



# CHESTERFIELD WFA

## Newsletter and Magazine issue 34

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## Welcome to Issue 34 - the October 2018 Newsletter and Magazine of Chesterfield WFA.



For our Meeting on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October we welcome Branch founder member and former Chairman and Secretary Peter Hodgkinson as our speaker. Peter who is now very active on the WFA speakers `circuit` will explain the ***Battle of Selle in October 1918.***

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.

***Grant Cullen – Branch Secretary***



## Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2018

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

January	9th	<b>Jan.9<sup>th</sup></b> Branch AGM followed by a talk by Tony Bolton (Branch Chairman) on the key events of the last year of the war 1918. Councillor Steve Brunt (a member of the WFA) will also be present to tell members about Chesterfield Borough Council's plans for a WW1 2018 Commemorations Group.
February	6th	<b>Tim Lynch</b> <i>'The Unknown Soldiers - the BEF of 1918'</i> By 1918 the BEF was mostly made up of conscripts as it launched the most successful campaign in its history. How did an army many regarded as "shirkers" fight so effectively? Tim Lynch is a freelance writer and battlefield guide. This talk is based on research into his own family's part in the Great War.
March	6th	<b>David Humberston</b> , Chairman of the Leicester Branch, will be making his first visit to WFA Chesterfield to talk about <i>'Women Spies in The Great War'</i>
April	3rd	<b>Peter Hart</b> making his annual pilgrimage to Chesterfield. His presentation will be <i>'Not Again' - the German offensive on the Aisne, May 1918.</i>
May	1st	Making his debut as a speaker to the Chesterfield Branch will be Jonathan Steer who will compare and contrast the <i>'BEF at Mons in 1914 with the BEF at Mons in 1918'</i>
June	5th	Rob Thompson – always a popular visitor to Chesterfield Branch. <i>"Running Out of Road. Supplying the BEF During the 100 Days Offensives. 1918"</i> . This is a new talk dealing with the logistical and supply problems the BEF had as the end of the war approached (BEF needed Armistice as much as Germans).
July	3rd	<b>Dr. Graham Kemp.</b> <i>"American Expeditionary Force" – the story and experiences of the AEF, 1917-18.</i> Talk covers the training of the new Army from the States to France. Taking in the experience, the hardship and humour. It looks at their first action at Belleville wood, and then turns to the success and tragedy of 'Argonne Wood.' It reveals the way the US Army contributed to the ending of the war and why afterwards US turned its back on Europe.
August	7TH	<b>Peter Dennis</b> is an artist who lives in Mansfield but he has made a name for himself as an illustrator for the Osprey series of monographs on The Great War (as well as other conflicts from ancient times to the present) Peter will explain how he carries out his researches for technical accuracy. He will also bring some of his original artworks for members to view.
September	4th	John Beech. <i>"The Great Escape"</i> . John needs no introduction to Chesterfield members as he rarely misses a meeting. In September 1917 a group of POW German officers escaped from where they were being held (now on the site of the University of Nottingham). Using his meticulous research, John will tell this story.
October	2nd	Making a welcome return to Chesterfield will be our former Chairman / Secretary, <b>Peter Hodgkinson</b> , who will explain the <i>Battle of Selle in October 1918.</i>
November	6th	<b>Bryn Hammond.</b> Another leading light in the field of historical research, study and publication on the Great War, Bryn will discuss <i>'The 500 piece jig-saw: Tank – Other Arms Cooperation in the First World War.</i>
December	4th	Rounding the year off in style will be <b>Dr Phylomena Badsey</b> on <i>"Auxiliary Hospitals and the role of Voluntary Aid Detachment Nurses during the First World War"</i>

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**A Personal note from The Chair (27)**

I am beginning to dread receiving Grant's emails which invariably arrive ahead of our monthly meetings. I think Grant does an excellent job in producing the branch newsletter but the thought of having to find something new to say in this section of the newsletter always fills me with alarm, and then out of the blue there arrived the 1918 Commemoration stamps courtesy of the Royal Mail.



I have admitted in the past to being a stamp collector and this latest set of Commemorative Stamps follows the previous pattern of Great War Centenary with a set of six stamps. Three of the stamps are 1st class value and three at £1.55. Alongside the depiction of a stylized poppy there are extracts from Wilfred Owen's 'Anthem for doomed youth' and Paul Nash's painting 'We are making a new world'. Rather more to my personal taste is a nice photograph of Westminster Abbey's grave of the Unknown Warrior, the 'object' depicted is a

set of flying goggles and finally a portrait photograph of Second Lieutenant Walter Tull.

Tull, you may know was a professional footballer who played for Northampton Town; as did Bernard Vann VC. Tull however was commissioned from the ranks of the 'Footballers Btn. of the Middlesex Regiment in May 1917 after service on the Somme. Now, I have on occasions in these Notes from the Chair railed against tokenism in the Centenary Commemorations but on balance I think his achievement as a man of mixed race, being commissioned in 1917 marks him out as a remarkable man even by the standards of the time. It should I think be remembered that it was only in the Autumn of 1917 that the first handful of Indian officers were awarded King's Commissions, up to then Indian Officers were only granted Viceroy's Commissions. This effectively meant that the most senior grey bearded Indian Officer was outranked by the youngest British subaltern. Tull was killed in the German Spring Offensive of 1918 and is remembered on the Arras memorial having no known grave.

I visited Charles Beresford last week to take him the card many of you signed at the September meeting, he was in good spirits and was looking forward to a weekend trip to Rushden where the Victoria Cross memorial stone for Bernard Vann was to be unveiled. Charles and Margaret send you their thanks for the card and your best wishes, Charles hopes to get to the next meeting if he isn't too tired.

**Tony Bolton** Branch Chair

*Any opinions expressed in this Newsletter /Magazine are not necessarily those of the Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch, in particular, or the Western Front Association in general*

# The Western Front Association's 2019 Calendar

**is now available !**



The Calendar includes high quality, modern images of scenes from the Western Front. The images are specially selected from the work of a number of committed and talented Western Front photographers.

A4 size when folded, opens out to A3 when hung on your wall. £10 (Inc p&p)

This price has been held since the 2015 Calendar.

Order by post or online or by phone on 020 7118 1914

Link to buy on the Eshop is <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/wfa-branded-items/wfa-calendar-2019/>

To Order by phone (020 7118 1914) please have your credit Card details to hand

To order by post please complete this form (link under) and send it with your cheque if paying by cheque  
[file:///H:/WFA/\(2\)%20Branded%20Goods/\(12\)%20Calendar%202019/wfa%20calendar%20leaflet%202019%20\(1\).pdf](file:///H:/WFA/(2)%20Branded%20Goods/(12)%20Calendar%202019/wfa%20calendar%20leaflet%202019%20(1).pdf)

The Calendar itself If you click on this link it will show you a low-resolution version of the calendar  
[file:///H:/WFA/\(2\)%20Branded%20Goods/\(12\)%20Calendar%202019/WFA%20calendar%202019%20proof%206.pdf](file:///H:/WFA/(2)%20Branded%20Goods/(12)%20Calendar%202019/WFA%20calendar%202019%20proof%206.pdf)

[There will also be a limited number available at Branch meetings until the end of the year](#)

## Secretary's Scribbles



September has been a busy month opening with an excellent Branch Meeting. Then I deputised for Branch Chair, Tony Bolton at the Chesterfield Great War Commemorations Working Group meeting. I really got my eyes opened here as to the time and effort being put in by the council and the various local organisations to make sure that the final chapter of The Great War is commemorated in a fitting and respectful manner throughout the district. That was the motive behind the `special edition` of the Newsletter & Magazine which I sent out to give folks ample notice as to all the various presentations and

activities in and around the town. Chesterfield Borough Council - in particular WFA member, Councillor Steve Brunt - are to be congratulated on what they are doing for the Commemorations.

Saturday sees the Branch outing to the Lincoln Branch seminar - there will be a full report in the next Newsletter. Thanks to our Labour Club, hosts of our meetings, members were able to leave their cars in the Club car park. Before heading to the seminar our group visited the Museum of Lincolnshire Life the Great War Mar IV tank on display there. Richard Pullen - familiar face as he has spoken twice at Branch meetings - and gave us a brief talk on this tank. Richard is Chair of the `friends of the Lincoln tank`.

Next Wednesday, Mark Macartney and I will be attending the unveiling in the Worksop Memorial Gardens, a stone to commemorate Sergeant William Henry Johnson a Worksop miner who won the Victoria Cross exactly 100 years ago to the date

The next meeting of the Book Club will be on **Tuesday 16th October** - more about this and the book in focus elsewhere in this Newsletter.

At the last meeting the last of the limited edition slate coasters (only 100 produced) commemorating the 100 Days Offensive of 1918 were snapped up. Branch Vice chair and WFA Branded Goods Trustee, Mark Macartney is delighted that every one has gone, such has been the success of this item. They were very much a `one off` - no more will be produced.

Hopefully before the November meeting I will be in a position to unveil our programme of speakers for 2019 - just awaiting a response from one of the `Big Beasts` of the speakers` circuit. We will have a blend of `Big Names` ... `New Faces` ....and well known ones, a programme which I hope will satisfy the wide of interests our members have in The Great War

Next Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, we welcome former Branch Secretary and Chairman, Peter Hodgkinson, as our guest speaker at the Branch meeting. Peter will explain the ***Battle of Selle in October 1918***. Having heard this presentation at the York 2018 Conference, I can tell you it is not to be missed!

Grant Cullen - Branch Secretary

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## Still Available

### BACKS TO THE WALL

**'To commemorate the 1918 Spring Offensives, the Western Front Association commissioned a Limited Edition bone china mug featuring part of Sir Douglas Haig's 'Backs to the Wall' Order of 11th April 1918. '**

**Available from the eShop on the WFA website**

**(While Stocks Last)**

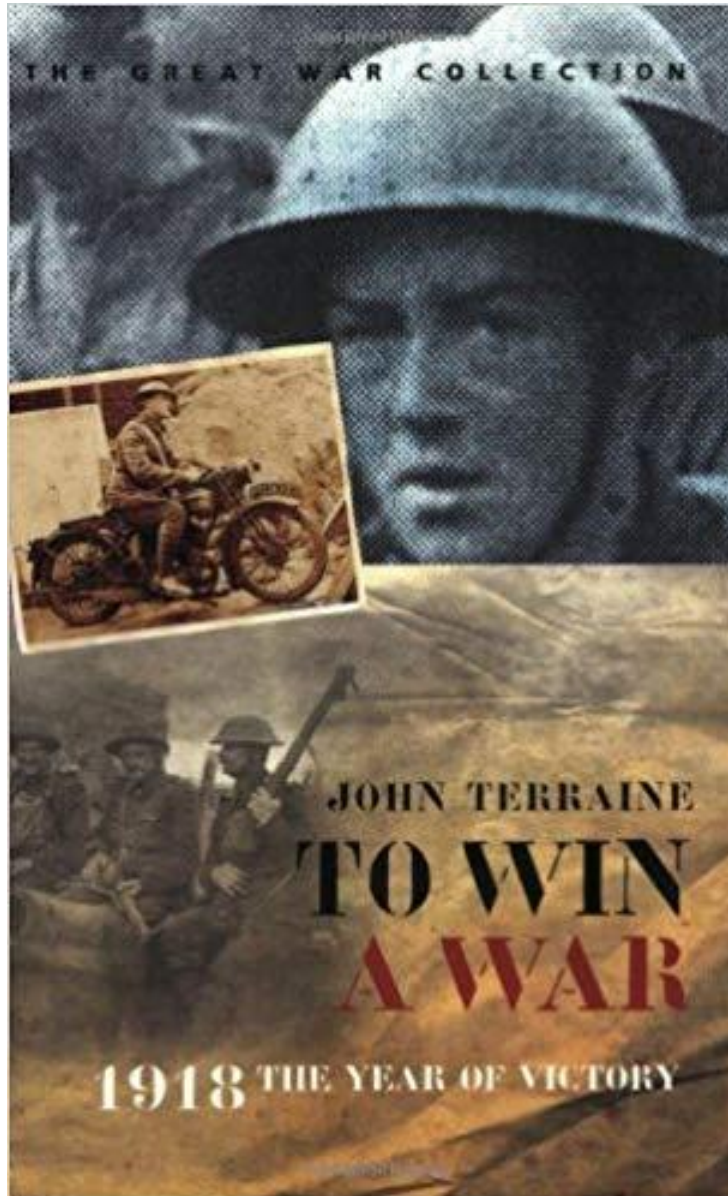
**Price: £14 (+£3 p&p)**





## Book Group

WFA Chesterfield's Book Group will hold their second meeting on **Tuesday 16th October** in our usual venue at Chesterfield Labour Club's Function room 7 - 9pm. The book selected for discussion by those who attended the first meeting is 'To Win a War: 1918, the Year of Victory' by John Terraine.



The book is available from the usual outlets - I got mine for ONE PENNY plus £2.85 postage in reasonable used condition off Amazon.

Hopefully we can build on the successful start that we had at our first meeting in July.

I will mail out a reminder nearer the date.

Picked up a copy of this book in a charity shop last weekend - a bit battered but readable. If anyone who intends coming to the Book Group and would like this copy I will bring it to the Branch Meeting on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

## September Meeting

Branch Chair, Tony Bolton opened the meeting before a healthy attendance, in our traditional manner, before making several announcements. The trip to the Lincoln Branch Seminar, the WFA Calendars for 2019 which had just arrived and the Book Group, next meeting of which will be in October.

Tony, then introduced our speaker for the evening, John Beech.

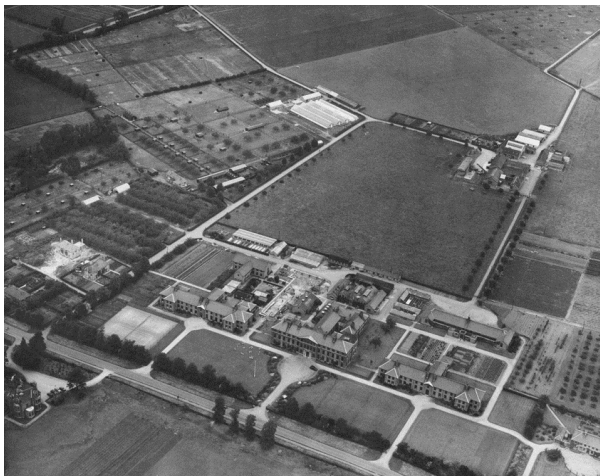


John, from Nottingham, is very much a `regular` at our Branch meetings, indeed he very rarely misses any of our meetings. A dedicated amateur historian who looks into what are considered `local` topics, with a flair for digging out lost information and presenting his well-researched findings in a very thorough and entertaining manner. His presentation for 2018 was entitled `The Great Escape` and was the story of the escape of 22 German officers on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1917 from the prison camp at Sutton Bonington, now the site of the principal campus of the University of Nottingham.

John said that if he restricted his talk to just be about the escape and its aftermath it would just be a quite short talk so he thought it would be better to expand it a bit and talk about POWs held in the UK, as well as the escape itself.

The talk would be about the Sutton Bonington camp itself, some of the personalities incarcerated there, the guards and the camp structure, the escape and the number of Germans who died there. Around June 1917 some of the inmates started to dig a tunnel under one of the huts in the grounds, it took them four months and 22 Germans escaped through it, but before going into detail about that John touched on the arrangements for managing POWs in Britain and how there came to be a camp at Sutton Bonington, under the command of the RGC, the guards and the speed with which it was closed after the war.

The camp was at Sutton Bonington, near Kegworth to the west of Nottingham





The picture is actually a post war one, indeed no one actually knows what the compound looked like although there was a perimeter fence and what is now the main administration building of the University of Nottingham is what often forms the backdrop to pictures of the German officers. There does not appear to be surviving pictures taken inside the building.

So what was the position in 1914, this was the first time since the Napoleonic Wars that Britain had actually had large numbers of prisoners kept in country. In Victorian or colonial wars, prisoners tended to be kept `in theatre` or be sent to Malta or St. Helena, as they did with many of the Boer prisoners, only on rare occasions were senior commanders sent to Britain. That did not mean that there was no facilities for detaining enemy combatants, every garrison town had its own prison, run by the military prisons department and had basically been set up to detain British military personnel who had committed serious offences, warranting imprisonment. So places like Aldershot, Colchester, Chelmsford etc., all had facilities. In peacetime these were adequate as the peacetime British army was actually quite small and it was easy to manage the numbers detained. Of course we went to war in 1914 and there was a sudden need to increase the amount of spaces that had to be available.

Initially, it wasn't Germans we had to worry about - it was the Belgians - many thousands of whom crossed the border into Holland when their country fell and subsequently made their way to Britain where they had to be accommodated. The Government looked around and started to commandeer large scale buildings around the country to house these refugees. Some of these places went on to be civilian detention camps and German POW camps. By September / October time they started to get the Belgian refugees rehoused and the facilities where previously they had been accommodated were now freed up.

There was a lot of agitation in the press etc. over the large numbers of German, Austrian and Hungarian citizens who were living in the UK, who had not been naturalised, for these people to be interned. The numbers are estimated at over 30000, most of these living in London, but there were significant numbers living in the East Midlands working in the hosiery and textile trades, indeed some of the large lace companies were owned by Germans. A lot of these Germans were not `first generation` immigrants, they had just not been naturalised, for example one man, Herbert Monsemeiner whose father originated from Nassau in Germany, had been born in Radford in Nottingham. His father was under suspicion, but Herbert had been a pre-war regular in the British Army in the Northumberland Fusiliers and in 1914 Herbert was recalled to the colours and took his maternal grandfather's name `Adcock`. Herbert was killed in October 1914 at Ypres and initially was buried under the name Adcock but that has now been changed and Lenthams war memorial, where he lived, and the CWGC now have him recorded under his original name. John said that in fact there was quite a few Germans who lived in Nottingham who served with the British forces.

By the autumn of 1914 many of the Belgian refugees had been rehoused but the agitation regarding the German nationals had increased and one man in particular, Pemberton Billings, a Conservative MP wanted them all rounded up and interned and during the winter of 1914-1915 many were indeed detained and put into the camps recently vacated by the Belgians. Some of these camps were totally unsuitable being located in disused quarries - there was a tented camp on Newbury racecourse which was a miserable place for the internees during that first winter. They even used prison hulks. Not much of an advance in the 100 years since French prisoners from the Napoleonic wars had been confined to these. However, by the end of that first wartime winter, the government realised that they needed to increase the number of camps and construction commenced. By the end of 1914 there was 7000 German POWs being held and

these had been held alongside the civilian internees and that was now deemed inappropriate and in early 1915 there was a big push to create camps to house German military personnel.

The nearest one locally was Donnington Hall which was opened in February 1915 despite much local opposition, indeed one correspondent to the Nottingham Evening Post wrote suggesting that they put all the Germans on a boat and sink it mid-Atlantic!!

During 1915, despite the war not going particularly well for the Allies, large numbers of Germans continued to be taken as POWs which by the end of that year had the Government looking around again for more permanent containment facilities and one of the places they set their sights on was Sutton Bonington here seen with its perimeter fence and guard tower and what appears to be the main gate.



Contrary to popular believe this was not the Midland agricultural college at this time, it was based at Kingston upon Soar, but had in fact rented land at this site, known as Lodge Farm, but it was their plan to relocate to Sutton Bonington at some future time. In 1914 the college bought the land, the plan being for the central building to be the administration block with the wings to either side of the main building to be for student accommodation. By the summer of 1916 the college was ready to relocate but the Government immediately stepped in and commandeered it, no students arriving until 1920.

John said he had looked through the archives of the local council East Leake BC and there was in fact no mention of a change of use until September 1916, one month until it opened to house German POWs. The council received a report from a company called Sanderson Walker who had been laying the sewage disposal facilities for the new camp and they basically said that the system installed was going to be inadequate for 600 Germans living there - indeed this report came as a surprise to the council as at the time of receipt of this report they were not even aware that Sutton Bonington was to be used to house prisoners.

Sutton Bonington is actually built upon alluvial sands and from before the war had had a terrible drainage problem with sand blocking up the sewage pumps which caused the sewage to back up and flood the village. The council had been monitoring this quarterly since 1912 so the last thing

they needed was a population increase of 600 by virtue of German POWs arriving and overloading the system. Of course when the camp opened that is exactly what did happen. The problem increased, the village kept flooding and it was into 1917 before they got the Army to accept responsibility for their sewage disposal and it was decided that the best solution was to build a big septic tank. Unfortunately nobody thought about what to do with the tank's contents when it was full and it ended up back in the drains with the return of the old problem, indeed it was 1918 before the army installed its own drainage system.

John then posed the question, what did the camp look like and the honest answer nobody really knows there being little or no written records which have survived, all we have is snippets of information from the Protecting Powers to give an insight into the camp. The nearest to a description of the enclosures that John has been able to find was that referring to another camp on Cannock Chase. There was a six foot entanglement of barbed wire on wooden posts with, inside that, a single strand of wire which, if stepped over rendered the prisoner liable to be shot. Further on the external, there was a 10 foot high fence with an inner overhang. It is known that there was a series of sentry towers at Sutton Bonington around the perimeter. Inside the camp it is known that there was a kitchen managed by British and German cooks.

Although was an officer camp there was a couple of hundred other ranks who often found employment in the kitchen or as cleaners. There was also a small hospital although more difficult cases were sent to Donnington Hall which had a larger medical facility with really serious cases being sent to No.5 General Hospital at Leicester which is today Leicester Royal Infirmary. The lecture theatre could seat 80, there also was two indoor recreation rooms with a sports field out in the grounds.

When the camp opened in 1916 the prisoners were held in the main building which consisted of 55 small rooms and 14 dormitories. Additional accommodation was in the block which would have been the male students' accommodation and in 1917 on the right of the main block, they ran a series of nine huts close to the perimeter fence. The guards initially slept in tents outside the perimeter fence but later 15 small huts were erected to accommodate the guards. There was a civilian run Army and Navy canteen which caused a big problem when they escape took place as they had been using this facility to buy supplies with which they escaped with and in 1918 there was a YMCA hut erected in the guards' compound for their use.

The Nottinghamshire Evening Post does say that the camp was surrounded by barbed wire, electric live wires and is adequately guarded with elevated sentry boxes giving a good view of the camp. There was probably spotlights facing into the camp as well.

That about sums up all that is known of the camp...was there an electrified fence?...that remains to be seen.

So, who was held there? The camp was designed initially to hold 600 prisoners. The first 50 arrived on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1916, all of them being NCOs destined to be officers orderlies and to run the camp facilities, sanitation etc.

When a German was first captured he would be sent, initially, to the French coast and then on to Britain, landing at Southampton and if an officer be sent to an officer's transit camp, there to be given a unique serial number starting at one but going up to around 260000 by the time the war ended. That number was unique to the individual prisoner and stayed with him wherever he went and these can be seen on the records of the International Committee of the Red Cross. However, every time a prisoner moved camp, he was given a camp number and those who were sent to Kegworth / Sutton Bonington had their camp number prefixed 'KEG', starting at 1 and the first prisoner KEG1 was a called Anton Francke who was actually a merchant

seaman working on board a trawler that had been converted to a minesweeper. It was sunk, he was picked up, made prisoner and initially sent to Donnington Hall. When it was realised he wasn't an officer he was removed and arrived at Kegworth upon its opening as a POW camp.

John mentioned that there was a company in Derby, WW Winters, which some may have heard of as over the last couple of years whilst doing renovation works at their premises near the train station, they broke down a wall and behind this they found thousands of glass negative plates taken in and around Derby during the war. They have absolutely no idea who the people in the pictures are although they are in the process of cataloguing and John explained that he had been trying to assist where he could along with a small group of like-minded people. Winters have proved very `cagey` about the images and appear to have identified about 20 or 30 from Kegworth camp and John put up two which are accessible on line



The chap in the left picture, John has narrowed down to three people. On his cap `tally` it says `Unterseeboote` and at the moment only three submariner NCOs have been identified as having been held at Kegworth. None of the other photographs have captions or names of officers. Winters were under the impression that these were propaganda pictures used to demonstrate that prisoners were being kept in good condition but John said he was of the opinion that, as the register that Winters found showed in some cases ten copies had been ordered so it was more than likely a commercial venture whereby a photographer would go into the camp, take photographs which would be converted into postcards which the prisoners would send to family and friends back in Germany.

The first officer to arrive at the camp came on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1916, KapitanLeutnant Alois Bocker whose Zeppelin was shot down the previous month by anti-aircraft fire over Colchester and he was unique in that his whole crew survived the subsequent crash. After the crash he gathered up his crew and started marching them along a road. The local police, having seen the airship crash despatched a constable on a bicycle to investigate and he met with Bocker and his men. Bocker asked `Can you direct me to Colchester ?` to which the constable replied `are you German ?` When Bocker answered `Yes` the policeman said `you had better come with me` and promptly marched them off to Colchester Barracks!

Bocker was subsequently transferred to Kegworth and took the number `KEG51`

John then told the story of an Austrian naval officer who was captured by the Italians, escaped and, passing himself off as a Serb made his way to the United States. He was keen to return to participate in the war and signed on as a crew member on a neutral ship sailing from the US to Holland. His luck ran out when the ship was stopped and searched by the Royal Navy in the western approaches and he was detained, eventually to be incarcerated at Kegworth camp.

By the end of 1916 345 officers and men had passed through the camp and from John`s researches he has found that prisoners did not always stay in one camp, they were often moved around and this has made it difficult when John has been trying to work out exactly how many were held there as, if you were moved away, and subsequently returned to the camp, you were given a new number. So far John has identified about 1325 - 1330. The last two officers to enter the camp was in November 1918 and they were allocated camp numbers 1547 and 1548 respectively.

Moving on, John discussed the men who were actually guarding them but first John drew the distinction between who was actually guardian the prisoners and who was running the camps. There was a camp management structure which had originally been set up to manage the prisoners at Donnington Hall and because of the close proximity from Donnington Hall to Sutton Bonington there would be a dual command. When Donnington Hall opened the commander was Lieutenant Colonel Frances Picot who was born in 1859 and joined the 89<sup>th</sup> Foot Regiment in 1881. This regiment became part of the Wiltshire Regiment and he served with them right through the Boer War by which time he had risen to the rank of major and whilst in South Africa assumed command of a Boer POW camp during which time he transferred to the Military Prisons Command and after the Boer War he managed military detention centres in the UK, retiring in 1910. He was recalled in 1914 and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Picot only had a small staff, his second in command being a Major Kenneth Robertson ex Royal Scots plus a series of Adjutants and interpreters. When Kegworth camp opened Picot and his staff moved there but Robertson remained at Donnington Hall although there was frequent interchange between the two sites. Picot had one son Philip who had been a rubber planter in Malaya but he returned upon the outbreak of war to join the Sherwood Foresters, later moving to the Royal Scots with whom he went to Gallipoli where he was killed in 1915 being buried in Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery at Helles. The Medical Officer was Douglas Bedford who actually covered both camps. Pre-war he had been the GP in Kegworth village and was given a temporary RAMC commission whilst he was M.O. and he appears in many of the Protective Power reports in the National Archives. Whilst Picot and his staff ran the camp, they were not responsible for guarding the camp that fell to the Royal Defence Corps.

In 1914 men, many of whom had previous military service were recalled, but for a variety of reasons, including age and fitness, were deemed unfit for active service. The Government, however, did not want to turn them down and they were put into reserve companies and the men who came to guard the Kegworth Camp were primarily from the reserve units of the



Leicestershire Regiment who formed `supernumerary` companies when the reserves of the Leicestershire Regiment took their place with the formation of the 59<sup>th</sup> Division. The supernumerary companies were outside of the battalion structure but still linked to them. These companies, composed of men considered unfit for active service were used for home defence, guard duties etc., indeed John said he had identified two chaps who joined up in 1914 at the age of 59 and another who had originally joined the army in 1871, which probably made him older still. These men were initially given duties close by where they lived and this practice continued into 1916 by which time they had the added duties of guarding POWs. In March 1916 the Government decided to bring these supernumerary companies and Home Service battalions into one Corps, to be known as the Royal Defence Corps. Initially it was formed of 18 County battalions but on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1916 the supernumerary companies were added. The RDC was given two roles, observation companies, a forerunner of the Royal Observer Corps. John spoke about 156 Company RGC, whose original commander was a man called Lt Col Thomas Piercy, who had little or no military experience, being a mining engineer who had spent much of his working life in gold mines in India and that was where he joined a company of the Burma rifles formed to provide military protection for the mines. Piercy being the senior manager on the spot was made commander! Upon his return to the UK in 1911 he went to live in Loughborough and was subsequently recalled to the colours in 1914 where he became a recruiting officer and by looking at the attestation records of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Leicesters nearly all are signed by Piercy. Failing health saw Piercy resign his commission and he was replaced by a Major Rickensen who was widely blamed for the subsequent escape of the German officers from Sutton Bonington. By all accounts he was a poor officer, formerly of the Royal Garrison Artillery. Originally he had resigned his commission but had been a Territorial Force Reserve commission as a major in 1908 and in 1914 he was appointed second on command of 156 Company. When Piercy retired he took command of the company, a post he held until 1918 when he was removed and replaced. When the escape took place, Rickensen was widely blamed particularly by the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Police, was removed and his place taken for six months by Lt. Col Wilkinson of the RGC at York who was followed by a Major White who remained at this post until the camp closed and he was demobilised. After his removal Rickensen completely disappears, no record of any further military career for him has been found and, as John said, draw your own conclusions from that.

A typical camp guard was a man in his late 40s, early 50s, previous military service but no longer considered fit and able for service overseas but who still willing and able to perform a role in the UK. Many were Boer War veterans but some had service in South Africa and Burma which predated that conflict.

Not all the RGC men were fine upstanding `pillars of the community`. Several days before the escape, three of the men, a Sergeant, a corporal and a private were found guilty at County Shire Hall of `game trespass` - poaching !! Each were fined seven shillings with Sergeant Leviss fined an addition four shillings for not having a licence for his gun! In 1918 Private Charles Prince assaulted a woman on Kegworth station and got eighteen months hard labour.

So to the escapees, the most noted of which was Kapitan Leutnant Karl Von Muller

He was captain of a famous German commerce raider, the Light Cruiser SMS Emden during the, a career naval officer who had joined the navy in 1881



At the outbreak of the War, *Emden* was anchored in the German base at Tsingtao. She steamed out to sea on the evening of July 31, 1914, and on August 4 she intercepted and captured the Russian mail steamer Riasan, the first prize taken by the Imperial German Navy (*Kaiserliche Marine*) in the Great War. *Emden* then made rendezvous with the German East Asia Squadron of Admiral Count von Spee in the Mariana Islands. It was during a conference on the island of Pagan that Müller proposed a single light cruiser of the squadron be detached to raid Allied commerce in the Indian Ocean, while the remainder of Spee's Squadron continued to steam east across the Pacific. Müller and *Emden* were given the assignment. In the following twelve weeks *Emden* and Müller achieved a reputation for daring and chivalry unequalled by any other German ship or captain. Müller was highly scrupulous about trying to avoid inflicting non-combatant and civilian casualties. While taking fourteen prizes, the only merchant sailors killed by the *Emden's* guns were five victims of a bombardment of British oil tanks and a merchant ship at the port of Madras, When *Emden* sent a

landing party ashore to destroy a radio station at Port Refuge in the Keeling Islands on November 8, 1914, she was finally cornered by the HMAS Sydney and was defeated by Sydney's heavier guns. Müller, with the rest of his surviving crew, was captured and taken to Fort Vedala, Malta. From the records it can be seen that as soon as he arrived there he started kicking up a fuss about his conditions of detention. A detachment of his crew which had gone ashore evaded capture and escaped to Germany under the leadership of *Emden's* first officer, Helmuth von Mücke. On October 8, 1916, two days after the German resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, Müller was separated from the rest of the *Emden* prisoners and taken to England where he arrived at Kegworth on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1916.

Upon arrival he promptly started the same campaign that he had ran in Malta.... `my room is too small...I haven't got enough furniture...I am a Kapitän-Leutnant why haven't I got the best room....I deserve better treatment than the rest of the prisoners...`. This goes on until May 1917 at which time his own government tells him to shut up and just get on with life in the conditions probably better than many civilians back in Germany were having to put up with.

A lot of people believe that von Muller is the instigator of the escape and there is probably an element of truth in that but the fact that he was told to `shut up` by his own government in May and the tunneling started a month later is possibly connected.

John then discussed three of the escapees, there being quite insufficient time to go through all of those who got out the compound. These were Oberleutnant Stephan von Prodzynski, Leutnant Otto Wilhelm Thelen and Leutnant zur See Joachim Thomsen. Prodzynski's claim to fame was that he when piloting a floatplane in December 1914 was the first man to drop bombs from an aircraft on the British mainland, an exploit which saw him awarded an Iron Cross by the Kaiser. In February 1915 - the night of the 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> he attacked Colchester but his plane ditched in the sea and he and Observer Heim were both rescued and made prisoner, Prodzynski eventually arriving at Kegworth in December 1916.

Leutnant Otto Wilhelm Thelen - whom John said was a personal favourite of his, was great prewar German pioneering flyer along with his brother Robert who was a noted aircraft designer who worked for the Albatros Flugzeugwerke. He designed the Albatros C1 fighter plane. Otto became the 491<sup>st</sup> person Germany to obtain a pilot's licence and in 1914 was with Flieger Abteilung V. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1914 he was an observer in a German plane when they were

spotted by an RFC plane of 5 Squadron piloted by a man called Louis Strange who had developed the seatbelt for fighter pilots and in 1915 came up with the idea of fitting a Lewis gun to the upper wing of his plane so that he could fire over the arc of the propellor, this of course in the days before the invention of interrupter gear which allowed machine guns to be fired through the spinning propellor without shooting it off. Strange had a long and successful career retiring as an Air vice Marshall. At this time in 1914 it was not the observer who commanded the plane in the German Air force, rather the pilot which, on this mission was a man called Julius Schulz, this despite Thelen being senior in rank. Strange shot two drums of Lewis gun ammunition at the German plane and forced Schulz to land behind Allied lines and both Thelen and Schulz were taken prisoner. In the spirit of the times, Strange landed close by his victim and later wrote in his biography that Thelen was seen to be punching and kicking Schulz whom Thelen did not think had put up much of a fight. He had to be dragged away from the hapless pilot by British soldiers. Thelen was a habitual escaper and arrived at Donnington Hall in February 1915. He escaped from there on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1915 and was at large for a week before re-capture and being sent to Hollyport Camp. He was caught trying to tunnel out of this camp in February 1916 and as a result spent some time in Chelmsford detention barracks before being returned to Hollyport from where he promptly escaped again! At large for two days he was returned to Chelmsford from where he broke out yet again only to be caught once again, finally ending up at Sutton Bonington, from where, of course, he escaped again. He is believed to have made seven escape attempts where he actually got out of camps and after being recaptured and returned to Kegworth, the authorities had had enough and packed him off to Holland.

Whilst in custody (again) at Chelmsford, Thelen, met up with a guy called Emile Lehman, another who had a record of escape attempts and when both were transferred to Sutton Bonington, John believed that, because of their record as habitual escapers and experience of tunneling, both were the instigators of the break out from this camp and probably ran the show.

Leutnant zur See Joachim Thomsen was another naval aviator whose plane was attacking shipping in the North Sea when it was hit and he ditched in the sea. Another plane piloted by Josef Melann landed beside them and took Thomsen and his fellow crewman on board in an attempted rescue but because of weight his seaplane could not take off so he tried to make for Holland on the surface but they were intercepted by a British destroyer and all four went into captivity. Subsequently all four were members of the Kegworth escape team, having arrived in July 1917 although by that time tunneling had commenced.

John then went on to say `what do we know about the escape` ...not a lot really although it appears that Karl von Muller was the one who suggested the escape attempt although Thelen and Lemman would seem to have been the main diggers. A start seems to have been made in June 1917 and took three months to construct from the German recreation hut out and under the perimeter fence.

John recalled what he said earlier, the soil around Sutton Bonington is alluvial sand so they must have used timber to shore up the tunnel...a bit like in the film `The Great Escape` where they nick folks bed boards etc. to support the tunnel walls along its 120 foot length. The tunnel was only 30 inches high so it must have been quite claustrophobic for those in it and ran under and out of the hut, under the perimeter wire and under and beyond the access road to the camp, emerging in a turnip field.

The escape took place under the cover of an air raid an opportunity because all the camp`s lights went out so as not to be seen from the air. All the escapees were out quickly and appeared to have scattered, there being no uniformity as to the ways they dispersed, clusters of men everywhere. Once they had escaped warning notices were posted around the County and



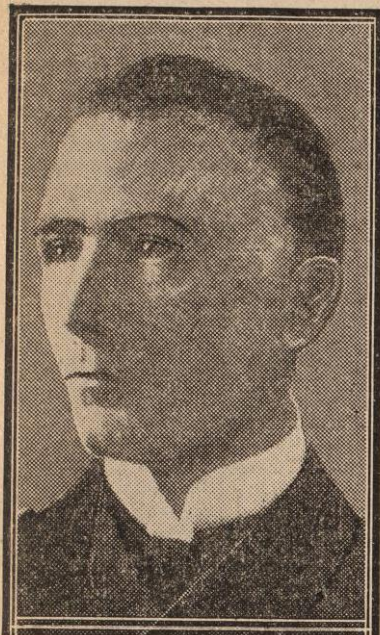
the Territorial Force men, Special Constabulary were called out, even air force cadets from Cranwell came over on motor cycles and they all started to hunt down these escapees.

Many of these still wore their actual uniforms with three being recaptured at Trent Bridge in Nottingham trying to pass themselves off as Spanish sailors. Some however just sat around in fields and John said he got the impression that the prime aim was not to get away but to cause maximum aggravation and disruption to the British. The Chief Constable said that they were trying to get to the coast but with four days eighteen of them had been captured and the majority of these within five miles of the camp. Seven were captured on September 24<sup>th</sup>, including Lehman and Thelen while Karl von Muller was spotted by a group of school children in Plumtree near Nottingham and promptly arrested.

By the 25<sup>th</sup> a further six had been captured and all had been taken within by the next couple of days. Four got as far as Brimington, just on the outskirts of Chesterfield being captured on the night of September 30<sup>th</sup>. For a `hardened` escapee, it must have been quite a comedown for von Muller who was actually arrested by an RSPCA inspector! - here is the headline and article from the Nottingham Guardian newspaper from the 26<sup>th</sup> of September. Samson Gunn the farmer spotted them, reported what he had seen to RSPCA Inspector John Keast. Muller thought Keast`s uniform was military and surrendered!

THE NOTTINGHAM GUARDIAN, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1917.

## CAPTAIN OF EMDEN AMONG RECAPTURED PRISONERS



Karl von Mueller, the captain of the German raider Emden, who was among the prisoners who escaped from Sutton Bonnington and was recaptured about mid-day near Plumtree.



Trumped the Germans' trick! Inspector John Keast, R.S.P.C.A., Nottingham, and Samson Gunn, farmer, East Leake, who found the two escaped German prisoners, Lieuts. Fritz Boerner and Hans Kraus, playing cards in a ditch on Gotham Hills.

None of the men appeared to have made much of an attempt to evade capture, when challenged they all just raised their arms and surrendered.

One man needs special mention, Special Constable William Neep who with others captured seven of the escapees, mostly on the advice of villagers who reported seeing men in unusual attire in their area.

Not all the men who escaped and subsequently were recaptured had been taken in the European theatre of war, several had been serving with German forces in China and the Camerons in Africa.

John then put up a picture showing pictures being marched back to the camp with the caption saying the location is Castle Donnington but if you look at the picture carefully some of the German prisoners all appear to be wearing civilian clothes - so is this picture of escapees who had been rounded up and be taken back to the camp?



So what happened to the prisoners after they were recaptured? The authorities were absolutely miffed that these Germans had escaped, indeed it was the largest mass escape of German prisoners in either war. The problem was for any escaped prisoner the maximum penalty was 14 days solitary confinement - unless there was extenuating circumstances. As the prisoners had taken the blankets off their beds they were additionally charged with stealing blankets - HM Government property - as John said King George must have been mightily upset when these blankets disappeared! So because they were charged with stealing blankets they were given an extra sentence of between 55 and eighty days.

The escapees served their sentences at Chelmsford and after that some were returned to Kegworth, others scattered throughout various other camps. The ringleaders, like von Muller were all packed off into internment in Holland and Switzerland in late 1917 or early 1918.



There was in fact two other escapes from Sutton Bonington before the end of the war. In September 1918 two airman got away and tried to steal an aircraft from East Bridgford aerodrome but were caught before they could make good their escape. Another two got away and made it all the way to London and when captured their excuse was they wanted to see London before the war ended! Now bearing in mind they were wearing German uniforms they got to London, had a meal, took in a show before surrendering themselves at Cannon Street police station and being returned to Sutton Bonington.

To gauge the official reaction of the mass escape, the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire was a guy called Thomason, wrote to the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire, one Mitchell Innes and told him that on one of these escapees they found an Ordnance survey map from Kegworth to Grimsby and Long Sutton upon which there was pencil marks evidently showing the stages of their journey. By this they were meant to be at Beckingham on the fourth day, Harmston on the fifth, River Witham by the sixth, while by the seventh day since escaping, the Humber and on the ninth day, Sutton on Sea. It appeared that the Germans thought that Sutton on Sea was a big port. Thomason seemed to think that was where they were headed but in fact few made it out of the County. The interesting point was the fact that they had an Ordnance Survey map and John recalled they he had earlier mentioned that there was an Army & Navy store at the camp which the Germans could use with money sent from home and their wages. In fact much of the gear used to implement the escape had in fact been purchased from the Army & Navy store.

Chief Constable Thomason wrote to the Home Secretary... `I have the honour to report that on the 25<sup>th</sup> September at 4.30 pm a sergeant of this Force, detained three men on Trent Bridge who, upon further examination proved to be German officers who had escaped. The Special Constables from South of the Trent were called out and every effort made in apprehending the escaped prisoners.`

Indeed it was not until the Deputy Chief Constable went to the camp on September 24<sup>th</sup> that the Camp Commandant, Rickensen, was even aware that there had been an escape of 22 German military personnel!

Thomason went on to praise his Special Constables but continued in his letter..... `the number of full constables in the County is now extremely small and while the Special Constables get through a tremendous amount of work and make every effort that cannot always be repeated if there is a further escape of people from the camp, and similar success as on this occasion may not be attained. English officers make bad gaolers, it is not in their work and their previous training is all against it. The system at the camp, as far as I know, seems to be wrong, the Commandant is not in complete control of the outside guards` In John`s words, Thomason considered Rickensen `a bit of an idiot`

The Home Secretary, Lord Derby, held a Court of Enquiry, and wrote a long letter which included the following..... `Thomason took the Deputy Chief Constable of Leicestershire into the hut where the tunnel was and put him three feet from the mouth of the tunnel and asked him if he could find it - he couldn`t.` One of the things which worried them was how they had dug this tunnel - Lord Derby said they had no tools and improvised by using a jam pot and a piece of zinc shaped like a trowel and questioned as to what they had done with the soil removed from the tunnel - it was found to have been hidden beneath the stage in the lecture theatre.

There was one death at the camp during the war, Leutnant Hans Schinglebeck who had arrived at Kegworth Camp in October 1916 just after it opened and in January 1917 he contracted appendicitis but he would not accept treatment by British doctors and his condition deteriorated. He was taken to Leicester Royal Infirmary where he subsequently died. The funeral was held at Welford Road Cemetery across the road from the hospital and 20 German

officers were allowed to go from the camp to attend his funeral and they went by train on parole with only one guard in attendance. After the funeral they were taken for lunch before being put back on the train to Kegworth.

During the war three guards died of illness and another died in a mining accident after discharge. Like everyone else they suffered badly from the Spanish `flu pandemic and there was a 34 deaths recorded at Kegworth camp and these men were interred at Castle Donnington cemetery - no deaths were actually recorded at Castle Donnington camp. John said he had in his possession a letter from one of the German inmates at Kegworth to his wife and this letter mentions the `flu in the camp and the fact that they had to give up their recreation facilities to make a temporary hospital. The letter says that ten had already died and this rose to 34 plus the three guards as mentioned previously. Why were the deceased moved to Castle Donnington for burial? That John couldn't answer as there is a cemetery at Sutton Bonington. When the announcement was made that the camp would close in early 1919 the Germans asked that they could erect a memorial and this was duly done and the memorial was created by grouping together all the individual grave markers. The burials at Castle Donnington and that of Schinglebeck at Welford road remained there until 1961 when they were all disinterred and moved to the German cemetery at Cannock Chase.



There was one final victim of the Spanish Flu - Joachim Thomsen, one of the escapers. He died at Dartford and was buried there. Like the others his remains were moved to Cannock chase in 1961.

So what happened to the camp? It appeared the authorities had a problem given the number of deaths when compared with Donnington Hall which had none. The camp closed in February 1919 the inmates 540 of them being moved to a new facility at Oswestry, with Lt Colonel Picot as Camp Commander. The site was returned to the Midland Agricultural College in October 1919 and finally opened as that establishment in the spring of 1920 by which time the War Office owed £5000 in back rent!!

John sat down to a well-earned vote of thanks by Tony Bolton with the members showing their appreciation in the traditional manner. No doubt John is planning another interesting talk for us - probably not for next year but certainly the year after.

## WFA Milton Keynes Branch Seminar

15th September

The Oak Tree Centre, Milton Keynes MK5 7HP 15th Sept

### Land, Sea and Air: First World War Seminar



This was an exciting full day seminar arranged by the Milton Keynes Branch of The Western Front Association.

What an excellent way to mark the centenary of the Great War.

The four distinguished speakers were historians who specialise in the First World War on land, sea and in the air.

Peter Hart, Oral Historian, Imperial War Museum, presenting a brand new talk entitled 'The All Arms Battle - how we won the war.'

Professor Andrew Lambert, Professor of Naval History, King's College, London, presenting another new talk entitled 'Sir Julian Corbett, Jutland and the educational value of experience.'

Greg Baughen, Author and Historian, Military Aviation, discussing 'From Flying Dreadnought to Dogfighter - the troubled birth of the British fighter.'

Alexandra Churchill, Historian, Author and Researcher, with her excellent talk on 'King George V and the Great War.'

Greg Baughen also commented on:

The **Vickers F.B.5 (Fighting Biplane 5)** -known as the "**Gunbus**"

The **Bleriot** single-seat scout plane.

The **Bristol Scout**, a single-seat rotary engine biplane originally designed as a racing aircraft

The **Gloster Javelin** a twin-engined T tailed delta wing subsonic night and all-weather interceptor aircraft (not WW1)

The **Fairey Delta (again not WW1)** a British research aircraft produced by the Fairey Aviation Company for investigation of delta wing flight characteristics and control at transonic speeds

An odd point from the speakers are as under:

Peter Hart said, Britain did not win the War, it was a collective Challenge (Corporate Effort) It's Firepower and neat skill of men that ended the War.

Alexandra Churchill pointed out that, George could be BREXIT, Ireland should be a Dominion but linked to the UK, He nearly died when Haig's horse sat on him, George was instrumental in starting the first UK two minute silence. Percy FitzPatrick wrote to King George V requesting that Britain adopt a two minute silence on the first anniversary of Armistice Day. The King accepted his request and the first UK two minute silence took place on November the 11th 1919

In addition to a splendid buffet lunch, tea, coffee and biscuits was served throughout the day. There were local branch display Stands plus a stall selling military books manned by Martin Passande from WFA Kent NW Branch and the WFA Branded Goods Stand manned by WFA Trustee Mark Macartney and his partner Jean Walker.



# First World War Centenary 1918-2018

11 November 2018 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the armistice ending the First World War.

Chesterfield Borough Council has worked with a series of partners including the Royal British Legion, ex-service organisations and local faith and community groups to organise a series of events to mark the anniversary.

For more information, visit: [www.chesterfield.gov.uk/ww1](http://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/ww1)



**CHESTERFIELD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



**Floral display** outside the Speedwell Rooms at Staveley on now until the autumn

**Poetry walk and artillery gun display** on Vicar Lane on now until November

**Annual exhibition by Chesterfield St Helen's and District Local History Society**

Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 September

Telling the story of WW1 in the local area - photos, articles, memorabilia and talks.  
10am to 4pm, Christ Church, Sheffield Road.

**New Whittington remembers**

Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 September at St Barnabas Church.

Exhibition telling the story of the WW1 in the local area, 12pm to 4pm.

Memorial service at 11am on Sunday 29 September.

### Events at Chesterfield Museum

#### The Trench Experience

11 October to 19 January

Interactive experience displaying the memorial book and reading out letters from the First World War.

#### Weapons of a World War One Infantryman

Thursday 1 November, 10am to 4pm  
Discover and handle the contents of an Infantryman's kitbag.

#### Mercian Regiment on tour

Sunday 11 November, 10am to 3pm  
Features a talk, The bloody road to victory, at 12.30pm.

Chesterfield Museum is open each Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10am to 4pm.

**Admission is free.**

### Events at the Winding Wheel

#### The Last Battle

Wednesday 31 October, 7.30pm  
Lecture by Peter Hart.

#### Festival of Remembrance

Thursday 8 November, 7.30pm  
Organised by the Fellowship of the Services, featuring the Long Eaton Silver Prize Band.

### Events at the Pomegranate Theatre

#### The Fulstow Boys

Thursday 20 September at 7.30pm

Play by Steelworks Theatre Company

#### Pack up your troubles

Thursday 4 October at 2pm

Show by Paper Moon Theatre Company

#### Private Peaceful

Friday 19 October, 1.30pm; Saturday 20 October, 2pm and 7.30pm

Play by Michael Morpurgo, presented by Scamp Theatre.

#### Screening of World War One related films

Sunday 4 November at 2pm  
**Lawrence of Arabia**

Sunday 4 November at 7.30pm  
**War Horse**

Monday 5 November at 11am  
**Regeneration**

Monday 5 November at 2pm  
**All Quiet on the Western Front**

Monday 5 November at 7.30pm  
**Oh! What a Lovely War**

#### The Eleventh Hour

Tuesday 6 to Saturday 10 November, evenings 7.30pm, Wednesday matinee 2pm, Saturday matinee 3pm  
Play by John Goodrum.

For more information on these events or to book tickets, visit:  
[www.chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk](http://www.chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk)



## Events in the borough from 11 October to 11 November

### Poppy commemoration

until Sunday 11 November  
At St Mary and All Saints' Church in association with the Royal British Legion featuring a knitted poppy to remember all of the 1,574 service personnel from Chesterfield killed from 1914 to 1918.

### Courage of Conscience

during October and November  
Chesterfield ProPeace group exhibition at Chesterfield Library exploring conscientious objectors during the First World War.

### So Long, Farewell

Friday 26 October, 7.30pm at Chesterfield Library, a presentation with words and music by Linda Woodroffe.

### Beer Festival

Friday 2 and Saturday 3 November  
First World War-themed event, organised by Chesterfield CAMRA in Market Hall Assembly Rooms.

### Firework extravaganza

Sunday 4 November  
At Stand Road Park, featuring a bonfire lighting to commemorate the centenary, fireworks at 7pm.

### Community event

Tuesday 6 November, 5pm  
At Outwood Academy featuring students' work, memorabilia, market stalls and a poppy fall.

### Soldier exhibition

Saturday 10 November  
At Holymoorside United Reformed Church, featuring tea at 3pm.

### Brimington remembers

Sunday 11 November  
Service on the village green at 11am and Beacon of Light Ceremony at 7pm.

### Poppy cascade

Monday 5 to Sunday 11 November  
Poppy cascade and garden of remembrance at Chesterfield Town Hall featuring poppies knitted and crocheted by community members.





## Remembrance services taking place in Chesterfield during November

### Spital Cemetery

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Monday 5 November at 2pm

### St Augustine's Church, Whitecotes Lane

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Sunday 11 November at 9.30am

### Hasland

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Sunday 11 November at 10am  
Hasland Methodist Church

### Staveley

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Sunday 11 November at 11am  
Taking place at the war memorial

### Brampton

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Sunday 11 November at 11am  
St Thomas' Church,

### Crich Memorial

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Sunday 11 November, 11am  
Organised by the Chesterfield branch,  
Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters  
Association.

### Old Grammar School, West Studios

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Sunday 11 November at 11am

### Newbold

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Sunday 11 November at noon

### Chesterfield Town Centre

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Sunday 11 November at 11am  
Eleventh Hour Ceremony at St Mary and  
All Saints Church  
2.30pm - service at St Mary and All Saints'  
Church, parade and wreath-laying at the  
war memorial, Rose Hill.

### Brimington

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Sunday 11 November at 3pm  
Parade and service

### Christ Church, Sheffield Road

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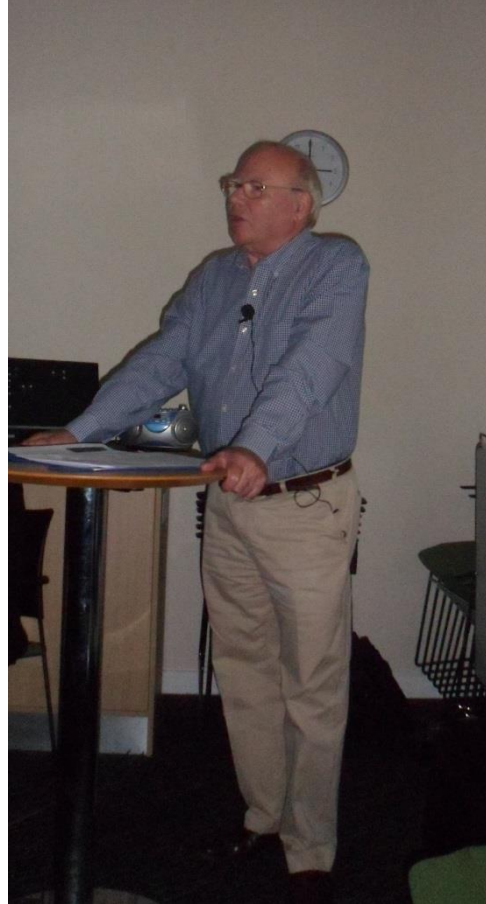
Sunday 11 November at 6.30pm  
Organised by the Chesterfield branch of  
The Old Contemptibles' Association.

In addition, Chesterfield's Mayor,  
Councillor Stuart Brittain, will lay a wreath  
at each publicly accessible WW1 war  
memorial in the borough and take  
part in a short ceremony.



## William Henry Johnson VC

On September 13<sup>th</sup>, I and almost 30 others gathered in Worksop Library to hear the life story of Worksop's only Victoria Cross winner in the First World War, William Henry Johnson VC. The presentation was in the capable hands of Charles Emson, a local historian, who discussed Johnson's life prior to enlisting, and WFA member Robert Ilett who explained his military career and that of his life post war. Charles illustrated his part of the talk with a series of photographs of Worksop, including where William lived in the years prior to World War One, and pictures depicting visits by British and European royalty to the Welbeck Abbey Estates.



The picture on the left shows Charles Emson being introduced by Helen Fox, organiser of the event, that on the right Robert Ilett delivering his presentation.

Charles told one very interesting story concerned the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie who visited Worksop and Welbeck Abbey in 1912. In snowy conditions he went out on a hunting party and while there narrowly missed death or serious injury when another shooter in the party fell, his gun went off and only narrowly missed the Archduke.....as Charles put it....What If...??????





William Henry Johnson (1890-1945) was born in Worksop, Nottinghamshire, on the 15th October 1890. He was the son of William and Elizabeth Johnson, and had an older brother Edward. His father died when he was quite young and he subsequently left school aged 13 and went to work at Manton Colliery which had just started production. He was also bell ringer at Worksop Priory Church. He enlisted in to the Sherwood Foresters on the 9th February 1916. Serving as a Sergeant in the 1/5th Battalion, Nottinghamshire Regiment when he performed the deed for which he was awarded the VC. On 3rd October 1918 at Ramicourt, France, when Sergeant Johnson's Platoon was held up by a German machine gun nest, he worked his way forward under heavy fire, and single-handedly charged the post, bayoneting several gunners and capturing two machine guns. During this attack he was severely wounded, but continued to

lead forward his men. Shortly afterwards, the line was once more held up by machine guns. Again, he rushed forward, attacked the post single-handedly, bombed the garrison, put the guns out of action and captured the teams.



No. 306122 Sjt. William Henry Johnson, 1/5th Bn., Notts. & Derby. R. (T.F.) (Worksop).

For most conspicuous bravery at Ramicourt on the 3rd of October, 1918.

When his platoon was held up by a nest of enemy machine guns at very close range, Sjt. Johnson worked his way forward under very heavy fire, and single-handedly charged the post, bayoneting several gunners and capturing two machine guns. During this attack he was severely wounded by a bomb, but continued to lead forward his men.

Shortly afterwards the line was once more held up by machine guns. Again he rushed forward and attacked the post single-handedly. With wonderful courage he bombed the garrison, put the guns out of action, and captured the teams.

He showed throughout the most exceptional gallantry and devotion to duty.

The citation for the award of the VC was posted in the London Gazette 14th December 1918. The VC was presented to him by King George V at Buckingham Palace on the 29th March 1919. In March 1920, he was awarded the French Medaille Militaire.

Robert describe the route taken by wounded men from the front until they arrived at a Base Hospital, then brought back to the UK where serious cases could be treated. William's wounds were such that he was never fit enough again to go back underground at the pit but he found work on the surface as a Weigh Checker.

He served in a Home Guard during World War II, but while serving in a searchlight unit, he suffered an injury to his leg that necessitated amputation. Later he was admitted to hospital at Sheffield for further treatment, and shortly afterwards his second foot was amputated. Sadly, William didn't recover from his injuries and died on 25th April 1945. He was buried in Redhill Cemetery, Nottingham with full military honours. One of the mourners at his funeral was John Caffrey VC.





In October 2011, The Newark Advertiser newspaper reported that the wording on his headstone at Arnold was repainted. The report noted "The Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Victoria Cross Committee donated half of the £360 it cost to renovate Sergeant William Henry Johnson's faded epitaph. This painting of William Henry Johnson VC hangs in the upper gallery of Worksop Library.

An excellent presentation, what a pity so few folks in Worksop are aware of this quiet, polite and unassuming man`s heroic exploits

On Wednesday 3rd October 2018, the centenary of the action that led to the award of the Victoria Cross a commemorative paving stone will be unveiled in the Memorial Gardens, The Canch, Worksop. (adjacent to the Library) This unveiling will take place at 1pm. At the same time and for one day only, Mr Johnson`s medals, including his VC will be on display in Worksop Library. William`s medals including the VC, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-19, King George VI Coronation Medal 1937 and French Medaille Militaire are held by the Sherwood Foresters Museum, Nottingham Castle.



## The Munitions Crisis - part 16

The Trade Union deputation accepted the Government's offer to incorporate the provisions of the two circulars under a guarantee that the Unions would cooperate with the dilution scheme and signed a document pledging the Conference and membership of their society to accept the scheme of dilution and cooperating actively within if the Government incorporated in the Bill the rates of pay and conditions of labour in controlled establishments set out in the Ministry's two circulars. The Bill was re-committed and amended in accordance with this agreement and thereafter dilution made rapid headway.

The story of the steps taken to organise labour for the munition factories and to induce them to put forward their best efforts and submit to control and the suspension of cherished trade union regulations and practices, would not be complete without a tribute to the vitally important help rendered by the King (below) to the nation by heartening and encouraging the munition workers and those who were creating the district organisations.



It would be hard to overestimate the value of the national service rendered by his visits to the munition areas and the personal relations he established with the workers there. The previous narrative has shown that a dangerous gulf had threatened to open between the outlook of the men in the trenches and that of the men at home in the factories. While those who had joined the army felt they were serving King and Country, and put on their khaki a spirit of loyal comradeship and unquestioning service, those who remained in the familiar civilian environments of the workshop found it hard to escape from the old traditional atmosphere of jealous care for their rights as against their employers, the fear of exploitation, the readiness to strike at any threat of encroachment upon their hard won privileges. It was no easy task to persuade them that they too were in the service of the State for the defence of the nation; and to this end nothing could have been happier than the spontaneous resolve of the King to go about

amongst them, to shake them by the hand, talk with them and to make a direct appeal to their patriotism and citizenship.

Today it is a familiar sight to see the Queen and members of the Royal Family in close proximity to the public but one hundred odd years ago that was very much not the case.

In the spring of 1915 when labour troubles were beginning to make themselves felt, King George began this practice of visiting places where munitions were being produced. On March 17<sup>th</sup> 1915 he went to Woolwich Arsenal and inspected the royal gun and carriage factories there and the royal laboratory where explosives were made and tested.



Few pictures exist of the King on these visits but the image on the right shows him visiting a munitions factory (probably later in the war) with the `Munitionettes` all lined up to greet him.

At the end of April 1915 he similarly visited the other royal factories, the small arms factory at Enfield and the gunpowder factory at Waltham Abbey. He followed up this visit by sending a special royal message to the workers at these factories, expressing his keen interest in their work, and his conviction that all

engaged in the workshops would do their utmost, individually and collectively, to support their comrades at the front. On May 12<sup>th</sup> the King paid a two day visit to Portsmouth, and went through the dockyards there, and again sent a message upon his return expressing;

*“appreciation of the part which, by their devotion to duty, they are taking in maintaining the strength and efficiency of the Fleet”*

Hardly had he got back to Buckingham Palace before he was off again on a week`s tour of the shipyards and munition factories of the north. He spent 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> May on the Clyde, touring round from early morning to visit shipbuilding yards. At one of the largest, that of the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company, the workmen presented him with a resolution expressing their loyalty and determination to press forward as efficiently and rapidly as possible with the Government work on which they were engaged. Replying he said;

*“.....this resolution will be universally welcomed and will strengthen the confidence of the Nation in ultimate victory. It will indeed be a happy outcome if my visit to the Clyde has in any way conduced to this expression of patriotic resolve on the part of the men of one of the most important shipyards in this renowned industrial centre”*

From the Clyde the King went to the Tyne where he also spent two days and spoke personally with a number of foremen and workers in the armament works and shipyards. He met members of the North East Coast Armaments Committee, and encouraged them in their task. He thanked the workmen in a speech for what they had done, but urged that more was still required. He voiced the hope that;

*“...that all restrictive rules and regulations would be removed, and that all would work to one common end and purpose”*

This was a courageous gesture on the King`s part to help forward the solution of the very difficult problem of suspending the trade union restrictions which was at that time were seriously hampering output. He followed that up a fortnight later by sending message to the Armaments Committee urging workers to; *“do all they can”*



King George concluded this tour by visiting Barrow in Furness on 21<sup>st</sup> May. Whilst there he received a message from the Wallsend workers declaring their resolve to get ahead with the Government work, and he replied expressing his appreciation.

On June 10<sup>th</sup> he sent a message to the Barrow workers appreciating;  
*“...their assurances of loyalty and of resolution to do their utmost to assist in bringing to a victorious conclusion the great war which has*

*now been raging for ten months..”*

The formation of the Ministry of Munitions had stimulated great interest in the King and this he expressed in a communication to the Minister.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> July he started off and toured the munitions areas of the Midlands. At Coventry he went round the works and spoke personally to the foremen and men in all the workshop. The members of the Coventry Armaments committee were presented to him. Then he went on to Birmingham where he spent the next day. So much interest did he show himself to be in the process of munition manufacture that it was difficult for members of his entourage to draw him away and thus enable him to keep to his time table. Here again he insisted on having the Munitions Committee and the District Board of Management be presented to him.

Towards the end of September the king made another munitions tour, this time in Yorkshire where he spent three days at Leeds and Sheffield. He moved among the munition workers, chatting freely with them. He picked out one worker at Sheffield, with whom he had recognised as having served with him when he was a midshipman in HMS Bacchante. He watched another making shells and remarked to him;

*“...I am glad you realise the importance of the work in hand. Without an adequate supply of shells we cannot expect to win”*

Words like these uttered `man to man` by the Head of State` to the artisan, naturally ran like wildfire through the works. It was this directness of personal contact, free from pomp or any trace of arrogance and aloofness, which made the King's visits to the munition areas such a valuable aid in the task of rousing the workers` enthusiasm and breaking through their reluctance to accept new methods and regulations. It was a real service to the men at the front who were in such peril at that time of being overwhelmed by the superior equipment and firepower of the enemy. The stimulation of the munition workers was of course only one among the myriad tasks imposed upon the Sovereign by the war - tasks to which he totally applied himself and which established him more firmly in the affection of most of the people of the nation. The British Crown was the only throne in all the combatant countries which survived the critical years of the war, others being overthrown or forced to abdicate. Nowhere was the part he played more fruitful and valuable than in the encouragement of the munitions workers.

To be continued



## From the 'Nottingham Evening Post,' 22nd September 1915.

Wounded Gallipoli veteran, [1] Stoker 1st Class Cecil Myers Dale, R.F.R., Hood Battalion, took his own life on 21st September 1915. The inquest held the following day heard that he had been unable to come to terms with his experiences, particularly the loss of a close friend on the peninsula.

“CONVALESCENT HOME TRAGEDY.

“NOTTINGHAM NAVAL STOKER’S SUICIDE.

“The suicide of a Nottingham naval stoker proved, on investigation by the Derby Deputy Coroner (Mr. J. W. Holbrook) this morning, [22nd September 1915] to be one of the minor tragedies of the war.

“The deceased, Cecil Myers Dale, 35, of 32, Crown-street, Carlton-road, was called up as a member of the Royal Fleet Reserve at the outbreak of the war, and was sent first to Antwerp, and then a few months ago, to the Dardanelles. There he was wounded in the hand, and contracted malarial fever. After being in hospital at Malta he came home for 28 days’ leave.

“Early in August he reported himself at the naval encampment at Blandford, Dorset, and on September 14th he was received at Markeaton Hall, near Derby, as one of a number of convalescent sailors whom Mrs. Mundy is entertaining there. About seven o’clock on Tuesday morning he went out saying he was going for a walk before breakfast. As he did not return search was made for him, and he was found lying unconscious on the bank of the brook running through the hall grounds, with a severe wound in his throat and his clothes saturated with water. There was an empty razor case nearby, and a track of blood indicated that he had first cut his throat and then walked into the water, afterwards struggling out. He was attended by Dr. Lochrane and then removed to the Derby Infirmary, where he died shortly afterwards.

“The widow, [Ada] who is left with four children, told the jury that when deceased was home in June he seemed very weak and unstrung through the war. She saw him at Markeaton Hall on Sunday, when he was strange in his manner, and apparently suffering from loss of memory. He told her that his head was “empty.”

“Gilbert Booth, of the Royal Marines, one of the inmates of the hall, said deceased, who spent a lot of time with him, complained of pains in the head and brooded a great deal over the fate of a mate, who was killed at the Dardanelles.

“Dr. G. Dyke, of the infirmary staff, expressed the opinion that the fits of depression from which deceased suffered were due rather to the impression created by sights he had witnessed while on active service than to the effects of malarial fever.

“The jury returned a verdict of “Suicide while temporarily insane.”

Buried in Nottingham General Cemetery, he was the 35 year-old husband of Ada Dale, of 32 Crown Street, Nottingham, later 278 Carlton Road, Nottingham.

He had been wounded during the Third Battle of Krithia on 4th June 1915 and invalided back to the U.K. on 21st June 1915. Admitted to Plymouth Hospital on 7th July 1915, Haslar Hospital on 12th August and it was while convalescing at Markeaton Hall that he committed suicide.

Pte. Gilbert Booth, R.M.L.I., Chatham Battalion, Royal Naval Division, had been wounded at Gallipoli and was invalided out of the service on 16th June 1916. Born in Nottingham on 24th September 1879, the former navy enlisted at Sheffield on 8th September 1914, joining the Sherwood Foresters and transferred to the Royal Marine Light Infantry on 16th September 1914. His home address was 37 Campo Lane, Sheffield.



### “IF THEY COULD ONLY SEE.”

In a letter published on 24th September 1915, Cpl. Percy Joseph Statham, 9th Battalion Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Regiment, described some of his experiences at Gallipoli while recuperating from dysentery in a Cairo hospital.

### “IF THEY COULD ONLY SEE.”

### “MATLOCK CORPORAL APPEAL.

*“Mr and Mrs W. N. Statham, of Dale Road, Matlock, have received an interesting letter from their son, Corporal Percy J. Statham, of the 9th Sherwood Foresters, who is now in a convalescent home somewhere in neighbourhood of the Dardanelles. After mentioning that the vessel on which the regiment made the voyage was chased by a submarine, Corporal Statham gives an interesting diary of events which happened on the voyage. “On the afternoon of the 20th July,” he says, “we were transferred to small boats, mostly minesweepers, and sailed for \_\_\_\_\_ up the Dardanelles, and landed under shell fire on the beach, with very few casualties. We marched two miles inland to a rest camp, where we stayed the night. Next day we went to relieve the Royal Naval Division, who were holding the centre of the trenches on the fort side of \_\_\_\_\_. We held these, each company taking its turn, till the 31st, when we were relieved by the French. We marched in the evening down to the beach, and embarked in small trawlers for \_\_\_\_\_, where the other three brigades of the division had been sent. Here, after a week's rest the \_\_\_\_\_ divisions embarked in small trawlers and gun boats to make a new landing at \_\_\_\_\_. They succeeded in making a new landing, and driving the Turks a few miles inland, but lost a great many men. I am pleased to say they were mostly wounded. Checkley [1] was hit in the head and fell dead. Jim Margerrison [2] was all right when I last got news of him. One does not*

*like saying what one sees or how one did things, because it is the best to forget them. Please tell all the chaps who have not joined that if they could have one look at some of the scenes out here, where two or three chaps are trying to hold about a hundred Turks, they would not be long in enlisting if they had any British blood in them.” [3]*

Admitted to hospital at Cairo on 20th August 1915, he returned to his unit on 24th October 1915. Wounded on the Western Front in August 1916, he received a more serious gunshot wound to his left knee on 4th November 1918. He was awarded the Military Medal ('London Gazette,' 17th June 1919).

[1] Pte. Herbert Checkley, 9th Battalion Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Regiment, was killed in action on 9th August 1915. Commemorated on the Helles Memorial, he was the 18 year-old son of Pattie Checkley, of Lime Grove Avenue, Matlock.

[2] L/Cpl. James Margerrison, 9th Battalion Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Regiment, was wounded in action on 9th August 1915. Commissioned, Second Lieutenant James Margerrison, 10th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment, died of wounds on 14th April 1918. Buried in Etaples Military Cemetery, he was the 28 year-old son of James and Elizabeth Margerrison, of Matlock, Derbyshire.

[3] 'The Belper News and Derbyshire Telephone, Mid-Derbyshire Mail and People's Advocate,' 24th September 1915.

Image: Hetman Chair looking towards Scimitar Hill, the area where the 9th Battalion Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Regiment attacked on 9th August 1915.





## A dying soldier's last wish fulfilled.....

A dying soldier's last wish for a photo he was found holding to be returned to his family was fulfilled by the German who killed him, as personal stories marking the centenary of World War One emerge.

Sergeant Percy Buck clutched the black and white photo of his wife Bertha and young son Cyril as he lay fatally wounded in a shell hole on the Western Front in 1917. On the back, he had written his address and asked for whoever found the photo to post it to his loved ones in the event of his death.

Sgt Buck would have assumed it would be a British comrade who would do the kindly deed if required. But the person who recovered the poignant image from his body was Gefreiter Josef Wilczek, the German soldier who is most likely to have fired the shots that killed Sgt Buck. In a remarkable act of humanity, Gefr Wilczek sent the photo to the Red Cross in Geneva along with a forwarding note.

He wrote: "He was holding the card in his hand and the finder was asked to forward it to his wife. I, wishing to fulfil the last will of the dead comrade, send it to you." "May he rest in peace."

But in carrying out the stranger's final wish Gefr Wilczek may have deprived Sgt Buck of a war grave for his family to visit. The photo would have been a key item that would have helped identify his body. In the end it is thought Sgt Buck was buried in an unmarked grave in Flanders. And in another sad twist, Gefr Wilczek did not survive the First World War and was killed on October 31, 1918 just two weeks before the Armistice.

Now Sgt Buck's granddaughter, Christina Reynolds, has unearthed the letter the German sent to her grandmother along with the devastating telegram informing her of her husband's death.

And part of the emotive archive that has come to light nearly 100 years later is a photo of Sgt Buck with his wife and son taken on the same occasion as the one returned to them.

Upon finding the documents, Mrs Reynolds, from Hitchin, Hertfordshire, showed them to the newly-formed Herts at War project, set up to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I. Mrs Reynolds, whose late father Cyril was aged three when his father died, said: "My father barely knew his father but he had these items in a box. "The box has been passed down to me and in it were these letters by the German soldier and the Red Cross explaining the return of the photo to my grandmother in 1917.

"It was this German soldier who probably killed my grandfather in an act of war." "He didn't have to take the time out and maybe risk punishment to fulfil my grandfather's wishes. He could have left it there." "The two men didn't know each other but it was very kind of him to do what he did for a fellow soldier."

Sgt Buck served in the Hertfordshire Regiment and trained troops in rifle practice before being sent to the Western Front in December 1916.

In July 1917 the men took part in a major dawn offensive in the Third Battle of Ypres, otherwise known as Passchendaele. The night before the men went over the top, Sgt Buck wrote the request on the back of the photo and showed it to a colleague. The next morning his battalion were at St Julien at Flanders and came under heavy machine gun fire which caused them to conduct a fighting withdrawal. Sgt Buck was shot in the side and fell into the shell hole.



Mrs Reynolds, 58, said until now the family did not know how Sgt Buck had died. But as a result of her coming forward, researchers for the Herts at War team have uncovered an eye-witness account of his death. In 1918, a Private Ramsell told the Enquiry Department for Wounded and Missing: "We went over the top together at St Julien front." "I did not see him (Percy) hit but several other fellows did. He was hit in the side and fell into a shell hole. He was too severely wounded to move." "He showed me a photo of his wife and child the night before. On the back of it he had written his wife's address and the words 'whoever finds this please forward', or words like that." "We never saw him again and his body was never found."

Mrs Reynolds said: "All the family knew was that my grandfather was missing in action and then confirmed as killed in action." "His body has never been found and we have never really known what happened to him until now." "We still don't know where he is, only that he is buried out there somewhere." "I just wish my father was still alive today because he would have wanted to know."

Sgt Buck was aged 26 when he was killed. His widow Bertha, who he married in 1912, died in 1962. Dan Hill, of the Herts at War project, said: "We are covering 20,000 different stories and this one stood out because it was an incredible moment of humanity in the carnage of war." "It was right in the thick of the action and this one German soldier took it upon himself to do a dying comrade this remarkable favour."





*Welcome Home Son.....Thank God you`re safe*