

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

JANUARY FEBRUARY 2024 VOL 24 No5

CHAIR'S REMARKS

I started my day by searching today's date online (21st December) in relation to WW1. I immediately came across some information on the WFA website regarding the death in action on 21 December 1914 of A/Cpl Simon Bennett. After a number of years as a coal miner, Bennett had enlisted into the army in 1904. After spending a majority of his service in India, he returned home and, while still held on the reserve, he became employed as a miner at the Towneley colliery in Burnley. Sadly, he had just entered the final year of his reserve commitment (and had returned to mining at Durham) at the time of the outbreak of war. I rather suspect a man of Bennet's ilk would have answered the call to colours irrespective of his reserve commitment. Bennet arrived in France on 13 August 1914 with 'C' Company of the 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers. Having seen action at both Mons and Etreux, where the 2nd Munsters suffered large losses, Bennet was killed in action near La Bassee on 21 December 1914 during the 1st battle of Ypres. His body was never recovered therefore he is remembered on the Le Touret Memorial à Richebourg. As with all such articles, I would like to acknowledge the research undertaken by David O'Mara with additional detail by Jonathan Vernon. For anyone who has not spent time browsing the site, I can assure you it is a treasure trove of information and well worth the effort.

I apologise for not yet populating the full list of branch speakers for 2024. Fingers crossed I should be able to publish the full list in the next two weeks. The forthcoming year (2024) has proved difficult but not insurmountable. A big thank you must go to those branch members who have suggested speakers and/or subjects in order to aid my efforts. The first 6 months will be published in the next 'Bulletin' (*and are below*) I very much look forward to seeing you all at the next meeting (**THE SECOND TUESDAY OF JANUARY!**) on the 9th January when David Griffiths will present: 'The Guards Division at War 1915-17'. This presentation will provide an overview of some of Davids research to date for his forthcoming book and will include a detailed case study of the Guards at Loos in 1915.

Hope you had a good Christmas, and the new year brings both you and your family peace and prosperity.

FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20th February 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

Steve Warburton spoke to us in November about his relative by marriage, his wife's Grandfather Brig General Cuthbert Lucas. Lucas served through the Boer War, spent time in Egypt and Sudan and then into WW1 hot spots at Ypres, Gallipoli, Somme, Cambria and Arras but it was the Irish Easter uprising that we were learning about on this occasion and what happened to Lucas in Ireland.

Lucas had married Poppy, his best friend's sister, after the death of her brother on the Somme and she was pregnant at the time he took the posting to Ireland to help control the situation there. She had to remain in England for safety.

What happened next, well Lucas liked to fish and used a regular location and it was here that the IRA Sinn Feiners captured him and colleagues. Speaking to each other in a language not known to the captors, an escape was planned but one who jumped from the car they were in was injured and the other was let go to look after him, with just Lucas as highest rank remaining. So began a series of moves around Southern Ireland staying in various houses. The army responded by going on the rampage in Fermoy.

Poppy was not told in case the news of his kidnap led to problems with her pregnancy but saw it had happened when using a newspaper to mop up a spill. Lucas was allowed regular contact with her and also kept a secret diary which is how this story comes about. He was treated reasonably well by his captors but still had plans to "escape" it seems, which he finally did, although it remains unknown if he really escaped or was let go. Things could have turned out so differently as they did later with murders of hostages.

He would continue in service for a while before retiring. He died in 1956.

An interesting talk on a story that is not perhaps well known to the British public, but also nice to know that contact between the people involved through the modern generations of those families happened in later years

Our December speaker was Stephen Barker talking on the Sikh, Hardit Singh Malik who travelled to the UK to study at the age of 14 and later decided to join the Royal Flying Corp. He overcame bullying and racism, become successful in his wish to be a pilot, played cricket for Sussex, studied at Balliol, Oxford, played golf and had friends in high places. He married the sister of the woman his parents wanted him to marry and spend many years in the Indian Civil Service. He was married to his wife for 60 years, perhaps a long time in those days. He died in 1985.

In his flying days he was made to wear a flying helmet over his turban, fought against German Aces, never becoming an Ace himself as he became ill with a bad reaction to Castor Oil used in the planes of the time apparently.

A very interesting man, who lead a very interesting life at a time when it was not easy for men from India to do so.

Those present might have wondered about Stephen's pronunciation of "Sikh". Apparently in English lingo it is Sikh as in seek, but in Punjabi Sikh is pronounced as sick.

Being our final meeting of the year the usual sandwiches were added to by a few mince pies and stollen, while the raffle was made up of Christmas goodies, thank you to those who brought items along.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

Paul has completed the first 6 months of 2024 for speakers and a reminder that January's meeting is on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. It is David Griffiths talking on 'The Guards Division at War 1915-17'. This presentation will provide an overview of some of David's research to date for his forthcoming book and will include a detailed case study of the Guards at Loos in 1915.

6/2/24 Steve Smith: 'Private G/5203 Frank Smith (A jolly good chap!).

The talk looks at the service of his Great Grandfather who served with the Buffs in the Great War. He saw action at Loos and served around Plugstreet Wood before moving to the Somme in July 1916 where he was wounded on 18 August 1916. He then served with the Labour Corps until being pronounced fit to go back to the infantry where he was killed in action on 21 March 1918. The last part of the talk looks at his wife's quest to ascertain what happened to him and also the impact in later years that his Grandfather's history has had on Steve and his family.

5/3/24 Major Phil Watson: 'Le Moncel - Lance verses Lance'.

On 7 September 1914, the 9th Lancers (2nd Cavalry Brigade) conducted the last lance verses lance charge on the Western Front. It took place at Le Moncel, just outside Paris, on what would become the end of the Retreat and the beginning of the Battle of the Marne. The commanding officer, and two troops of B Squadron charged a squadron from 1st Garde Dragoner. The story was depicted in paintings, which misrepresented the action. Likewise, the regimental history only recorded that which supported the cavalry narrative. The presentation seeks to represent an accurate portrayal from both German and British sources.

2/4/24 Jeremy Gorden-Smith: 'Ypres - ruin to restoration'

' A visual tour of post-war Ypres using photographs taken by Corporal Ivan Bawtree, showing the town's reconstruction and influx of battlefield tourists and pilgrims.

7/5/24 Dr Peter Hodgkinson 'Fear and courage in the trenches'

Fear is natural in war, but the demand for courage is remorseless. What was the experience of the British soldier of fear, and were the social restrictions on its expression helpful or harmful? Similarly, did the traditional model of heroism and courage prove something that was helpful to live up to? Were those born in the late Victorian era handicapped by expectations of behaviour, or did they possess an advantage in contrast to modern methods of dealing with stress?

4/6/24 Rob Burkett and Andrew England 'A Great War Miscellanea..... aspects, stories and encounters on the Western Front'.

Rob and Andrew have been touring the Western Front for many years, and they will present a small number of interesting and illustrated stories that they have researched in recent years. (confirmed)

I gather we do have Peter Hart booked for later in the year, so watch this space!

IN THE NEWS

At the beginning of December the village of Great Ryburgh held a bell-ringing event in their church as part of the Christmas festivities but at the same time honouring a man from the village who fought in WW1 but did not die during fighting but from his wounds later. War Memorials

honour those that died up to 1919 but many would die in the coming years from injuries etc. William Howard died in 1923 having served with the Suffolk and Essex regiments, but he was badly wounded and discharged in 1918. He spent the next 5 years in and out of hospitals but succumbed to his injuries and was buried in the cemetery in Fakenham.

There are thousands like William buried in graves around the country and probably the Commonwealth that don't have CWGC headstones as they missed the date deadlines. We often wonder when looking at graves of young men who died in the next 10 or so years if their deaths were the result of injuries of some form from war service. These are the forgotten victims of war, their history only known to their families usually. Great Ryburgh does seem to be a village that wants to find as much as possible about the past of their community.

2nd Reepham scout group decided to make a poppy wreath from discarded plumbing bits this year. They intend using this at coming remembrance services in the future. They will make a donation each year to the RBL.

SUFFOLK WFA

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

This is their program for 2024

10/01/24 - The Flying Sikh - Stephen Barker

14/02/24 - Redan Ridge - Andrew Lock

13/03/24 - A foot soldiers' memoir of W.W.1 - 1918-1919 spring offensive and P.O.W. - Phil Sutcliffe

10/04/24 - Daring Deeds of the Dardanelles - Clive Harris

08/05/24 - T.B.C. Peter Hart

12/06/24 - Lawrence of Arabia John Peaty

10/07/24 - W.W.1 told in dusted down artefacts that have so far survived over 100 years - Dave Empson

14/08/24 Norfolk Regiment on the Western Front - Steve Smith

11/09/24 - Deserters of the First World War the home front - Andrea Hetherington

09/11/24 - Irish recruitment to the British Armed Forces 1914-1918 - Timothy Bowman

13/11/24 - Cambrai - Ross Beadle

11/12/24 - AGM and Cameos

DR DOLITTLE AUTHOR HUGH LOFTING

English born but studied in the US and travelling the world after as a civil engineer, Lofting would return to the UK and joined up in the Irish Guards for the war. In 1918 he was seriously wounded

by shrapnel from a grenade, which would give him issues for the rest of his life. He died aged just 61 in 1947 whilst in California and was buried in the family plot in Killingworth, Connecticut where the family went to, on emigrating to the US after the war.

Dr Dolittle was born from the fact that Lofting thought he did not want to upset his children with the true horrors of war, or the periods of boredom he experienced in his letters to home. So he wrote to them and gave horses and other animals in the war a voice, animals given no choice as to whether they wanted to be there or not, and with no method of defending themselves from bullets, bombs, mud, illness etc. When injured or unwell they had no voice to tell what was hurting or how they felt..

At heart, Lofting was a pacifist, and after the war this probably came even more to the front, he "was often frustrated at the quickness in which governments resorted to armed conflict to resolve international issues" according to a comment on an internet site. Sounds familiar?? He worried about the effects of war on children who were being told of heroic deaths and war being glorified in books aimed at them.

He would go on to write and illustrate many children's books aimed at different age groups and featuring the Dr and animals. There is just one book aimed at adults and it is a long poem which is anti war, and was published right in the middle of the 2nd war in the UK, it was not well received. It is called "Victory for the Slain".

HORSTEAD ALL SAINT'S CHURCH MEMORIALS

Horstead All Saints church has a death penny fixed into its wall, it belongs to Drury Frank Percy Wormald, a Captain in the Royal Garrison Artillery, who also served in the Coldstream Guards. He died in November 1918 of pneumonia aged 33, a week before the armistice was signed.

Here in Norfolk, he had been living at the now gone Horstead Hall with his wife whose family had links to Clive in Shropshire which is where he is buried. I have never heard of this sort of thing being done with these plaques before, maybe there are others in unusual locations out there?

There is also a family plaque to one member of a well known family in the area, Percy Norgate who was killed in what is once more a war zone sadly, that is Gaza, in 1917. He is listed on the Jerusalem memorial. Percy and a few others from the village who were killed in the war were members of the church choir and there is a special memorial to them as well. One of these choir boys was a 17 year old (CWGC say 16) who was a Merchant Apprentice on board HM Transport ship, SS Arab which was sunk by a torpedo from UB 50 in January 1918. Wilfred C D Walton is buried in North Africa, at Bizerta in Tunisia. Arab was a coal ship on route from Cardiff to Messina with 22 on board, Wilfred was the only one washed ashore.

And finally,

Here's wishing you all best wishes for a happy, healthy and, hopefully, a peaceful New Year. We hope to see many of you at meetings at some point in the year.