

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

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CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Please forgive what is likely to be a short report. I have very recently arrived home, from a long trip to France in our motorhome, to a list of urgent jobs a mile long and grass which I am unsure whether to mow or ask a farmer friend if he wants to cut it for hay! On our return from Brittany, we stopped for two nights at a favourite campsite at Falaise. Overlooking Falaise Castle, the site provides access to what can only be described as an amateur historian's idea of 'meat and drink'. The town museum which concentrates on D Day and the weeks that followed, is challenging experience. One statement that I read in the display was made by Churchill while discussing with bomber command the potential losses of a sustained aerial bombardment of key crossroads and towns in Normandy. In agreeing the campaign, he had hoped that civilian losses could be kept below 10,000! Sadly, the figure was tragically optimistic and later haunted Churchill. I suspect that many of you have at times wondered how you would have reacted if faced with such decisions, I certainly have. Churchill's comments got me thinking about the losses sustained during WW1 as the result of similar orders. Two things came to mind: How did those giving the orders live with the consequences of those orders? Secondly, having read, and listened to, the painful testimonies of the civilian survivors of the bombardment of Falaise, I was not at all keen to imagine how I would have dealt with the situation.

I look forward to seeing you all at the next meeting on Tuesday 05/09/23 where our speaker will be Kate Wills who will present 'The Fallen Choristers of King's College Chapel Cambridge'

FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20th October by post to Mrs J Berry, 8 Fairstead Rd, Norwich NR7 8XQ or by email jackie.berry3@btinternet.com, items can also be given at meetings.

MEETING REPORTS

Our last two meetings have given us a lot to think about, firstly Peter Hodgkinson talking about the massive task of finding the dead after the end of the war and up to the beginning of the second war in 1939 and then John Stanyard taking about the Salvation Army VC winners.

The talk by Peter was one I was interested in after reading a report written by Peter which I found on the internet some time ago. The clearing of the battle fields in general had always been something I had wondered about, and certainly the clearing of "lost" bodies and condensing of burial grounds, as one of my great uncles had his remains moved to a bigger cemetery after the

war.

It was not an easy or pleasant job by any means, after all a million men were said to be missing. Shortages of materials to put bones into were an issue. Numbers of men required for the job, these could be any nationality. There was the danger from other materials of war to the workers. It can hardly be surprising that some drank too much... One was a chap known as Charlie the Bastard an Australian officer, who was drunk much of the time.

Another Australian officer was also not much good at the tasks in hand, he is now said to be the man who missed finding the pits at Fromelles.

Work included removing bodies from known graves and reburial in new larger cemeteries, but even that was not done well, cases came to light of wrong bodies in graves at places such as Hooge Crater (that is something one of my great uncles who came home always talked about).

In the early years lots of remains were recovered but as time went on with locals returning to farm the land and rebuild villages the task became trickier. In the end locals could find bodies and get a small payment. With major construction more remains continue to be found to this day. And lost men can still be named with research, if a rank or unit is on an unknown grave in a cemetery. DNA can now help put names to those whose remains are now discovered, but those in cemeteries with unknown soldier on the headstone, may always be unknown.

John Stanyard told us the stories of the three Salvation Army men awarded VC's during the war, but said it could have been five VC's according to some. It seems some felt they could hoodwink others into thinking they had won a VC. One such person was William Isaac Kennell from Wellingborough who told everyone he had won a VC, going as far as wearing a VC ribbon in public, his lies got him in a lot of trouble, also links to Christine Keeler, Mandy Rice Davis and the KitKat Club where mentioned. Possibly a recommendation was put forward but not granted, so he felt cheated?

The three awarded VC's were Pt James Fynn - Mesopotamia, Corp William Clamp - Passchendaele and Thomas Holmes CEF at Vimy who served the war and died in 1940 aged 50. His later story is a well known one as his medals were stolen, the replacements were given to a museum but also stolen, but thankfully later found. He was said to be the youngest Canadian to win such a medal. John also explained a bit about how the Salvation Army layers work, Thomas was an Adherent, meaning he was not a full member, a full member would be classed as a Salvation Army Soldier, hence why some are Majors in Rank.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

October 3rd - Stuart Hadaway - The Battle of Romani - 4-6 August 1916

November 7th - Steve Warburton - Out of the Western Front Frying Pan and into the Fire of Fermoy.

IN THE NEWS

100 years ago on the 22nd July 1923 Loughborough dedicated a Carillon Tower in the Queen's Park to the memory of the men who died in the Great War. The bells were cast by local foundry Taylor's Bell Factory which still is located in the town.

This year to mark the centenary of the Tower, a service will be held and other events through the rest of the year.

Also to mark the event a local knitting fan known as Syston Knitting Banxy, has made a postbox topper, it looks rather impressive.

The Tower is open throughout the year till the end of September, it houses a museum with lots of stuff from WW1 through to WW2, gives access to view the bells and views out over the county around Loughborough. Take a look at the website for lots of information, opening hours, etc.

Lowestoft Old and New have launched a new section to their website called Our Fallen which has information on some 2000 people from WW1 and 2 who died in or were from the area of Lowestoft and some of its surrounding villages. If you have an hour or so on a rainy day look for www.ourfallen.lowestoftoldandnew.org.

A report in the August edition of the Best of British magazine tells that Transport Auctions of London held an auction on 24th June where a WW1 medal issued by the Auxiliary Omnibus Companies Association to drivers from London who drove B-type buses on the Western Front went under the hammer. The enamel on brass medal has the names of Loos, Somme, Amiens, Antwerp and Ypres surrounding an illustration of a B-type bus. It had associated paper work, the date of 1914 and the medal had the number 506 on the back. It sold for £180.

SUFFOLK WFA

Meetings held at the RBL Club, Tavern St, Stowmarket IP14 1PH 7.30pm

September 13th - Steve Smith - Zeppelins over Norfolk and the East coast.

October 11th - Simon Shephard - Artillery conquers, Infantry Occupies. Looking at the effectiveness of the British Artillery at 3rd Ypres.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Diss Corn Hall is having a performance of Journey's End by a local theatre company on Thursday 9th November cost is £12. See the Corn Hall events website for booking details.

Bungay's Fisher Theatre is also having this local theatre group performing Journey's End on Friday 10th and Saturday 11th November at 7.30pm adults £12, £6 for students.

The above location is also hosting a talk by Mark Smith from Antiques Roadshow on November 9th at 7.30pm. Medal expert Mark is talking about "For Valour" The Story of the Victoria Cross. Tickets are £15. See website for booking details.

Waveney Heritage is having a talk on Wednesday 8th November by Gary Alderton, he will show and talk about a collection of WW1 artefacts which locals brought back. Meeting starts at 7.30pm at the Old School House, Grove Rd, Brockdish, Diss IP21 4JP. Contact waveneyheritagecio@gmail.com or check the website for more information/cost. www.waveneyheritage.com

A VISIT TO ORKNEY - Richard Rayner

Orkney is just 10 miles north of the coast of Caithness and has about 70 islands, of which 20 are inhabited. Probably most famed for the huge number of prehistoric remains, three of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, for the WFA member the big draw is Scapa Flow. But of course, as it is an expanse of water, there's not much to see! However, there are defensive structures all around the former naval base dating back to Napoleonic times. On the south of the island of Hoy is the former naval shore base of Lyness, by 1940 home to some 12,000 military and civilian staff

(the current Orkney population is around 20,000!). Pretty much all that remains is the former pumphouse, now the museum, that used to transfer fuel oil from massive underground tanks to the fleet. Outside the museum sits the starboard propeller, shaft and bearing from HMS Hampshire. Illegally raised from the wreck, seized and returned to its rightful owners (MoD) it was gifted to the Orkney Island Council who donated it to the museum.

Blockships were sunk in 1914 to protect the eastern approaches to the harbour and some of these still remain. More were sunk in 1939 but that didn't stop U-47 entering, sinking HMS Royal Oak and escaping. Subsequently, the Churchill Barriers were constructed to block these approaches. Italian PoWs were used as labourers, in breach of the Geneva Convention, so to get round this a road was built across the top of the defensive structures and both road and barriers remain today. The Italian Chapel on Lamb Holm, two converted Nissan huts, is an artistic wonder; all that remains of PoW Camp 60.

Also on the various islands are disused airfields from both the First and Second World Wars. Squadron Commander Edwin Dunning landed a Sopwith Pup on HMS Furious in Scapa Flow on 2 August 1917, the first time this had been done on a moving vessel. Dunning took off from an airfield at Smoogro on Scapa Flow's northern shore. It is possible to visit the site of HMS Tern/RNAS Twatt at Birsay, which is in the process of being preserved. While at Birsay one shouldn't miss the Kitchener Memorial; a tower built on top of the cliffs above the wreck site. More recently a memorial wall was built listing the names of those lost when HMS Hampshire sank and the crew of a minesweeper who were killed when sweeping the area afterwards.

For the adventurous (crazy) person it is possible dive the few remaining German warships scuttled in Scapa Flow. Most of the vessels were salvaged for scrap during the 1920s and 1930s. It was one of the largest maritime salvage operations in history, of the 52 ships that sank, only seven remain beneath the water.

Given the wealth of historic and prehistoric sites, wildlife, breweries and distilleries to visit, two weeks just wasn't long enough! Better start planning a return visit.

THE LAND OF MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN - Bob Kerry

Testament of Youth, written by Vera Brittain about her experiences in the First World War, is to me the best book ever written about the war but was not the sort of subject you would expect to be turned into a new musical. However, with musicals about the Titanic disaster, failed revolutions in France (*Les Misérables*) and the Vietnam War (*Miss Saigon*) it seems no subject is too sad to be turned into a song and dance show.

The show came to Norwich Theatre Royal at the end of July and I saw it on Friday 28 July. It is a co-production of the Norwich Theatre Royal and the Buxton International Festival and only being commissioned in 2021 is a brand-new production. The story is based on Testament of Youth with the music of Ivor Novello, one of the best-known composers of the 1920's and 1930's and the Andrew Lloyd-Webber of his day.

To those of you who have not read Testament of Youth, Vera Brittain was a strong willed young middle-class woman growing up in Buxton before the war who was determined to go to Oxford University, almost unheard of at the time. Her brother Edward was gay, as was Ivor Novello, in a time when it was very dangerous to be so and her fiancé was Roland Leighton, a poet who was brilliant at everything he did and surely destined for great things. Making up the quartet is a fictional character Bobbie Jones, friend of Vera and Leighton and lover of Edward. Vera did have

two other real-life male friends, Victor Richardson and Geoffrey Thurlow, and Jones appears to be an amalgam of the two. At the start of the war Vera becomes a VAD nurse, putting her university studies on hold, and Edward, Roland and Bobbie all join the army as officers.

The first part of the show concentrates on the gilded lives of the wealthy in Edwardian England where a girl was expected to find a husband and settle down to family life. Needless to say, Vera fights against this tooth and nail. The second half tells what happens to the quartet during the war with Edward, Roland and Bobbie all being killed. Vera's two real male friends, Victor and Geoffrey were also killed so you can see why she would say the war really did result in a Lost Generation with all four of the men she was closest to gone.

After the war Vera completed her university studies and became a writer, feminist, socialist and pacifist and this part of her life is featured very cleverly at the very start and end of the show. Her daughter Shirley, who became Baroness Shirley Williams, even gets a part.

Did I like the show? Yes indeed. You did not need to know the book to follow the story being told, the production was first rate, the sixteen actors on stage were excellent and the fourteen-piece orchestra and Ivor Novello's music superb. Although obviously a sad story there were many moments of comedy with Edward getting the best lines. Audrey Brisson, Alexander Knox, George Arvidson and Kit Esuruoso, who played Vera, Roland, Edward and Bobbie are all young actors at the start of their careers were well matched and sung beautifully. With such an ensemble piece it is perhaps unfair to single one person out but to me the stand out performance was Stuart Pendred who played Vera's father Arthur Brittain, he really was a superb operatic singer.

Apart from looking at Edwardian England before the war and the effect of the war and loss on this public-school generation it covered subjects omitted from Vera's book, notably Edward's unconventional sex life and whether he effectively committed suicide when he heard he was to be court-martialled for his "inappropriate" liaisons with other men.

The only sad part about the evening was that the theatre was less than half full. A few years ago, *Six*, the musical based on the six wives of Henry VIII, premiered in Norwich and I read it was poorly attended with tickets hard to sell. It has since become a worldwide phenomenon and when it returned to Norwich this year it was a sell-out without a ticket to be had. I would not be surprised if the same happens to *The Land of Might-Have-Been*.

BARNARDO'S BOYS IN WW1

There are, probably, many stories linked to Barnardo's in and around the period of WW1. But one of the main ones is the story of young boys sent to Canada before the war with the idea that they could make a better life for themselves, these became known as the Barnardo's Home Boys after they joined the CEF. The story is complicated by the now known stories of what really happened - children, both boys and girls sent to Canada and other Commonwealth countries often without parents knowing, in some cases families told their offspring had died. Some found life better but many suffered at the hands of those who had been expected to help them into a better life.

When the war began many of these youngsters felt they should join up and training done in Britain would perhaps allow them to reconnect with family before they headed to the battle fronts of the Great War, often never to return.

It is thought well over a 1000 lads from the Homes system died, although no one knows for sure, 1917 was a bad year with the Canadians fighting at Vimy, Hill 70 and Passchendaele, losses would be numerous..

A few would gain awards such as Claude Nunney and Walter Rayford who both gained VC's for bravery at the 2nd Battle of Arras.

I had not heard or thought about the part Barnardo Boys played in WW1 until a photo came up on

an internet site regarding a visit by the Duke and Duchess of Somerset to see the boys parading somewhere or other. I had never heard of this Duke but looks like he was an ancestor of Jane Seymour wife of Henry VIII.

LONG LOST BELL

One of our members pointed me in the direction of a story from the Metro, a northern newspaper, telling of a ship's bell from SS Stock Force, formerly Charyce in a previous working life, which became a Q ship. This named bell was found in a house clearance and was due to be auctioned at the beginning of July in Scarborough with a guide price of £3000 to £5000.

This ship was under command of Lt Harold Auten RNR, when on the 30th July 1918 it was attacked by a U-boat off the coast of Devon. Its been said it was U80, but others say not. The U-boat torpedoed the Stock Force whose crew then did a "panic party piece" routine - part of a manoeuvre they had been taught, to luring the submarine to the surface where the ships crews then fired anything still in working order at it. The sub sunk but made its home base, while the ship did finally sink, but all crew survived.

For this action Auten was awarded the VC, he went on to serve in the second war before going to live in the USA, where he died in 1964 aged 73.

The ship was found by divers in 2013. But the bell at auction was not the bell on board at the time according to some sources. It is thought to have been replaced by a blank bell at the refit to turn it into a Q ship and may be why it appears to remain unsold after the auction, but is still open to after auction bids.

HERRIES KNOCKER DUDLEY-SCOTT, RAF

Recently a picture of gravestones in Beccles cemetery appeared in something I was looking at, can't remember what, but it was clearly a patch of war grave headstones. Now for years we have been past the cemetery there and never been in, I need to go to find family graves but never get round to it and of course we would also hunt out WW1 headstones at the same time.

So I found details of the men of WW1 buried there and the one that caught my eye was Lt Herries Knocker Dudley-Scott who died on 22nd September 18, aged just 19. An unusual Christian name for a start, Knocker - his mothers maiden name, and a double barrel surname - worth looking up.

Born in Durham in 1899, his father died a few years later and his mother remarried Lt Col Robert Free Lush quite soon after. The family then moved to Beccles at some point, Herries attended a school at Roydon Hall near Diss for a time. By 1915 Herries was working as a Red Cross volunteer at the Beccles Red Cross hospital. In 1917 he had become a probationary flight officer with a kite balloon unit as part the RFC. But by April 1918 he had arrived at Cranwell by now a RAF base where he learned to fly. Sadly his flying career was short, he along with fellow airman Flight Cadet John Wilcock died when their plane had issues on take off near Stonehenge. Herries was returned home to be buried in Beccles. While Wilcock is listed as part of No1 School of Navigation and Bomb Dropping! he was returned home and is buried in a churchyard in Stockton Heath near Warrington, Cheshire.

LT TRISTRAM JAMES PINE-COFFIN

This man caught my eye as much as anything for the surname, when I first read an item I think at a quick glance I took his surname as James and pine coffin as a burial item..... It turns out that the Pine-Coffin family were members of a long standing military family with an estate in Devon, and Tristram was just one of those military men.

Tristram served in the 3rd Battalion Devonshire Regiment and was one of the men for whom

fighting did not stop with the 11th November 1918 Armistice as he went to the Russian Civil War aiding the anti Bolshevik White Russian Force. Sadly he was listed as missing presumed KIA in late September 1919 at the age of 33 and is commemorated on the Archangel Memorial. He was, at the time, assisting troops who were withdrawing from Murmansk.

A nephew, Colonel Richard Pine-Coffin DSO + Bar, MC commanded the 3rd Parachute Regiment in WW2 in North Africa and then 7th Parachute Regiment in Normandy. He was known to his men as "Wooden Box" a nod to his surname, men knew if they died they would be buried, if they were lucky, in a pine coffin.

Another relative, Sgt Geoffrey Tristram Pine-Coffin died during a RAF bombing raid over Aachen in July 43.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY RUDE, STIRLING

I recently was given a batch of magazines from a visiting friend, one of which contained an article on Stirling in Scotland. Now we have been past Stirling so many times over the years, but we have never stopped to visit the castle or other historic sites there.

In this magazine article the Church of the Holy Rude was mentioned and a picture showed a stained glass window which was installed in 2016 to commemorate WW1, 100 years on from the battles that took place on July 1st 1916 on the Somme.

It looks amazing, it honours the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who fought and died at Beaumont Hamel, amongst other places. A young soldier of the regiment is depicted standing in the Beaumont Hamel cemetery with the cross of sacrifice and row upon row of headstones behind him, it has poppies at the top with the regiment badge.

So if you are in the area it must be worth a look. On a bright, sunny day it must look absolutely stunning.

And Finally

Over the years I have seen many men with the name Verdun, and the odd Mons, as mainly a middle name, but recently I found a man with the middle name Schrapnel which is certainly a bit different.

Naming children after battles, places, ships and military leaders is not new to WW1, it had been a practise for hundreds of years. One of my early boss's had the Christian names John Jellicoe, while a school friend's father was one of the children given Verdun as a second name, there is also a Kitchener as a second name on a gravestone in the same graveyard. Names could be adapted to fit a female child such as Dardanella and Arrasina. As the war came to an end Peace was used and the occasional Poppy. Poppy is these days a common name, but probably with out a thought to how it was used back in the early 1900's.