intriguing aspect of Michael's story is why, despite his background in entertainment and describing himself on military records as a "writer of plays", he was not given a role in the realms of concert parties/troupes entertaining troops on the Western Front?

Chris”

Ken Wright provides us with an interesting sideline to Nick Baker's piece on SIR Wm Orpen in last month's newsletter:

It is said that research takes you on a journey you didn't know you wanted to embark upon and far from the original theme.

Taking the lead from Nick Baker's fascinating and, as ever, very interesting article about Orpen and his "muse", Yvonne, who married Orpen's chauffeur, William Grover, has brought into focus my other interest, that of early motoring history.

William Grover was indeed a talented racing driver. He had settled in France where he bred dogs, and also pursued his driving interests. By the end of the 1920's he had added "Williams" to his surname (perhaps a double-barrelled surname might elevate him socially?) Notwithstanding his motives, he had nevertheless been able to secure for himself a works "drive" with, at the time, one of the most prestigious manufacturers of sports racing-cars, the French company of Bugatti.

Driving a 1928 Type 35B Bugatti, on 14th April 1929, he won the inaugural Monaco Grand Prix. "Williams" as he was best known by, secured for himself an important place in motor racing history. Along with other legendary winners at Monaco, a life-size bronze statue of Williams driving his Bugatti can be found in the centre of Monte Carlo (see photo). It would appear that Grover-Williams afterwards went into obscurity, and, as Nick records, was executed as a spy by the Nazis while working with the French Resistance during the Second World War.



But no such obscurity for his victorious Type 35B Bugatti (number 4914) which went on to win many more international races in the hands of the famous French racing driver René Dreyfus.

There is an interesting backstory to Dreyfus which is worth telling. He was connected to the "Bugatti in the Lake" saga. In consequence of being a works driver, Dreyfus had been able to acquire an ex-works 1925 Type 22 Bugatti for his personal transport. He also had a

weakness for gambling, and in 1934 while in Paris, fell in with a professional Swiss gambler and playboy called Adalbert Bodé. Dreyfus was losing heavily and, in order to try to recover his losses, he put up as a stake, his ex-Grand Prix Bugatti. He spectacularly lost it in the drunken card game.

Bodé then set off to the South of France where he lost most of his winnings, whereupon he returned to Switzerland with the Bugatti. When he arrived at the Swiss border, he was unable to produce evidence of where and for how much he had paid for the car. As a Swiss national, he was liable to pay import duty on the value of the car. Unable to pay the tax, he had no alternative but to leave it with the Swiss authorities, whose rules at the time were that they retained untaxed property for a period of time to allow the tax to be paid and, when that time-frame had expired and the tax remained unpaid, the confiscated property was to be destroyed.

The tax on the car was not paid and the Swiss customs confiscated the car, took it to a high point above Lake Maggiore on the Italian/Swiss border, and rolled the car into a deep part of the lake, and there it remained for several decades.

The car was finally recovered in 2008, and to say that it had suffered from being submerged in 173 feet of water for over 70 years, it was in remarkably good condition and in one piece. The tyres on the side of the car that were partially buried in the silt at the bottom of the lake, still had air in them! The car was then put up for auction in 2010 and bought for the sum of \$370,000 by a wealthy U.S. car collector, Peter Mullin, and it is now on display in his museum in California, unrestored, and in its “as found” condition.

There is, however, a sting in this story. It is believed that a Japanese classic car collector had previously bought a beautifully restored Type 22, which had been sold to him as the Dreyfus car. With the discovery of the true Dreyfus car, the manufacturer’s plate (VIN plate) on the restored car was found to be a fake. While a restored Type 22 is still worth a considerable amount of money, it is not as much as a true historic car with such an excellent provenance. In such cases of “mistaken” identity, a compromise is usually reached between buyer and seller and these issues rarely come to Court or are reported in the press.

But what became of No.4914, the ex-Grover-Williams Type 35B Bugatti? The car eventually passed into private ownership, and the family that had owned it for 51 years decided in 2005 to put it up for sale. The car had not been restored and retained its original and iconic pale blue French national racing paintwork. While appearing a little “tired” and looking neglected, it was nevertheless in running order. It was entered into a Bonhams auction on 16th September 2005, but failed to reach its reserve. Bidding reached £1.8 million.

Apologies to members who perhaps thought my next article would be Great War related, but I hope that adding a further chapter to Nick’s excellent article will win your forgiveness.

Kenneth Wright

Dates for your Diary

- i. **Thursday 7th September – Saragarhi: The True Story by Jay Singh Sohal.** On 12 September 1897, 21 Sikh soldiers fought against 10,000 Afghani tribesmen to bravely defend the Saragarhi outpost. This is their story. **A Museum of South Staffs & Wolverhampton Trust presentation.**

Venue: Wolverhampton Cricket Club, Danescourt Road, Tettenhall WV6 9BJ. This event will be a screening of Jay's documentary-drama, 'Saragarhi: The True Story', followed by a Q&A with the man himself. £5.00
Click [HERE](#) for details.

- ii. **Saturday 16th September – Tudor Warfare Conference 2023** by Helion Books. Venue: Worcester Cathedral Learning Centre. £35.00 inc lunch.

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Further details and how to buy tickets [HERE](#)

- iii. **Saturday 11th October – “The Home Front 1914-1918”** by David Vaux and Paul Jacques. Industries across Birmingham and the Black Country geared up for the huge demand for munitions; in particular, production of heavy guns at Avery in Smethwick and tank production in Oldbury and Wednesbury. Because the efficient evacuation of wounded from The Western Front resulted in high demand on hospitals, a number of wealthy people allowed their homes, including Lightwoods house, to be used for the recuperation of wounded soldiers.
A Smethwick Local History Society event.
Venue: Lightwoods House, Lightwoods Park, Adkins Lane, Smethwick, B67 5DP 2.00pm start. £3 charge

- iv. **Saturday 2nd December – The Royal Warwickshire Regt 14/18 in books & cartoons** by Paul Jacques and David Vaux. **A Midland Ancestors event.**
Venue: Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret St, Birmingham B3 3BS.
Free to attend.

Details [HERE](#)



Programme of Talks 2023

Lyppard Grange Community Centre, Ankerage Green, Worcester WR4 0DZ

30th September 2023

Talk by Paul Handford
13.30 for 14.00 start.

In 2012 Paul purchased a group of WW1 medals for Herbert Mowle Kendal, a British civilian volunteer ambulance driver who was purported to have been '**Killed in Action**' in **May 1918** whilst driving his ambulance in support of the French Army. His body was never recovered. However, research revealed that his death was not recorded or indeed recognised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. His death seemed to have been forgotten! By translating French War Diaries, examining records contained at the International Red Cross (Geneva) and other research material and retracing Mr Kendal's movements on the day

of his death, a large dossier of evidence was submitted to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The case was scrutinised by the National Army Museum (NAM) and the CWGC accepted Paul's findings. Mr Kendal is now the **first ever WW1 British civilian casualty** to be commemorated on a CWGC War Memorial (Soissons). **Friends £3 Non-Friends - £5 Light refreshments included.**

21st October 2023

Nursing in the Falklands War on HMHS Uganda
by Liz Omerod
13.30 for 14.00 start.

Liz's talk is from a personal perspective and includes the practicalities of turning a cruise liner into a hospital ship. It is illustrated with slides including those "before and after" views of the clinical and other areas. Liz joined the QARNNS in May 1972 at the Royal Naval Hospital in Gosport. She worked in several different clinical areas including 3 years in the A & E department. Following a 6 month course in Cardiac nursing in London, Liz returned to the joint Intensive & Coronary Care Unit at the Naval Hospital in Plymouth. Following service on the Uganda where she was Senior Nursing Officer on Intensive Care Liz returned to the Plymouth Naval hospital to complete her commission. Leaving QARNNS in 1985 she became a Palliative Clinical Nurse Specialist with the Macmillan Service in Cornwall and later in West Berkshire. Now retired Liz has done some work as a volunteer at the hospice in Hereford and has delivered many talks on her experiences in the Falklands. **Friends £3 Non-Friends - £5 Light refreshments included.**

Contact Sandra Taylor: friendsoftheworcesters@gmail.com 07919 522840

If you know of any other relevant events that our members may be interested in, don't be shy – let me know and I'll put it in the Newsletter.

Future Newsletters:

Please send any items you would like to be included to me at my official e-mail address: wfawtoneditor@gmail.com

Many, many thanks to those members who have provided items for the Newsletter; you know who you are, and your reward shall be in Heaven...

John Hale
Branch Newsletter Editor