



CHESTERFIELD WFA

Newsletter and Magazine issue 49

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Simkins

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Christopher Pugsley FRHistS

Lord Richard Dannat GCB CBE MC
DL

Roger Lee PhD jssc

Dr Jack Sheldon

Branch contacts

Tony Bolton
(Chairman)
anthony.bolton3@btinternet.com

Mark Macartney
(Deputy Chairman)
Markmacartney48@gmail.com

Jane Lovatt (Treasurer)
Grant Cullen (Secretary)
grantcullen@hotmail.com

Facebook
<http://www.facebook.com/groups/157662657604082/>
<http://www.wfchesterfield.com/>

Welcome to Issue 49 - the January 2020 Newsletter and Magazine of Chesterfield WFA.

The next meeting of the Branch will be on
Tuesday 7th January at 7.30 pm in
Chesterfield Labour Club.

The Branch AGM will be held then there will
be FIVE short presentations by members and
friends - three of these speaking at one of
our meetings for the first time, so please
come along and give them your support -
more details elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Also the Questionnaire Survey already sent
Out but also included elsewhere in this issue
- please let us have your responses

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



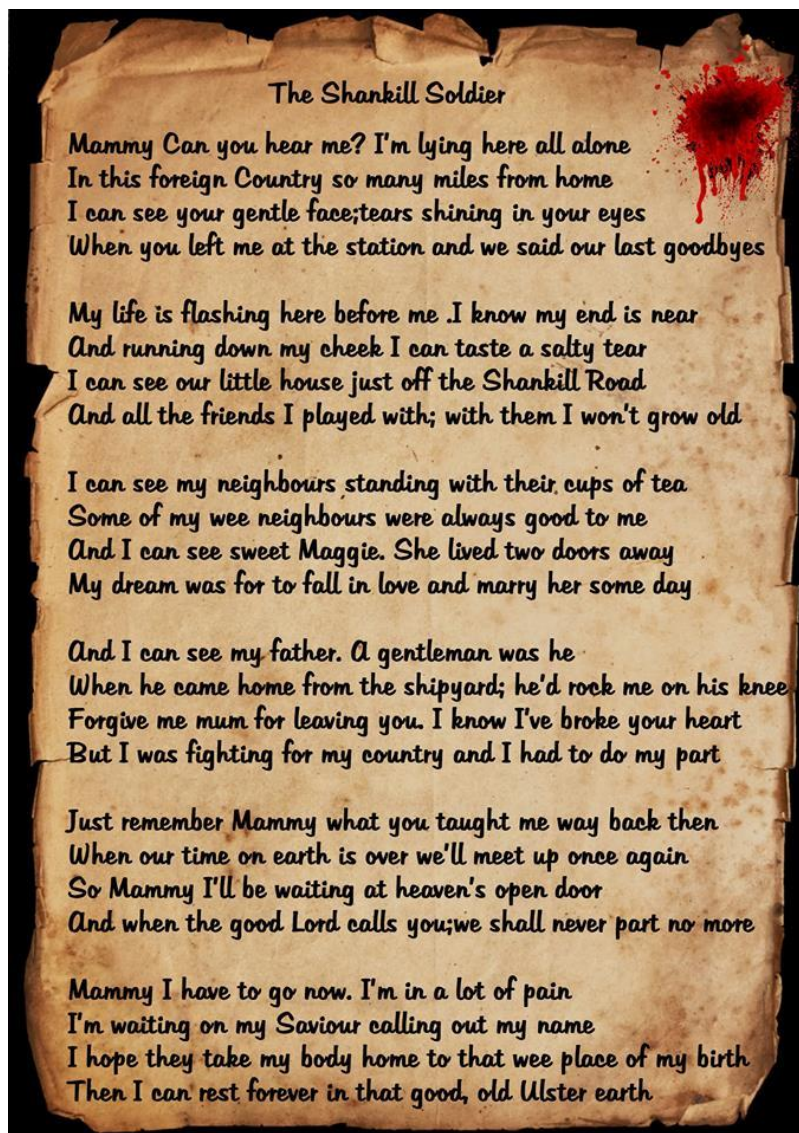
Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2020

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

January	7th	. AGM and Members Night - presentations by Jane Ainsworth, Ed Fordham, Judith Reece, Edwin Astill and Alan Atkinson
February	4th	Graham Kemp `The Impact of the economic blockage of Germany AFTER the armistice and how it led to WW2`
March	3rd	Peter Hart Après la Guerre Post-war blues, demobilisation and a home fit for very few.
April	7th	Andy Rawson How Sheffield's smaller industries turned their hand to war work.
May	5th	Nick Baker . The British Army has always fought a long battle with the debilitating cause to its soldier's efficiency through venereal disease, a combination of behavioural change and civilian interference resulted in an 'epidemic' of VD which threatened military effectiveness.
June	2nd	Rob Thompson 'The Gun Machine: A Case Study of the Industrialisation of Battle during the Flanders Campaign, 1917.
July	7th	Tony Bolton `Did Britain have a Strategy for fighting the Great War or did we just blunder from crisis to crisis? "From business as usual to total war" `
August	4th	Beth Griffiths `The Experience of the Disabled Soldiers Returning After WWI`
September	1st	John Taylor. 'A Prelude to War' (An Archduke's Visit) - a classic and true tale of `what if` ?
October	6th	Peter Harris Tanks in the 100 Days. Peter will present some of his researches for his Wolverhampton MA course
November	3rd	Paul Handford Women Ambulance Drivers on the Western Front 1914 - 1918.
December	1st	John Beech 'Notts Battery RHA - Nottinghamshire Forgotten Gunners'

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A Personal Note from the Chair (40)

As I think I mentioned in last month's *Notes from the Chair* as well as January being our Members Evening and AGM it is one of the last opportunities to canvas your ideas about the future of the WFA before the Branch Chairs Conference.

Next month the WFA will be holding its Branch Chairs Meeting, this event takes place every two years and it is an opportunity for members to feed back to the National Executive Committee about how they would like to see the Association develop over the next two or more years. It is also an opportunity for me (or if I am voted out at the AGM a new Chairman) to understand about how other branches operate and to use the jargon 'learn best practice.' This year I hope to be able to explain about our own Book Group and see if other branches are interested in adopting the idea, so we too have ideas to share.

As a result of the above your Branch Committee are inviting you to 'have your say' in what we take to the Chairs Conference, I have drawn up a short questionnaire which is open to members and non-members. If you could spare the time to put down your ideas it would be very helpful. Hard copies of the form will be available at the AGM, elsewhere in this Newsletter or can be obtained by emailing me.

If you are unhappy (or happy) with the way the WFA Chesterfield Branch or nationally operates please let us know. Submissions can be anonymous if you prefer.

On a slightly different note I spent some time over the Holiday at Helmsley in North Yorkshire, on the imposing library building which overlooks the square there is a commemorative plaque to the 21 Bn KRRC which got me thinking about recruitment areas. Obviously County Regiments and City Regiments had clear geographical catchment areas but from where did the Rifle Brigade and KRRC recruit? I would be interested if anyone knows.

Best regards,

Tony Bolton

Branch Chair

Secretary's Scribbles



Welcome to issue 49 of the WFA Chesterfield Branch Newsletter and Magazine.

May I, on behalf of your Committee, extend Best Wishes to each and every one of you for the New Year - indeed New Decade - 2020.

Next Tuesday is the Branch AGM and Branch Chair, Tony Bolton will be going all out to get through the formal business for the evening in record time before we move on to the five presentations by members. Details of these individuals - some 'weel kent' faces, others 'debutantes' and their topics are listed elsewhere in this Newsletter. We were rather overwhelmed by the responses we got when we asked for 'volunteers' to give several short talks, indeed I had to respectfully decline several simply due to the time factor. One of those whom I had to decline their offer said this in his response

"Great that there have been so many offers, which illustrates the breadth of knowledge and experience within the branch. I don't think we are aware what our colleagues know. Perhaps we should repeat the format in future if it goes well."

A great summing up !

As many of you know, 2020 is the 40th year of the Western Front Association and indeed 2020 also represents the 10th year of this Branch and I think we should pay tribute to those - sadly some no longer with us - who had the foresight to take the big step in founding the Branch.

As we move forward, both as a Branch and an Association, your Committee felt it an opportune time to canvass all with whom we are in contact with to find out their thoughts and ideas with a view to taking guidance as to what we should be doing to maintain interest in the Branch and indeed develop it. Partly this is due to the anticipated downturn in interest in the Great War now that all the Centenary Commemorations are behind us, although, it cannot be said that we, as a Branch, are experiencing this. Having said that we do not want to be seen to be resting on our laurels. Already we are receiving responses to the survey forms sent out several days ago - keep these coming. We will analyse the results and share them with all in a future issue of the newsletter / magazine.

I look forward to seeing a good turn out on Tuesday evening - see YOU there !!

Grant Cullen - Branch Secretary

07824628638 grantcullen@hotmail.com

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

Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch

As the WFA reaches the year in which it will celebrate its 40th Anniversary it seems an opportune time seek feedback from Members and Friends about your ideas and suggestions of how we can develop in the future.

Your Branch Committee would welcome your thoughts and ideas ahead of forthcoming Branch Chairs Conference.

1. Are you a Member of the WFA Y/N

2. If No is there anything that would encourage you to become a

member?.....
.....
.....
.....

..

3. Which of the following apply (Members and non-members) to you, please tick all that apply

- I am interested in tracing my family history.
- I am interested in learning more about the Western Front in WW1.
- I am interested ion learning more about the wider conflict of the Great War including the Home Front.
- I am particularly interested in the Army.
- I am particularly interested in the Navy.
- I am particularly interested in the RFC/RAF.
- I would like to see more talks on individual service men or women.
- I am interested in other combatants not just Britain and the Empire.
- I feel there is not enough emphasis now on the major battles of the war.
- I feel the Branch should organise more trips within UK.
- I would probably support the Branch if it organised a battlefield tour.
-

- I would like more talks on the period between the wars.
- I would like talks on a wider range of military subjects than just the First World War.
- I think the balance of talks provided by the Branch is about right.
- I understand how the WFA is organised and how the Branch network works.
- I agree that the magazines *Stand To* and *Bulletin* are worth the subscription alone.
- I use the WFA website as my main link to the Association.
- I follow WFA facebook and twitter.
- Facebook reminders of meetings are useful.
- I do not attend branch meetings.
- I find the Branch Newsletter useful.
- I find the WFA Podcasts useful.
- I have used the Pension Records.

4. If you are a member but do not choose to attend meetings would any of the following apply.

- I have difficulty travelling.
- I don't know anyone that goes.
- I have mobility issues.
- Work commitments tend to mean evenings are difficult.

We know that this type of survey is not a popular means of getting feedback but if you can suggest an alternative the Committee would genuinely welcome ideas.

If you have taken the time to complete the survey and would like to add any comments please do so they will be considered by the Branch Committee and if appropriate taken to the National Executive.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Chesterfield Branch Committee.

Speakers for Members Evening - January 7th 2020

It was extremely gratifying to receive such a response to our appeal for members and friends to volunteer to make short presentations after the Branch AGM. Sadly, I had to decline several offers - and make no mistake they would have been of great interest to the members - simply on the grounds that I took the first five who responded. As each presentation has to be limited to 15 to 20 minutes duration, to have included any more could have meant a very late finish, hence me having to reluctantly limit it to five presentations. I trust you will understand my reasoning - practical grounds.

1. Jane Ainsworth. Jane admits that her expertise is as a researcher of family history rather than military history. Both of her books published by Helion and Company - "*Great Sacrifice: the Old Boys of Barnsley Holgate Grammar School in the First World War*" (March 2016) and "*Keeping their Beacons Alight: the Potter Family of Barnsley and their Service to our Country*" (November 2017) - focus on the individuals and family stories of those who served in the Forces.

The subject of Jane's short talk "*Serendipity*" because of the number of lucky coincidences that led to her two books being written and published. Jane considers these books her main legacy in addition to her tribute to the men who sacrificed their lives. Jane discovered how much effort goes into producing books. Tenacity is essential in carrying out research, which requires a great deal of time, as does organizing and writing up the material. Jane fully acknowledges the values of chance and 'Random Acts of Kindness' as part of this process and has chosen to share her experiences with WFA Chesterfield Branch.

2. Ed Fordham. Ed served on the Chesterfield Council's World War One Commemoration Group along with our own Branch Chair Tony Bolton. Ed is a very busy individual having been elected as a local borough councillor in May 2019, he is a Unitarian, a bookseller (Brockwell Books) and is vice chair of the Friends of Spital Cemetery. Ed's family originally hails from Suffolk and he has researched their participation in the Great War. His presentation will be entitled '*Gallant and Patriotic Sons: the story of Coney Weston and Barningham in Suffolk during World War One*'.

3. Judith Reece "*Can anyone ask Jesus Christ to help them fire a machine Gun?*"*After spending most of her life in nursing and research, both psychiatric and general, and later as a lecturer in these areas Judith retired about 9 years ago. She took up an earlier interest in history and particularly the study of firstly the Second World War at Birmingham University, where her dissertation was a study of issues raised by the significances of sheltering during air raids. Next came The Great War and Britain at Wolverhampton. Her dissertation there, allowed a return to consideration of theological issues last undertaken many years previously when she studied and was then ordained as a Baptist minister. This presentation arises from a dissertation submitted to Wolverhampton that considered three concepts relating to the expression of faith on some of the battlefronts and at home. The study considered the role of chaplains, and at home ministers, mostly Baptist of the faith, and certain Anglican priests. It explored how the concepts were used to maintain the war effort and offer some rationale for those facing death on a daily basis. Some of the material was drawn from local resources.

*A Runcie "The God of Battles" 1986 (Personal Communication to Alan Wilkinson)

4. Alan Atkinson. Alan needs no introduction to our members, a regular attender who made an excellent presentation on Propaganda in The Great War a couple of years ago. Alan's presentation is entitled, '*One Day in May*' or '*1918..the end, almost*'. Quick fire stuff, some background to 1914-17, with the Germans still occupying large parts of Belgium and N France, the Americans have arrived so it's Germany's last chance to win the war on the Western Front before the Americans get fully up to speed. Then, some detail about 105 Field Company Royal Engineers on 27th May 1918 (first day of Blucher-Yorck), where they went, what they did, referencing two individuals (a Sapper from Buxton who was killed, a 2nd Lieutenant from Sheffield who survived).

5. Edwin Astill. Branch founder member and a 'regular' who rarely misses a Branch meeting. Edwin will talk about his Grandfather *Frank Astill. 7th Field Coy RE*. He will be showing some WW1 pictures of him plus an IWM photo of a bridge his Company built in 1914 plus some Old Contemptible photos. He last presented to the Branch in 2015 and has also had a book published, a History of the 1st Battalion The Worcestershire Regiment in the First World War.



The Western Front Association's 2020 calendar is now available for pre-order. Once again it features images of the battlefield taken by a team of volunteer photographers. It includes a bit of a Canadian theme this year The scenes depict points of interest in France and Belgium (and, incidentally, Italy, not forgetting Cobbers image to The 5th Australian Division, and the Vancouver Corner image to commemorates the Canadian 1st Division, there is also reference to Canadians on the Courcellette British Cemetery text) ditto to New Zealand because of what is written in February) some of which are well known but others 'off the beaten track'.

As well as providing superb images of a dozen views of the First World War battlefields, the calendar provides detailed commentary to each image helping to set the scene in context.

This is a high-quality product which, every year, receives superb feedback. The sales of the calendar also assist the WFA to continue its work.

The WFA's 2020 calendar is available via [the WFA e-shop](#) or by phone on 0207 118 1914.

The URL for the calendars on the Eshop is here <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/wfa-branded-items/wfa-calendar-2020/>

If you prefer to order by post just complete the order form accompanied by a cheque (details on the form) the URL for this is

[file:///H:/WFA/\(2\)%20Branded%20Goods/\(15\)%20Calendar%202020/calendar%20leaflet%202020%20\(1\).pdf](file:///H:/WFA/(2)%20Branded%20Goods/(15)%20Calendar%202020/calendar%20leaflet%202020%20(1).pdf)

The calendars can be ordered NOW

It is clearly the case that members like to see the calendar images first before they purchase the calendar'

These images can be seen in this URL .

[file:///H:/WFA/\(2\)%20Branded%20Goods/\(15\)%20Calendar%202020/Calendar,%20Final%20Images%20.pdf](file:///H:/WFA/(2)%20Branded%20Goods/(15)%20Calendar%202020/Calendar,%20Final%20Images%20.pdf)

Of course Orders in addition to (as stated here) may be made over the telephone to Sarah in WFA Head Office, please ring 0207 118 1914, with credit card details to hand, or purchase on the Eshop , the Eshop link is under, you can purchase at the Branch for the same price of £10, and when purchased at branch , £5 is retained at branch level and £5 sent to the WFA.

The calendars are now available for dispatch .

Just a few images here, but if you click on the link all images are there, all 13 of them,



Above: May 2020 - Prowse Point Military Cemetery (photo: John White)



Above: November 2020 - Sacrario Militare Del Monte Grappa (photo: Jonathan Dyer)



Above: April 2020 - Vancouver Corner (photo: Steve Kerr)

December Meeting

Branch Chair Tony Bolton opened the meeting front of a near `full house` - it was good to see so many in attendance, some who hadn't been for a while. Good to see Pam Ackroyd, founder member and former Branch Treasurer back amongst us, this being her first visit since her husband Malcolm, also a Branch founder member, passed away earlier this year. Tony reminded those present that no one had to be a member to attend our meetings but urged those who are not, to seriously think of joining for the modest annual subscription - if only to get the Association journals, `Stand To!` and Bulletin` each of which are published three times per year and asked if anyone was interested they could pick up some back numbers of these excellent magazines from Branch Secretary, Grant Cullen. Tony also reminded folks that we still had a few WFA 2020 Calendars for sale at £10 each.

Branch vice chair Mark Macartney asked if there was anyone attending tonight who had come along having seen the note about the meeting on the Branch Facebook page...several said they did.

Before Tony introduced our speaker for the evening, Tim Lynch, Arthur Lacey read Binyon`s Exhortation and we all stood for a few moments silent contemplation.

It was noticeable that there was no projector or screen in position the answer to that being that Tim had dashed out from his home with no laptop or memory stick with his illustrations, however, as he got underway, it was obvious that these would have been very much secondary to what he had to say.

Battlefield Guide is all about the ability to `testiculate` what this means is that when you are out and about - you are talking bollocks. Tim said that when folks find out that he does guiding, the response is usually...that must be fantastic...and for now Tim asked all to imagine a picture of an alpine landscape and that he can point at that and say...`that`s a day at the office`...which is followed by the question `where`s that`...that`s the `Eagles Nest`....what`s that....Hitler`s tea house...hmmWhat tour is that....it`s called `The Rise of Evil` . Really ?....What do you do on that...? Well we go all over Bavaria visiting all the main nazi sites. It is something that is on the schools curriculum, it`s educational but adults go there as well. And that is where things get a bit weird because this isn`t your idea of a `happy holiday`. If you looking for information for research it is called `Thantourism` or certainly since the 1990s when it became referred to as `Dark Tourism` which can be defined as tourism involving travel to places historically associated with death and tragedy. More recently, it was suggested that the concept should also include reasons tourists visit that site, since the site's attributes alone may not make a visitor a "dark tourist". The main attraction to dark locations is their historical value rather than their associations with death and suffering. Holocaust tourism contains aspects of both dark tourism and heritage tourism. Dark Tourism can come across as a bit weird but in fact is one of the big `pulls` of the tourism market. Some people go off to Chernobyl and have a wander around there, go to Vietnam, visit the Cu Chi tunnels and fire off weapons - The cost for firing an M16 rifle is priced at VND 35,000 per bullet, with a minimum of 10 bullets. Is that about tourism ?, is that about remembering? What is it about? Most of the people out there are backpackers who are acting out their Rambo fantasies. Then there is Krakow, lovely city , there are golf type buggies to take you about...then there is the Schindler factory...there is Auschwitz...with the big outcry over people taking `selfies` there...`Here I am...in a concentration camp` indeed recently someone climbed into one of the crematoria ovens to have their picture taken. That is appalling...but in 1815 a tourist to Waterloo could brag about bringing home part of a skull...and a Grenadier cap. We have not changed that much in the way we approach tourism but Waterloo is the start of what we call Battlefield Tourism.

Tim then quoted from a book written by Sir Walter Scott in 1815.....

“...the Flemish housewife who keeps the principal caberet in Waterloo had learned the value of her position and charged three prices for our coffee because she could show us the very bed the Grand Lord had slept in the night before the battle....or one very like it...”

Moving on Tim said that from time to time Britain and France have a spat in Europe, then pay to go and see those parts we have blown up. In 1815 Waterloo is a mecca for tourists...you can rent a buggy from Brussels...it becomes a focal point of The Grand Tour. Anybody who was anybody went to visit Waterloo. This tourism caught on and by 1883 there are letters talking about Waterloo, saying Agincourt is great too...it`s not actually, as Tim said, he was there a few weeks ago...it`s just a muddy field. But this was the idea of incorporating battlefields into our ours....but then, why wait until after the battle....let`s go and watch the battle. American Civil War, 1861, Battle of Bull Run, so many people turned up to *watch* the battle that when the Union forces were in retreat...they ran into the tourists...a complete rout, a huge problem...indeed several of the tourists were actually killed during the battle! If you want to get the genuine war experience..that`s it.

Later on, similar problems with the Franco-Prussian war, again, tourists turn up to the battle, which back in those days, a battle was pretty well contained, so that, if you were far enough away, you would probably be alright.

So, what is that about ? Battlefield history, morbid curiosity ? Who knows.

One of the reasons for this upsurge in tourism is the development of mass transport and someone like Thomas Cook. Thomas Cook started to get people on excursions out to Waterloo, they get people off to the Holy Land. During the Anglo-Egyptian campaign it was Thomas Cook who transported the troops.

Tourism in the 19th century is a much bigger business than we tend to think of it today. By 1895 Cooks were running weekly trips to Waterloo and we might think that was something only for `posh` people but going to the continent at that time was cheaper than going to Margate! Belgium versus Margate ?....no contest.

American and British visitors to the Paris Exhibition in 1900 found one of the great attractions to be...the morgue...and you could just pop in and have a look at the `stiffs`...something considered to be a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

As the idea of touring battlefields really caught on and in 1900 the Governor of South Africa exclaimed *`for God`s sake stop coming we are trying to fight the Boers, we can`t do it because of all the tourists wandering around the place and getting in the way`*

It was a genuine problem and almost as soon as the firing stops, Thomas Cook is in there, or as the satirical magazine Punch called it.. *`champagne stop on Spion Kop`*

Independent travel became more popular and Tim quoted from a letter by guy written in 1903 who described cycling round battlefields...battlefield tourism had become an absolute `normal` thing to do.

By 1900 and the outbreak of the War, the average passenger numbers of people travelling to Europe per year was 1.2 million, a big part of the population able to get across there because we have these cheap rates with regular excursions going to Paris and Waterloo, so people are getting used to the idea of travel and it is rapidly becoming a business.

So, when war breaks out, there is a twofold problem, part being, France needs money and so the Tourist Board are actively saying `come over`, yes this are going `bang`...but at the same time other folks are saying there is a war on...let`s go and have a look...so this led to a lot of weekend trips to go and see the battlefields.

A tour company in the West Midlands organised a Christmas Tour...`Paris and the Battlefields`. We know it went ahead and was successful because at Easter 1915, the tour was run again. Eventually it was the French and not the British who said let`s stop this . It was however still possible to go out there....Billy Congreve, winner of a VC was visited in his trench at Hooze in August 1915 by his father Walter....and his twelve year old brother Christopher John!. The latter in full Boy Scout uniform. Generally this was frowned upon but if you were a senior commander then you could get away with it.

So, for the guys fighting , the idea that *where* they were fighting would become a tourist spot seemed absolutely illogical, indeed one soldier, in 1916, wrote this...`*I suppose the tourists in their thousands will come to see the battlefields and will try to imagine the hardships and deprivations we are going through now`*

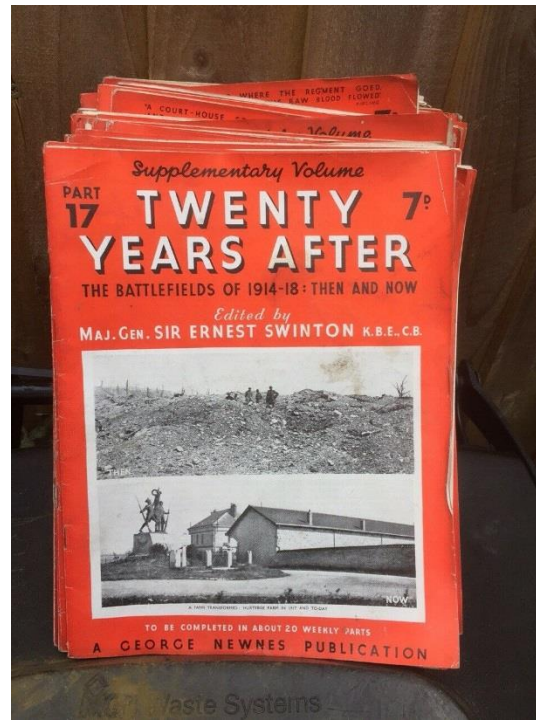
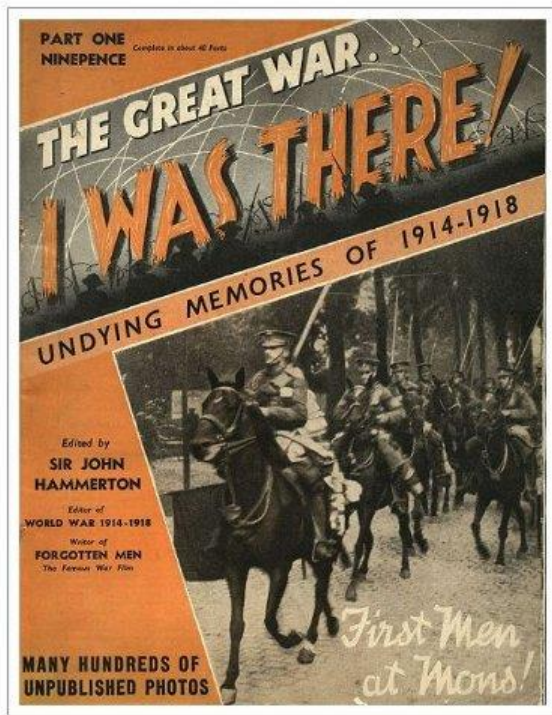
You find lots of references in memoirs to guys making this or similar comments...indeed in the `Wipers Times` you often find spoof adverts advertising tours of the trenches.

Books proliferated...Tim held up one `Battlefields of the Marne` published in 1917...*before* the Second Battle of the Marne had even taken place , there were guide books to show people around, indeed by 1922 over a million copies of such books had been sold in both French and English.

When the war does end the Devastated Zone does need income - and fast - they need to rebuild and one of the ways to do that is by catering for tourists. We have all seen Trench Art, and what was that...souvenirs made for tourists after the war. Imagine the devastated area, it is very difficult to get the infrastructure going so it is not something everybody can do immediately.

1919 Gallipoli starts to be cleared and tours commence with people like Bean go to look at the sites, watch the recovery of bodies, so that when people do start to come back they know where everything is and what went on there. Gallipoli as you can imagine is very remote so there was 8 large pilgrimages between 1925 and 1936, major undertakings back in those days. Tours to the Western Front began as early as April 1919 again Thomas Cook leading the pack with a luxury tour costing 35 guineas, average tour nine and a half guineas. At this point the average weekly wage was three pounds so when you think about it, nine guineas, nine pounds nine shillings, average weekly wage three pounds so if you spend three times your weekly wage on a holiday you would not consider it expensive, would you ? The problem was, not that people could not afford to go in terms of money, it was in terms of time as even as late as 1937 only 4 million out of 18 million workers had paid holiday. If you didn`t have paid holiday, there was also loss of earnings to take into account as well. Even so, 75 % of the enquiries to travel agents like Thomas Cook in 1919 was for battlefield tours.

So, the first people to go are bereaved relatives and once everything had settled down a bit by the early 1920s, it cost about £4 to get over to the Western Front and it was reckoned you could do The Somme for two, for a week for £20. It is starting to become more and more affordable and in the devastated zone there is more infrastructure, hotels, roads etc, it is becoming much easier to get around. So the numbers start to creep up, particularly for veteran groups going back as well as the bereaved. Then you start to see publications like `I Was There` with veterans recollections, and later on `Twenty Years After`



These are `then and now` type magazines, if you go back across you can actually find where you served but that was a problem for many of them as the only view many of them had had was from the bottom of a trench...not a ground level...which meant many of them needed local guides to point out where they were.

In 1927 the Menin Gate is opened and something in the region of 10000 folks travel from the UK to see it, many of them travelling independently. There is recognition there that this is going to be a pilgrimage, about people going back to remember, their friends, their own experiences and it became very much a pilgrimage.. *a sacred journey*. Not just going for a quick nosey around, you are going for a reason and that is the focus of a lot of these visits. Shortly after the Menin Gate opened, 20000 Americans descended on Paris, they had a march down past the L`Arc de Triomphe...hey look at us...we won the war! The French were not impressed, the Brits weren`t impressed...and..the Americans were not invited back.

Then came the Great Depression and numbers visiting the Western Front began to fall but two events are worth mentioning. The Canadians came back but didn`t make a fuss out of respect for friends or neighbours had family members who didn`t return after the war. There was never any sense of `hey...look at us...look what we have done. But there was a sense of maybe we should do something for our veterans. Vimy Ridge monuments were due to be built , indeed it was well overdue not being completed until 1936 but before that the veterans had had a big meeting in Toronto, a big festival where they could go along and be with other veterans and say...you know what...we did a good job. We created this country, this country was born on Vimy Ridge, we should do something to mark that - we should be proud of what we did. The result was a large scale pilgrimage to the unveiling of the Vimy Ridge Memorial costing about 150 Canadian dollars per head - about 2500 Canadian dollars in today`s money. 11000 people set sail from Canada in a convoy of liners to France where they met up with other Canadians who had come to join them. At Vimy Ridge, as well as the memorial they saw the reconstructed trenches, an experience for many which was very cathartic. It was massively important to Canada and the service was actually postponed until 2.30pm in the afternoon so that it could be broadcast live across Canada. For those who could not go they actually created a mock French

village back in Toronto so that the veterans could go down to the estaminet and have a reminisce down there.

By this time it was quite cheap to go to France and travel around and ToCH was starting to think about preserving the battlefields, the veterans are coming, the tourists are coming, we need to preserve bits of it.

When these magazines came out, it cost about £2 to cross the channel, lots of groups and individuals making the journey and in F. Scott Fitzgerald's book 'Tender is the Night' he actually describes going to visit Newfoundland Park.

Of course 1940 brought an end to battlefield tourism, at least for the time being and shortly after the Fall of France Hitler turned up, making a visit to German Cemetery at Langemarck. Langemarck is crucial to Nazi ideology, the idea of willing volunteers dying for the Fatherland. What they were, were students, academics, volunteers, frankly people they could afford to lose - but it became part of the 'blood myth' death of the heroes, death for the Fatherland. At Langemarck Hitler could reinforce that.



German soldiers at the Menin Gate, Ypres

It was all about the death cult that the Nazis had become and using Langemarck to reinforce it, just like modern politicians using, for example the Battle of Britain of the First World War, no matter whether the facts are right, just whether it suits them. The Germans left the battlefields and monuments (largely) untouched and they had their own battlefield tours...this is where we fought, how we fought, how we won this battle...and learning from it, just as soldiers do today.

After the Second World War, a similar thing, in 1946 there was battlefield trips, but in the post war slump, there was a bit of a dip and it was slow to build up again. In the 1960s the thing that changed was the likes of 'Oh! What Lovely War' ...telling people what to think...and we have the veterans, fifty years on, they are retiring, they have their pensions, they have time on their hands - they are able to go back. There is a 'wave' in the 1960s, then in the 70s and 80s we have the children of those veterans who are now coming to retirement age and again they have time and money on their hands and they start to go.

We see, from the mid sixties a rise in tourism going out to the Western Front, this is such a defining thing for the British people. But, as the veterans start to die out, our direct links to the war start to get lost. We start to get this thing where tell us what we should think about it. There was an image going round social media recently, sitting on the ground, head in hands, mud and destruction all around...and social media says 'imagine what this guy has seen, imagine what he has been through'. Not a lot actually, because the figure is a wax manikin in a museum.....ah...but he *represents* reality.

So we are moving away from what I did to what my dad did, to 'I have no idea what happened here, so I will just have to make it up'. What am I remembering...Blackadder...what these people said...and that is becoming an increasing problem as we move away from the centenaries. There is lots of things going on...you are about to enter a trench, it is winter 1914. The trench...it is wide, it is deep, it is full of mud...how many of you think..hmm..I need to take a football? It is not the thing a soldier would think of, yet there is this image of a proper football match taking place in no-man's land, to a point where lots of people have been re-enacting it...can you re-enact something which did not happen in the first place? You have the memorial, down near Ploegsteert put in place by UEFA when everyone in the know went...it didn't happen there..it happened over here. This is what happens when the facts no longer matter as much as what we want the facts to say.

Tim then asked if anyone had seen the 'fantastic' B& Q display at Pozieres - the animal memorial - a sight to behold - including a statue commemorating 'combat squirrels'!

It is a memorial to the animals but unfortunately it is right next to the Pozieres windmill and close by the markers to all those Australians killed...but we have to remember the fluffy bunnies. Remember 'War Horse' ...a fine film....



Many will have visited Essex Farm Cemetery and will have seen the grave of Valentine Strudwick - what do you find - poppy crosses, fine...wreaths, fine...teddy bears...teddy bears??. What are you thinking...he`s a fifteen year old soldier and you think a teddy bear is the way to remember him? What is that about ?

Tim said he remembered that, early on in the centenary when the BBC interviewed a family who were going to visit a relatives grave for the first time and had a wreath upon which was written `mohana`...why...`mohana` means family.....and is a character from the Disney film Lilo and Stitch...quite what a Great War soldier would know about Hawaiian...ah...but it`s about respect..init?

Think about what you are doing and why you are doing it..are you interested in the person, or are you interested because it is what you do when you are in the area?

Tim said he had mentioned earlier about the Canadian Pilgrimage and said he wanted to come back to this topic. In 1928 the British

legion wanted to organise their own pilgrimage and it attracted 12000 people , travelling to Belgium, visiting the battlefields then marching through Ypres itself. By the time they got into Ypres this had risen to 20000 people, the cost was around £4 and 5 shillings for the whole trip so you can imagine this is big business for Belgium now, it is in their interest to keep things going. There was problem , when do we actually do this in 1928 - 4th August 1914, start of the war, or, August 8th 1918 the `Black Day` of the German Army they hedged their bets and went for the 3rd to the 8th of August . It was great, very, very powerful and last year the Royal British Legion decided that they would commemorate that event - on the 90th anniversary - GP90.



A fantastic event with over 1000 standards going through Ypres - an incredible sight, but Tim said that afterwards, when he thought about it...what was that about? It was not a commemoration of the war....it was a commemoration of the commemoration. In ten years time will we have RBL GP100 or GP90 + 10?. It is starting to get to this point where we are not really sure what it is we are trying to remember any more. Everyone has their own reasons for being there and that is what Battlefield Tourism is all about..it allows you to go there for your own reasons and do your own thing. Anyone who has been to the Menin Gate recently will see that it has moved away from being that momentary stop in time to remember to become an event in its own right..a show...some of the singers and musicians are terrific...but it is a show, and people come to see the show rather than to remember the names on the gate itself...it is what you do when you are in the area..and you get, my remembrance is more than yours `cos my poppy is bigger .

So we talk about `dark tourism`, encounters with death...what makes people go ? Some go because they feel they have a personal connection with it through their families but in fact the biggest draw for battlefield tourism is education, teaching kids, and if that is done properly, it means something. Tim then related a story of going on an occasion to Tyne Cot with a group of children, talked about what was going on, talked about the names on the walls, why they have no graves and why there are so many unknowns. Why would anybody stop ? When Tim finished, all of the kids. Without being prompted, went out, found an `unknown` soldier`s grave, knelt down, put their hands on the headstone and sat there for a few minutes. It went back, if it is done properly, to this idea of Pilgrimage, Sacred and a Remembrance, but that is not something you get all of the time.

Where do we go from here ? Tim`s answer..`I don`t know`...it is a continuously evolving thing, the reasons for going...it is changing all the time. What does he do when he takes groups to, for example Thiepval, I just make a quote from a chap called Archie McLeish about the Young Dead Soldiers

The young dead soldiers do not speak.

*Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses:
who has not heard them?*

*They have a silence that speaks for them at night
and when the clock counts.*

*They say: We were young. We have died.
Remember us.*

*They say: We have done what we could
but until it is finished it is not done.*

*They say: We have given our lives but until it is finished
no one can know what our lives gave.*

*They say: Our deaths are not ours: they are yours,
they will mean what you make them.*

*They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were for
peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot say,
it is you who must say this.*

*We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.
We were young, they say. We have died; remember us.*

Tim concluded by returning to Waterloo, an account by a battlefield visitor many years after the battle.

“It is highly necessary to say that badges, belts, swordhilts can be purchased cheaper in Sheffield - where they are manufactured - than on the field at Waterloo, nor must we forget that the battle was fought in 1815 and therefore the guys who claim to have been there must not be relied upon implicitly “....it was in 1928 that comment was written!

Tim said there had been kids on tours who said.... Tim...did you die in the war answer?
...yes...but I got better!

Book Club Report

On Tuesday 10th December, five members, with three apologies, met in the bar of The Labour Club, Saltergate to discuss 'Haig's Enemy' by Jonathan Boff.

This is about Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria (1869-1955), the General in charge of the German Sixth Army and later as Field Marshall of an 'army group' of 1.5 million, that faced the BEF under Haig for most of WWI - although the two never met. *Maybe Haig's real enemy was Lloyd George who denied him extra troops and supplies?*

The book was one of the first to examine Rupprecht and the German Army in WWI. As a fluent German speaker, Jonathan Boff was able to examine Rupprecht's original diary, later editions were purged of any controversial incidents, and other documents. He maintains there is a dearth of secondary sources as there is actually no tradition of military history in Germany.

Boff also says, "Studying Rupprecht's military career allows us to interrogate and challenge several of the preconceptions we have about World War 1 and about modernity itself"

We particularly discussed that Prince Rupprecht, the eldest son of the King of Bavaria, was actually competent and well qualified to lead the German Army - something of a surprise for someone with such a royal background. However he was also lucky to have his Chiefs of Staff, Konrad Krafft von Dellmensingen and Hermann von Kuhl, two of the most talented soldiers in the German army.

The book shatters the illusion that the German Army was very efficient. We learnt how Rupprecht did not get on with von Falkenhayn who did not communicate with him and how Eric Ludendorff was a control freak who eventually suffered a nervous breakdown.

We also talked about the German Army's atrocities that inflicted on the French and Belgians at the early stages of the war. The two main reasons for the executions being the Germans did not wish to endure being sniped by partisan 'Franc Tireurs', as they had been during the Prussian War of 1870 and also they had planned a short war, so they did not wish to be slowed down by prisoners or court hearings. Rupprecht was actually number 33 on the French post-war list of 890 wanted war criminals.

Rupprecht considered the French Army to be more dangerous adversaries than the British, particularly because of the continual pressure they would exert. In his opinion the British would pause after they had won a battle

We noted there was not a lot written about Rupprecht as a man and nor did this book tell us much about his family life,

Rupprecht believed that one of the main reasons Germany lost the war was the attritional effect of Verdun and the Somme with the consequent deterioration of the low quality the army replacement recruits.

Jonathan Boff writes clearly and presented the story of the war from a German point of view in a clear and lucid way.

Everyone agreed that this had been a good choice and they had enjoyed the book. This showed us that a well-written academic book can be popular as well and we thought we are getting the variety and level of our choices right.

Member John Dolan e mailed in his comments

Sadly, things have moved against my being able to attend this evening. Please accept my apology.

However, having bought the book new in hardback (!), i can happily report that I thoroughly enjoyed it. It is, in my view, a handsomely bound and presented volume, containing some really interesting photographs that I hadn't previously viewed. I thought Boff's use of recently available, German primary sources commendable, and his acknowledging of these in Notes both thorough and generous. I would have welcomed some maps of positions and deployments, but this doesn't weigh too heavily with me.

I found Boff's style lucid and generally compelling, though at times his obvious (is it?) fascination with Rupprecht got the better of Boff's critical judgement of his subject as both a commander and a man. I was very interested in Boff's outlining of. Rupprecht's assessment of Haig and the BEF, as compared with the French commanders and fighting troops. As i read it, Boff argues - powerfully - that French strategies and tactics were on the whole the better judged and implemented.

I found Ch10 fascinating, and distressingly revealing of the life style of a senior commander (along with supportive sections and snippets placed elsewhere in the book of the same). I found and find it impossible to either forget or overlook the privilege and sense of entitlement which Rupprecht - and, no doubt, others similarly positioned commanders in all the engaged forces - displayed and enjoyed even as hundreds of thousand others fought and died trying to execute the orders and conditions determined for them as a result of command decisions made by commanders.

Overall, though, I thought the book a very good selection, so thanks to whoever recommend it to the group. I hope your evening discussion is lively and enjoyable. Please let me know the date of the next meeting, along with details of the next book for reading and discussing.

John

At the next meeting on **Tuesday 10th March, 7pm** ~ Labour Club, Saltergate we will talk about:

“1918: Winning the War, Losing the War” edited by Matthias Strohn

This new study is a multi-author work containing ten chapters by some of the best historians of the First World War from around the world writing today. It provides an overview and analysis of the different levels of war for each of the main armies involved within the changing context of the reality of warfare in 1918. It also looks in detail at the war at sea and in the air, and considers the aftermath and legacy of the First World War.

We thought we would do the first five chapters – (156 Pages) which are papers by different authors on the armies of Germany, France, Great Britain and USA. This will leave a further five for a later date.

Hardcover: 304 pages, Publisher: Osprey Publishing; (9 Mar. 2018)
ISBN-10: 9781472829337, ISBN-13: 978-1472829337

The book is also available on Audible and works well as a series of talks.

Barnbow lasses: Man who saved 12 in explosion honoured in Leeds



A man who saved the lives of 12 women in an explosion at a World War One munitions factory has had a road and bridge in Leeds named after him.

William Parkin was a mechanic at the Barnbow Munitions factory in Crossgates, Leeds, when a shell exploded in Room 42 on 5 December 1916. The accident killed 35 of the so-called "Barnbow Lasses", but Mr Parkin returned to pull 12 more to safety. A plaque has now been unveiled at the site near Thorpe Park retail park. Members of his family were at the ceremony and stories were told about the events of the night, after the plaque was unveiled by councillor Pauleen Grahame.

There were about 150 women and girls in the room when the explosion happened, at 22:27 as the night shift got under way. With 35 dead and many more injured, men and women rushed into the room to try to bring the injured to safety.



Mr Parkin went in several times and brought 12 women out, only stopping when emergency services arrived. His bravery was not officially recognised at the time, but he was presented with a silver watch by some of the survivors. In 2016, the site of the factory was given heritage protection by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to recognise the role of women in the conflict.

William Parkin Way passes partially over the site of the shell-filling factory where information about the site has been placed.



Explosion on at Barnbow led to the single largest loss of life in the history of Leeds

When World War One broke out, there was unprecedented demand for ammunition and three businessmen found the site for the factory. It was built within three months and employed 17,000 workers, most of them women. Three separate explosions happened at the factory, but the most serious was the one on 5 December 1916. A further two women were killed on 21 March 1917 and three men lost their lives in a blast on 31 March 1918.

Mike Parkin, William's grandson, was at the event and said: "It is emotional, my grandfather wasn't one for blowing his own trumpet, and what he did was instinct to him, to save the girls." "It was a very destructive time but it is good that he is being recognised." His great-great-granddaughter, Annabelle Babot, said: "What he did was amazing, it makes me feel really proud."

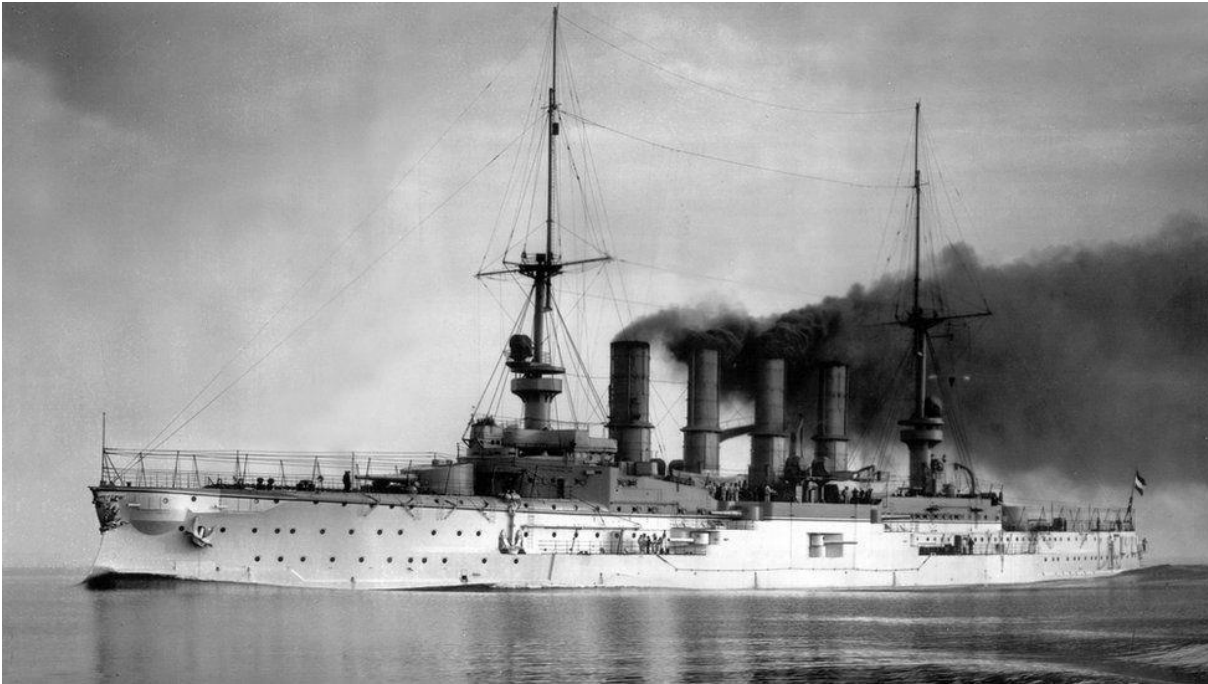


Cross Section through a shrapnel shell

Shrapnel consisted of a hollow shell which was packed internally with (typically) small steel balls or lead, together with an amount of gunpowder, and was the most common form of artillery deployed in 1914.

Managed by a timed fuse shrapnel was designed to explode while in mid-air above the enemy's trench positions. The rapid dispersal of the shell's contents, be it lead or steel, was designed to cause maximum casualties with minimal artillery effort.

German WWI wreck Scharnhorst discovered off Falklands



The wreck of a World War One German battlecruiser has been located off the Falkland Islands, where it was sunk by the British navy 105 years ago. SMS Scharnhorst was the flagship of German Vice-Admiral Maximilian Graf von Spee's East Asia Squadron. It was sunk on 8 December 1914 with more than 800 men on board, including Vice-Adm von Spee himself. The leader of the search for the wreckage said the moment of discovery was "extraordinary".

"We are often chasing shadows on the seabed, but when the Scharnhorst first appeared in the data flow, there was no doubt that this was one of the German fleet," Mensun Bound said of the moment of discovery.





Suddenly she just came out of the gloom with great guns poking in every direction," he added. "As a Falkland Islander and a marine archaeologist, a discovery of this significance is an unforgettable, poignant moment in my life," Mr Bound said. The search for SMS Scharnhorst began five years ago, on the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Falkland Islands, but was not successful at first. Search teams resumed their operation this year using a subsea vessel, the Seabed Constructor, and four autonomous underwater vehicles. They found SMS Scharnhorst on the third day of the search, at a depth of 1,610m (5,282ft). The wreck was not disturbed during the operation and the Falkland Maritime Heritage Trust is seeking to have the site formally protected in law. SMS Scharnhorst was part of the East Asia Squadron, the Imperial German Navy's cruiser squadron which operated mainly in the Pacific Ocean until the outbreak of World War One in 1914. The armoured battlecruiser played a key role in Battle of Coronel, fought between the British Royal Navy and Germany's Imperial Navy off the coast of Chile. Vice-Adm von Spee's son Heinrich died on board the battlecruiser SMS Gneisenau and Otto aboard the light cruiser SMS Leipzig. In total, 2,200 German sailors died in the battle. The head of the von Spee family said that the discovery of the wreck was "bittersweet". "We take comfort from the knowledge that the final resting place of so many has been found, and can now be preserved, whilst also being reminded of the huge waste of life," he said. "As a family we lost a father and his two sons on one day. Like the thousands of other families who suffered unimaginable loss during the First World War, we remember them and must ensure that their sacrifice was not in vain." Vice-Adm von Spee was hailed as a hero in Germany for not surrendering and in 1934 a new heavy cruiser was named after him. The Battle of the Falkland Islands had a lasting effect on World War One because as a result the East Asia Squadron, Germany's only permanent overseas naval formation, effectively ceased to exist and could no longer engage in commerce raiding.




From the BBC website

Not Great War related, but it is local history so I thought it worth including.

It **was** a well known fact that there was one Victoria Cross winner from Worksop, Sergeant William Henry Johnson VC who won his gallantry award in October 1918. However recent researches revealed that another VC winner had actually been born and raised in Worksop - Arthur Frederick Pickard - and the local council organised the erection of a Memorial, the unveiling of which took place in the town`s Memorial Garden on November 20th 2019 , 156 years to the day when Pickard won his award.

Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Frederick Pickard VC, CB (12 April 1844 - 1 March 1880) was a British Army officer and courtier. For his actions in New Zealand in 1863, he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. After further service and promotion in the Royal Artillery, Pickard was appointed an Equerry to the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn in 1871; seven years later, he was made Assistant Keeper of the Privy Purse and Assistant Private Secretary to the Queen and promoted to lieutenant-colonel, but died of tuberculosis in France, aged 35, less than two years later. Pickard was born at Forest Hill, Worksop, now the site of a care home although some of the original buildings still stand. He was baptised in Priory Church. Queen Victoria sent a floral tribute for his funeral with a message lamenting the loss of a `a dear friend` .

Arthur Frederick Pickard VC CB
Commemorative Memorial Unveiling Ceremony
Wednesday 20th November 2019
10.00am






LT. ARTHUR FREDERICK PICKARD VC

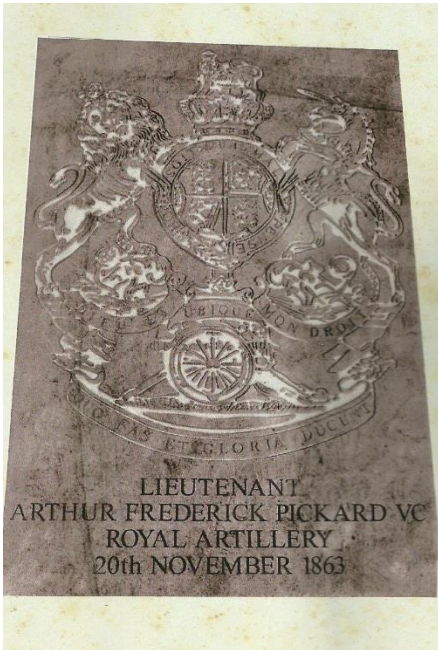
BORN: 12th APRIL 1841, Forest Hill, Worksop, Nottinghamshire
DIED: 1st March 1880, Cannes, France

Honours

1864 awarded Victoria Cross for actions on 20th November 1863
1871 until 1878, Equerry to Prince Arthur
21st December 1877, Groom in Waiting to Her Majesty Queen Victoria
8th February 1878, Lieutenant Colonel
5th July 1878, Extra Equerry
8th October, 1878, Assistant Keeper of the Privy Purse and
Assistant Private Secretary to Her Majesty Queen Victoria
15th March 1879 Ordinary Member 3rd Class (Companion) of the
Civil Division of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath



Bassetlaw
DISTRICT COUNCIL
— North Nottinghamshire —



The stone plaque in Worksop Memorial Garden

On the day of the unveiling we took up positions in the Memorial Garden.

Chairman of Bassetlaw District Council, Councillor Deborah Merryweather welcomed all present.

“ Vice Lord Lieutenant, Chairman of Nottingham County Council, Councillors, representatives of the Armed Forces, Veterans Groups, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you today to Worksop for the unveiling of this memorial to Lieutenant Arthur Frederick Pickard VC CB. I especially want to welcome 94 New Zealand Battery 4th Regiment of the Royal Regiment of Artillery who have travelled from their barracks in north Yorkshire to join us this morning for this occasion. We refer to Arthur Pickard as a Lieutenant as today marks exactly 156 years since the action

that led to the award of the Victoria Cross. As we will hear Arthur Pickard rose through the military ranks and would play a prominent part in public life. I would like to place on record thanks to Brian Drummond whose research on the Royal Artillery identified that, although many sources stated that Arthur Pickard was from Northamptonshire, he was actually from Worksop. I am very pleased that Bassetlaw District Council, together with support from Worksop charter Trustees, the Royal Artillery Charitable Foundation and 4th Regiment. I also wish to acknowledge the work of the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Victoria Cross Committee who, through Tony Higton, have ensured that due record has been made on the new memorial at the Victoria Embankment, Nottingham. From its historical links, the Battery has a strong bond with New Zealand. Although this garden was all under water less than two weeks ago, we are in a fitting location today. We have Worksop war memorial nearby. Adjacent are memorials to Sergeant William Henry Johnson another Victoria Cross holder from Worksop and memorials to Flight Lieutenant Nowak, the Polish pilot who made his way across Europe to join with the RAF and became a senior commander and a citizen of Worksop until he passed away. We take this opportunity to remember all those who have served their country and their families”

Gunner Bethanni Cook then read the Citation for the award of the VC

“ For gallant conduct during the assault of the Rangiriri Redoubt on 20th November 1863 in exposing their lives to imminent danger in crossing the entrance to the Maori Keep at a point upon which the enemy had concentrated their fire, with a view to render assistance to the wounded and more especially to the late Captain Mercer of the Royal Artillery. Lieutenant Pickard crossed and re-crossed the parapet to procure water for the wounded, when none of his colleagues could be induced to perform this service, the space over which he traversed being exposed to a crossfire and testimony is borne to the coolness displayed by him and Assistant - Surgeon Temple under the trying circumstances to which they were exposed”

Major Peter Alexander, Royal Artillery, then spoke an Appreciation after which Major Alexander, assisted by WO2(BSM) Daniel Aitken, unveiled the Memorial Stone. This was followed by the Prayer of Dedication, the Collect of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, and The Exhortation.

The Ceremony was concluded with a Final Blessing by Regimental Chaplain, Reverend(Captain) Alastair Beattie CF

Faithful Dog Rewarded

A.B. John William Spowart Cowan, R.F.R., survived the sinking of H.M.S. Formidable on 1st January 1915 thanks to a collie called 'Lassie.' His seemingly lifeless body had been brought to the Pilot Boat Hotel in Lyme Regis and Lassie brought him round.

“FAITHFUL DOG REWARDED.

“SAVED LIFE OF FORMIDABLE’S SURVIVOR.



“One of the most moving incidents that occurred when about 48 survivors of the ill-fated H.M.S. Formidable were landed at Lyme Regis was the faithful conduct of a cross-bred collie named Lassie, belonging to Mrs. M. Atkins, of the Pilot Boat Hotel, it will be readily recalled that the survivors were taken to the hotel, and one of their number, named Cowan, it was thought, had succumbed the privations to which he had been subjected while being in an open boat for 22 hours, without food or water on a storm-swept sea. While Cowan lay apparently dead on the floor of the inn the dog approached him and settled down by his side. Lassie snuggled its body close to the man’s left side and commenced to lick his face assiduously. After while animation was thus restored to the seaman’s body, and he gradually recovered, thanks to the kindly attentions of the dog.

“In recognition of its services on this occasion some of the dog’s admiring friends have presented it with a handsome silver collar, with padlock attached. The collar bears the following inscription: “Presented to Lassie by her admiring friends in Lyme Regis. The warmth of Lassie’s body revived the life of J. Cowan, one of the survivors of H.M.S. Formidable, who had been given up for dead. January 1st, 1915.” A medal has also been presented to Lassie for life-

saving by the National Canine Defence League.

“On Wednesday Lassie was honoured at Cruft’s Dog Show, London, where she was one of the 15 exhibits in the select circle of Cruft’s Canine Heroes’ League, and was awarded premier prize. Visitors to the show displayed a keen interest in Lassie’s noble work in restoring animation to the body of one of the Formidable’s survivors. At the show she probably did not understand the cause of her greatness, or why over her head there were placed a laurel wreath and a medal.

“At the .show Lassie was awarded a silver shield mounted on ebony and a silver medal. Inscribed on the shield was the following:— “Presented to Mrs. Atkins’ Lassie for saving the life of one of the crew of H.M.S. Formidable, 1st January, 1915.” Mrs. Atkins was, unfortunately, through indisposition, unable to accompany her pet to the show.” [1]

[1] 'Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser,' 17th February 1915.



An iconic image from the Battle of the Somme © IWM (Q 79501)

WHAT WERE THE ACTUAL ODDS OF DYING IN WW1?

Step into the shoes of the British Tommy and examine the stats that determined his chances of life or death.

We've all heard the numbers: hundreds of thousands of casualties for every major battle, over a million on the Somme alone, and close to 10 million servicemen killed overall. Put simply, the First World War was a savage, imposing statistical juggernaut. But the figures can be easily misunderstood, as Gordon Corrigan points out in 'Mud, Blood and Poppycock':

"Everyone knows – because it is endlessly repeated in newspapers, books and on radio and television – that if the British dead of the First World War were to be instantly resurrected and then formed up and marched past the Cenotaph, the column would take four and half days to pass."

He wastes no time in correcting this misapprehension: "Actually it wouldn't. The British lost 704,208 dead in the Great War, and if they were to form up in three ranks and march at the standard British army speed of 120 thirty-inch paces to the minute, they would pass in one day, fifteen hours and seven minutes. It is still an impressive statistic but utterly meaningless. It is about as useful as saying that if all the paper clips used in the City of London in a year were laid end to end they would reach to the moon, or to New York, or halfway round the world. The figure is quoted, usually around 11 November each year, to illustrate the scale of British casualties in the war of 1914-18."

Just as revisionist historians have challenged the notion of valiant British soldier lions being led to slaughter by incompetent generals, so too has the image of the war as one long stay in hell also been questioned.



Corrigan relates an episode from one of his A-level classes as a young man in which his headmaster, Wilf, a First World War veteran, gave a taste of his experience in the form of a maths problem:

"A brigade consists of a headquarters and four battalions, each of 1,000 men. It has a cyclist company and a company of the Army Service Corps attached. It has an escort of two troops of cavalry. The infantry marches at two miles per hour. The brigade sets off from Cassel at 0900 hours. At what time does the last man reach Poperinge?"

Corrigan's interest had been piqued: "This was much more fun than proving that $e=mc^2$, but whatever answer we came up with was always wrong. As Wilf wryly pointed out, the brigade was held up for four

hours in Steenvorde because the gendarmes considered that the commander lacked the necessary travel pass. Wilf had enjoyed his war.”

The BBC’s Dan Snow, in an online piece entitled ‘How did so many soldiers survive the trenches?’, has likewise used statistics to point out that the war was not necessarily as darkly pessimistic as we might think.

British soldiers, he says, actually had a 90 percent survival rate, far higher than in Britain’s previous continental engagement, the Crimean War.

Furthermore, because of a complex system of unit rotations, each soldier spent an average of only 15 percent of his time in the firing line, 10 percent in support trenches, a further 30 percent in reserve trenches further back and almost half his time, 45 percent, out of the trenches entirely.



It’s also worth pointing out that one common error people make is mistaking ‘casualty’ for ‘dead’, when it is, in fact, a combination of all those killed, wounded, missing or made prisoners of war.

Thus, although Britain’s Great War casualties certainly numbered in the millions, it’s dead most definitely did not, hovering instead, according to many sources, at around 700,000.

But does stepping this far back really clarify things? Or is it possible that the war, although not universally awful, was still far worse than this ‘soberer view’ of the numbers suggests?

To find out, and to really step into the shoes of an imaginary Tommy and assess his odds of death or wounding, the Forces Network contacted First World War expert Dr. Stephen Bull. He agreed wholeheartedly that there is far too much guesswork in this area and, happily, ended up recommending a source already consulted: ‘Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War 1914 – 1920’, an enormous tome filled with all manner of tables and statistics compiled by the War Office a few years after the conflict.

Dr. Bull also recommended the 1931 volume ‘Casualties and Medical Statistics’, the final instalment of the ‘Medical History of the Great War’, which the Forces Network was not able to get hold of but which was consulted by the Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe in its work on this topic, outlined below.

Of course, even with such authoritative sources, the hunt for a correct figure and an answer to our basic question “What really were poor Tommy’s odds of death?” is far from straightforward.

To begin with, even Corrigan himself lists two different conservative figures for the total British dead - 704,208 on the first page of his book, and then 702,410 on page 55.

Using the latter figure, he points out that this was 8.4 percent of the 8,375,000 men mobilised (one in 12) during the war and 1.53 percent of the British population, which is listed as having been 45,750,000 in 1914. This is significant, of course, but compares favourably to the losses endured by the Germans and French, whose pre-war populations were reduced by 3.23 and 3.7 percent respectively, according to Corrigan’s figures.

(The 8,375,000 men mobilised made up 73 percent of the 11,437,500 adult-male, fighting-age population. Corrigan points out that more than two million men were eventually ‘starred’ and put into ‘reserve

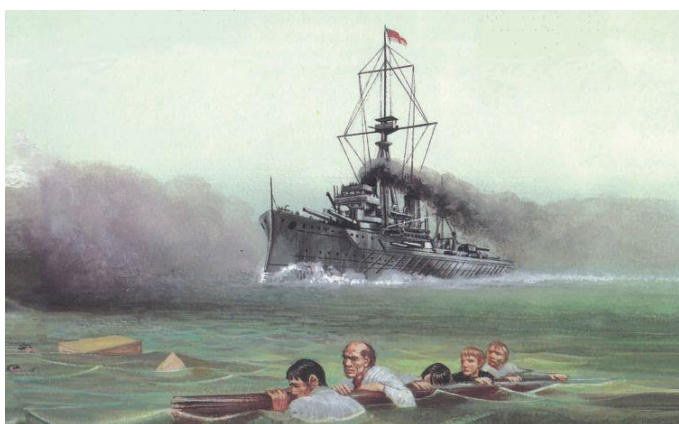
occupations' like the railways, coal mines and agriculture by the end of the war. And some men, of course, would have been deemed medically unfit for military service).

Starting out with the figure of 702,410 as a benchmark, the Forces Network checked this against the numbers listed in Statistics of the Military Effort.

The figure does indeed appear, at the start of Part IV, on casualties, as the number of dead suffered by the British Isles (as opposed to 908,371 deaths borne by the British Empire at large.)

But a look deeper into the book, and some fact checking with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, reveals that Corrigan's figure is incomplete – because it is only the number of dead sustained by British men who served within the British Army, albeit inclusive of the Royal Naval Division (sailors who were refashioned as soldiers.)

Admittedly, this is what's needed for judging Tommy's odds of death, but outside of the direct experience of the British soldier, the figure doesn't help us to truly understand the impact of the war on the home front. Just how many of Tommy and his compatriots in the other services did not come back alive?



Shipwrecked British sailors await the arrival of a Dreadnought
(image from 'World War I' by Ken Hills © Cherrytree Press Ltd)



For the Royal Navy, Statistics of the Military Effort does also list its casualty rates on page 339: 32,208 killed, consisting of 2,342 officers and 29,866 other ranks.

The page also contains a yearly number 'borne' (as in, men taken out to sea) and gives their odds of becoming a casualty each year (i.e. being killed or wounded), which averages 2.51 percent annually. (2.97 percent in 1914; 2.2 percent in 1915; 3.81 in 1916 – the Battle of Jutland the likely cause of that spike; 2.18 percent in 1917 and 1.75 in 1918).

From this it is possible to work out what the odds of a sailor becoming a casualty over the entire course of the war would have been. It is not, though, simply a matter of adding all these figures together, as this simpler example illustrates:

If a Tommy on the Western Front faced a 10 percent chance of becoming a casualty each year, and he served for three years, his chances of being killed, wounded or captured would not be 30 percent. The reason for this is that if he survived unscathed the first year, his original cohort would be 10 percent smaller. Thus, once the 10 percent who had become casualties in the first year had been replaced and

everybody again faced a 10 percent chance the second year, then that would be 10 percent of the remaining 90 percent who survived the first year. So after three years, Tommy would have a $10 + 9 + 8.1$ percent chance of becoming a casualty, which is 27.1 percent.



Likewise, going through the same process with the Navy figures results in a 12.27 percent chance of becoming a casualty for a sailor who served all four-and-a-half years of the Great War.

Of course, not everyone would have served the whole war, not everyone in the Navy would have been borne out to sea each year, and not all casualties at sea resulted in death (although the majority actually did.)

This might be why Michael Clodfelter's 'Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopaedia of Casualty and Other Figures' puts the Navy death rate at around 5.5 percent of the 647,237 who served in the Royal Navy during the whole war (as compared to 5,215,162 he lists as serving in the British Army and 291,175 in the RAF.)

Statistics of the Military Effort also points out in one of its footnotes that the Navy death figures do not include those of the Merchant Marine, who certainly aided the war effort, even if they weren't fighting directly. This figure is 14,661.

With regards to the RAF, this was formed when the RNAS (Royal Naval Air Service) and the RFC (Royal Flying Corps, part of the Army) were amalgamated in April, 1918. The Naval death figure – 32,208 – is inclusive of the RNAS, as well as the Royal Marines. However, the Army figure given above is not inclusive of the RFC (a point also made by the Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe in their endnotes.)

To track down this, as well as the death rates for the successor service, the RAF, the Forces Network consulted Chris Hobson's book 'Airmen Died in the Great War 1914-1918'. The death rates for these two services come to 4,053 and 4,364.

In all then, Britain's military, and military-related, deaths in the First World War weren't 702,410, they were $702,410 + 32,208 + 14,661 + 4,053 + 4,364$, for a grand total of 757,696.



But even this might be too conservative a figure because there were multiple civilian deaths throughout the war, due to Zeppelin and Gotha bomber raids, starvation from food shortages and disease. Corrigan makes a point of saying that the influenza virus that struck at the end of the war tended to hit, counterintuitively, the young and healthy. And since conditions in and around the trenches facilitated contagion, many who caught it would have been young men, the same demographic we are examining.

In its 2007-2008 annual report 'World War I casualties', the Virtual Centre for Knowledge on Europe estimated that the British Isles actually suffered 994,138 deaths, including 109,000 civilian deaths.

The Virtual Centre also consulted Statistics of the Military Effort and, as mentioned, The Medical History of the Great War, as well as liaising with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). They have since come up with this larger number that they believe is a more accurate accounting of all deaths attributable to the Great War.

What this amounts to is 2.19 percent of the population. As the revisionists have pointed out, this is no 'lost generation', but the impact becomes clearer when the figure is put into perspective.

Bear in mind that, as noted, the vast majority of these deaths were males, so they would have actually been 4.38 percent of that half of the population.

Additionally, the 1911 Census reveals that the population of the time was bottom heavy, meaning that approximately 40 percent were under the age of 20, and therefore mostly too young to fight. Also, 10 more percent were over the age of 55, and thus too old to fight.



A march during the coronation of King George V in London, 1911 (image: Library of Congress)

That left 50 percent of roughly fighting age, so in fact 8.76 percent of males in this age bracket were killed, and this doesn't even take into account the fact that much of this toll would have fallen on the younger end of this group. That's because those between 19 and 41 did the bulk of the fighting and dying, as conscription went up to this age when it was introduced in 1916 (it went up to 51 right at the end of the war). Essentially then, around 10 percent of young men must have been killed. To be sure, this is a smaller portion of those who were killed than in the Crimean War, as Dan Snow has pointed out. Clodfelter puts the figure at 22,182 British dead out of 97,846 engaged in the conflict, giving a 23 percent death rate.

Today's British Army, including both regular and reservists, is a little over 100,000 strong, and if 23,000 of them were killed in a conflict, the nation would be rocked by this loss. In 1851, a few years before the outbreak of the Crimean War, the population of Britain was also only 27 million, as opposed to 65 million today.

But there's still something very different about 23 percent of a relatively small army not coming home to 10 percent of an entire nation's young men not coming home.

The impact of the Great War also didn't end with the deaths it caused. Many multitudes more were wounded.

Using the same source material – Statistics of the Military Effort and Chris Hobson's book – the Forces Network has estimated that the wounded figure for Britain would have been 1,685,257.

That breaks down as 1,662,625 for the Army, 5,135 for the Royal Navy, 16 percent of the total dead; if we assume the same ratio for the Mercantile Marine then the figure is 2,346. Page 507 of Statistics of the Military Effort gives RFC and RAF casualties in France only from mid-1916 to the end of 1918 – these come to 1,591 killed and 2,887 wounded.

Given Chris Hobson's subsequent figures, these air service stats in Statistics of the Military Effort seem a little low, but for the sake of argument, and since the air service stats in this case are marginal in comparison to the others, it seems reasonable to go with them for this exercise.



Since the wounded figure for the air services, 2,877, is 180 percent of the death toll figure, 1,591, it makes sense to multiply the total RAF (4364) and RFC (4053) death rates for the war, 8,417, by 1.8, which gives an approximation of 15,151 injured. Taken together, these all add up to 1,685,257.

This, however, represents not the actual number of wounded men but the number of wounds, the difference lying in the fact that a man could be wounded more than once.

It is not possible to know for sure from the sources used exactly how many individual men were wounded, but it can be fairly well guessed at.

This is because page 245 of Statistics of the Military Effort has a table with information taken in late October 1917. It shows the total number of men up to that point who had been unlucky enough (or, perhaps lucky, depending on whether they wanted to get out of the line) to be wounded two or three times. The total? 83,203.

In addition to this, the Casualties section of Statistics of the Military Effort also shows that by October 22, 1917, officers in the Army had received 32,402 wounds and men 741,118. (This time, for some reason, the Royal Naval Division is not counted but approximate figures were filled in later – 199 wounds to officers and 4,838 to men).

The Royal Flying Corps is confusing – its part in the Army is included in some tables, though, as noted, the death figures are not part of the overall accounting. In any case, 1.8 x the 1914, 1915, 1916 and 1917 dead listed by Hobson up to October (2661), 4,790, isn't statically significant in this case so it has been left out.

So adding together 32,402 (Army officers), 741,118 (regular soldiers), 199 (Royal Naval Division officers) and 4,838 (Royal Naval Division men) comes to a total of 778,557 wounds sustained by the Army up until late 1917.

Immediately, it's easy to see that 83,203 is roughly 10 percent of this total (10.69 to be precise). This means that 1 in every 10 'wounded men' in many stats probably didn't exist, the wounds going instead to men who had already been wounded once or twice.

Multiplying the original wounded figure of 1,685,257 by .9 gives 1,516,731 British men wounded, 3.31 percent of the population, if one uses Corrigan's figure of 45,750,000 in 1914. (For their part, the Virtual Centre had a figure of 1,663,435 wounded British men).



Thiepval Memorial near the Somme (top). St Symphorien Cemetery near Mons (bottom)

It means that, in addition to the 8.76 percent of those aged roughly 20 to 55 who were killed in the war, 13.24 percent would have been wounded, a grand total of 22 percent of the fighting-age male population.

(This may be a little high, to be sure, since some of those wounded would have gone back and been killed, which means they would have been counted twice here. Although it is a little difficult to estimate what proportion of those deaths might have happened before a given wounded man went back into the line, and thus what chance he had of being killed subsequently. In any case, the figure still works as an approximation).

Fortunately, the vast majority of the wounds sustained were recovered from, at least physically. But a certain subset were not.

Hospital figures listed in *Statistics of the Military Effort* show that there were around 40,000 amputees, that St. Dunstan's Hospital took in roughly 2,000 blind patients, and 30,000 who had lost one eye and, according to the book *'Faces From the Front'*, which charts the efforts of surgeons to do reconstructive surgery on soldiers the French called 'the men with broken faces', 5,000 men were treated for facial wounds. (This last group again might overlap slightly with those who lost one or both eyes).

That means a total of roughly 77,000 men were left permanently disfigured by the war – about 5 percent of the total wounded, or another .67 percent of the fighting-age (20 -55) population, making 9.43 percent when added to the dead.

As for psychological wounds, it can be safely assumed that the 1,736 patients treated at Craighlockhart - and, according to the National Center for Biological Information, the 735 unable to return to duty – are a drop in the bucket of all those suffering from shell shock, or PTSD.

The documentary series 'The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century' features footage of men with all manner of strange maladies, such as a one who compulsively cowered under a bed at the mere utterance of the word 'bomb'; another man with a strange facial tic caused by his having bayoneted an enemy soldier in face; and a former serviceman continuously shaking from head to toe, utterly unable to walk without a cane.

Pat Barker, whose novels 'Regeneration', 'The Eye in the Door' and 'The Ghost Road' deal with the meeting at Craighlockhart and subsequent friendship between the war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, theorises on the cause of shell shock, or neurasthenia, through the lead character, Dr. William Rivers.

The breakdown in nerves occurs, Rivers postulates, because of the ongoing, extreme stress of being stuck in a trench whilst being bombarded continuously by artillery. This is meant to have been a uniquely stressful experience, and may explain the kind of mental illness alluded to in Sassoon's poem 'Repression of War Experience':

"No, no, not that,— it's bad to think of war,

"When thoughts you've gagged all day come back to scare you;

"And it's been proved that soldiers don't go mad

"Unless they lose control of ugly thoughts

"That drive them out to jabber among the trees."

Niall Ferguson points out in 'The Pity of War' that even soldiers like the 'almost psychopathically brave' German Stormtroop officer Ernst Junger could be driven mad by the horror of an artillery bombardment.

Junger likened the experience of being caught in the open when the shells started raining down to being tied to a post whilst a madman swung a sledgehammer in his direction, never knowing if it was going to hit his head or the post.

As for being literally tied to a post, the 306 British men executed during the war are naturally included in the fatalities but what hasn't been covered yet are other forms of discipline.

Starting on page 643 of Statistics of the Military Effort, it shows that, between 1914 and 1920 there were 304,262 courts-martial proceedings involving officers and soldiers, of which 141,115 took place on the home front and 163,147 abroad.

On average, 78 percent of the officers were convicted and 85 percent of the soldiers were. This may have been because of some underlying classism, or possibly also because the social configurations of the time meant that those who became officers were fortunate enough to come from backgrounds that inculcated more internalised (i.e. 'middle' class) discipline, perhaps making it at least seem less necessary to go through with punishments. An upbringing of that nature may well have exposed a young man, even indirectly, to the upper echelon of the Army, making it seem more familiar and intuitive when he entered it formerly.

Also, when punishments were meted out, they were often different in nature. Field punishment number 1 and 2 (tying or shackling a man to a fixed object, or forcing him to perform duties whilst restrained, i.e. perhaps marching in leg irons) were never carried out on officers. Instead, they tended to be cashiered or dismissed, or reprimanded in some way.

For the men, there were 78,758 cases of field punishment, which, divided amongst the more than 5 million men who served in the Army (it was largely an Army procedure). That meant that a battalion of 1,000 men might have 15 who experienced field punishment during the course of the war.

Some sources talk about this being fairly widely (and unfairly) used, though it seems at least equally likely that, like the wounded, this might well have been applied several times to the same individual, or individuals – the ‘usual suspects’, as it were. Two drunken idiots kicking off every six months or so and picking a fight with their sergeants, for example, might well account for the entirety of its use within a given battalion over the whole course of the war.

Away from the battlefield, many others were imprisoned or detained, often for relatively short periods of two years or less, but some received penal servitude, 142 men for life and 7,231 for three years or more.

So taking courts-martial as a whole, the 304,262 people subjected to the stress of going through one, even if they were acquitted, came to 3.6 percent of the more than 8 million men mobilised, .67 percent of the population and 2.68 percent of fighting-age males, taking the total of dead, permanently wounded, and those possibly bearing grudges as a result of military discipline to 12.1 percent of fighting age men.

Also, although a relatively small number of executions were carried out, and a mere three of them on officers (1 for murder, and 2 for desertion), the mere threat of a court-martial resulting in death must have weighed on the minds of many. After all, as well as the 306 executed by firing squad, around 2,700 more men were sentenced to death but had their sentences commuted to lesser punishments.

Even officers were not immune, as illustrated by a section in the book ‘A Subaltern’s War’, published variously as either Charles Edmund Carrington or Charles Edmonds (a pseudonym).

At one point during the Battle of Passchendaele, Carrington was separated from his men and struggled to get back. When he did so, he says he had half expected to be court-martialled, though instead received a medal for his efforts.

It’s easy to see why the monochromatic battlefield of Ypres was easy for Carrington to get lost in, and it’s worth remembering that, whilst Passchendaele represented the very worst of the hellish weather on the Western Front, the conditions were often extraordinarily unpleasant at other times too.

Dan Snow may be right about troops spending a limited time in the firing line, and they spent even less time actively engaged in battle, but that didn’t mean life was easy. Even in quiet sectors, or when out of the line, the conditions were often appalling, as these sections of John Ellis’ ‘Eye Deep in Hell’ make clear:

“The company would take up its new position after at least one night in billets, which they had reached, as like as not, by a route march... These in themselves were gruelling experiences, the troops often covering fifteen or twenty miles.”

In addition, with each man weighing on average 132 lbs, he was often required to haul between 60 and 77 lbs of uniform and kit:

“Only ten minutes rest was allowed every hour, and in summer the exertion often proved too much. A Coldstream Guards’ officer, Lieutenant St. Leger, described one such march in which many men fell out, fainted or had fits. Once his battalion reached billets it was decreed that everyone who had fallen out had to do a further five hours marching in full kit; those who had not actually been unconscious at the time also had to suffer eight days CB (confined to barracks).”

The other extreme was also a huge problem:

“The trenches were invariably ankle-deep in mud, and often the level grew much higher. It was common for the water to be at least a foot deep and hardly rare for it to reach a man’s thighs. There were actually occasions when men had to stand for days on end up to their waists, or even their armpits, in freezing water. Usually, of course, the water mixed with earth in the trenches and turned to thick mud, making each step and effort. The shortest journey became a major enterprise. An officer of the 19th London Regiment... told how it once took him three hours to make his way up a communication trench 400 yards long.”

France and Flanders didn’t only have some of the most trying weather conditions, they were also the most dangerous place for a British soldier to be.

Roughly 50 percent of the British war effort was focused on the Western Front, and men there suffered a disproportionately high number of casualties – 12 percent of those sent were killed and 37.56 percent wounded, for a total of almost 56% battle casualties, when the odds of going missing or becoming a POW are accounted for. In fact, the risk was higher within specific parts of the Army, most notably the PBI, Poor Bloody Infantry.

As Corrigan points out, the British soldier in the First World War was at the tip of a very long spear.

This means, in effect, that he was not only at the front of a vast trench system through which he was rotated constantly, limiting his time in the line, but also that he was supported by an ever-increasing bureaucracy and an array of specialists.

What Statistics of the Military Effort reveals is that, as the war went on, the share of it being fought by the infantry, and other combat arms, decreased considerably.

On page 76, it shows that in September 1916, the infantry were 42.9 percent of the British Army, and 58 percent of the combat arms, the others being cavalry, artillery, engineers and the Royal Flying Corps. Non-combat arms made up 25.5 percent of the Army and consisted of units like the Army Service Corps, the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Pay Corps, which, believe it or not, expanded exponentially over the course of the war (illustrated on page 225) – a move necessitated presumably by the fact that the British Expeditionary Force also increased hugely from its relatively small size in 1914.

By June 1918, the Machine-Gun and Tank Corps had both been added to the mix but the combat arms had decreased in proportion from around 75 percent of the Army to about 65 percent. The infantry by now were only 32.88 percent (51 percent of the combat arms).

One should not diminish in any way the contribution to the war effort of the BEF's non-combat arms (not to be confused with the Non-Combatant Corps, which was made up of conscientious objectors). Men in these units likewise operated under the most trying conditions, risked life and limb, and the war would almost certainly not have been won without their efforts.

But the fact is that, to answer one of the central questions of this article – what the odds of a combat soldier dying in the First World War really were – one must discriminate between combat and non-combat units. Because what Statistics of the Military Effort also shows is that the vast majority of the deaths sustained, around 95 percent, went to combat arms.

Furthermore, 85 percent of casualties in general were borne by the infantry. Yet, as noted, they only made up between 43 and 32 percent of the Army in 1916 and 17, respectively.

Those serving on the Western Front would have been even harder hit, given the disproportionate rate of death, wounds and chances of becoming a POW there (55 percent of those there became casualties).

So to work out the odds of our Tommy coming to harm if he'd been in France or Belgium during the war, we must add 42.9 to 32.88 and divide by two to give a rough estimate of the average proportion of the Army taken up by the infantry over the war.

That averages out to 37.89 percent of the entire British Army, amongst which 85 percent of the casualties must be allocated. 85 divided by 37.89 is 2.24, or roughly two-and-a-quarter times the normal chance of becoming a casualty overall. As stated, that was 55 percent for everybody on the western front, so 2.24 times 55 gives a 123.2 percent chance of becoming a casualty.

This might seem unbelievable, but it is in fact comparable to Crimea. Whereas 23 percent of British soldiers died there, well over 100 percent of them became casualties of illness, the primary cause of death. That meant that a number of men fell seriously ill more than once. What this figure implies is that the British infantrymen on the Western Front, assuming they served for any significant amount of time, were pretty much guaranteed to become a casualty in some form. (The Lancaster University maths department has advised that, of course, no single man ever had a 100 percent chance of becoming a casualty. Multiplication can be used instead of addition to arrive at the odds of a single man being killed, wounded or

going missing. This can bring the figure very close to, but never actually reaches, 100 percent because, naturally, some lucky few men got through with no injuries at all whilst others sustained multiple wounds. Irish Guards officer Alexander Turner, whom the Forces Network contacted in the course of researching this article, noted indeed that one individual who served in his battalion during the war, Neville Marshall VC, was wounded an incredible nine times).

Statistics of the Military Effort shows that, of all casualties sustained by the infantry, 19.96 percent were as fatalities, 64.23 percent were as wounds and 14.81 percent were in the form of missing soldiers or those who became POWs. In 'Kaiserschlacht 1918: The Final German Offensive', Randal Gray says that the British suffered 177,739 casualties between March 21 and April 5 as part of the German spring offensive. 72,000 of these were in the form of prisoners taken by the enemy.

For the remainder who lived, it seems very likely that almost all of them would have sustained some kind of wound during their time in France and Belgium, and some more than one.

And finally, because we know that about 20 percent of the infantry's losses were in the form of dead, that means that our Tommy on the Western Front would have had a 24.64 percent chance of being killed (his 123.2 percent chance of becoming a casualty multiplied by .2).

The odds were apparently slightly worse for Scottish soldiers. Clodfelter says that 26.4 percent of them were killed, and 20 percent of Oxford students who served were.

But even this isn't the worst it got. Airmen, of course, sometimes had stunningly short life expectancies, depending on whether or not they went through a particularly perilous period. In '*On a Wing and a Prayer*', Joshua Levine tells us that at one point new pilots might only be expected to last 11 days.

As for soldiers, it must be borne in mind that that 12 percent death rate for those on the western front wasn't only an average of all arms, but also of all times – those who were there from the beginning would have had a higher chance of death (or injury) than men who joined up, or were conscripted, later.

The character of a given unit was also a factor in the exposure of its members to risk. Tony Ashworth's detailed account of the development of truces in '*Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System*' divides battalions into three broad categories: Unreliable units whose members were more likely to fraternise with the enemy or, later on, to engage in only predictable, deliberately inaccurate perfunctory fire; 'elite' units that could be counted upon to aggress the enemy all or most of the time; and the remaining battalions that falls somewhere between these two extremes.

In researching my great grandfather's military service, I learnt that his unit, the 1 Grenadier Guards – which was about as elite a unit as one could be in at the time – sustained an incredible number of deaths and injuries.

Alan Ogden, the Regimental Archivist for the Grenadiers, informed me that my great grandfather's battalion had suffered 1,286 fatalities over the course of the war. Battalions were about 1,000 strong at the start of the war, meaning that new members were put in and cycled through the unit several times (4,434 men served within 1 Battalion over the whole course of the war). This gives an overall death rate of 28 percent – it was 29 percent for 3 Battalion, 32 percent for 2 Battalion and 34 percent for 4 Battalion.

In fact, had my great grandfather not been transferred to the home front after becoming a casualty himself early on in the war, his odds of death would have been closer to that of those in 4 Battalion. The German sniper who shot him in the shoulder, and narrowly missed his heart, may well have done him a favour in the long run because M Gillott, editor of 'Great War Diaries: 1st Bn Grenadier Guards War Diary 1914 – 1919' tells us: "*Of the original thousand men (who served from the opening of the war), nearly 90% would become casualties during the war. A third (33 percent) would be killed. While recovered sick and wounded would be recycled through the Battalion, very few would served (sic) to the end of the war unscathed.*"

There were also the invisible injuries that continued to impact men after their service, and thus British society in general. My great grandfather applied for, and got, a service pension with funds awarded on the

basis that his war service had probably exacerbated, though not caused, his 'pulmonary tuberculosis' (which may well have been lung cancer – he did reputedly smoke, well, like a trooper.)

Niall Ferguson opens his book, 'The Pity of War', with a discussion that mentions his grandfather, who was also shot through the shoulder by a sniper, the bullet also narrowly missing his heart. As well as this, he was also gassed, something that impacted his lungs for years afterwards.

Gordon Corrigan attempts to quantify the extent to which these kinds of injuries might have impacted British society: "One way in which non-fatal casualties might be quantified as to their effect on the nation and on the generation that fought the war is to examine the number of pensions paid after the war to men who were incapacitated by their wounds. While it might be argued that a man who had been a marathon runner before the war and now was minus a leg could become a lawyer instead, and thus still make a contribution it is fair to say that the overwhelming majority of men receiving a war disablement pension were to a greater or lesser extent incapable of performing as they might otherwise have done, and to have been affected by the war. Medical boards began to sit immediately after the war to decide who should qualify for a war disablement pension. The number awarded each year increased, as men came forward or as wounds initially thought to have been cured flared up again. In 1929 the number of men in receipt of pensions reached its peak, and then began to decline as men recovered entirely or began to die off through natural causes."

He continues: "The British government made monetary awards, either as lump sums or as pensions, to 735,487 men. Many of these awards were for non-battle casualties, but if the man was serving at the time he contracted the disease or suffered the accident, it was considered to be attributable to war service... the total of those who died in the war plus those accepted as having been left physically or mentally disabled by it comes to 1,437,897." Corrigan also mentions that in the 1930s the British Legion helped organise pensions for an additional 100,000 men not initially thought to be eligible for them: "Adding this to our figure of men killed or affected by the war, we arrive at a figure of three per cent of the total population, or nineteen per cent of the males of military age."

In fact, if the total pensions figure of 835,487 is added to the higher death toll of the war presented in the Virtual Centre's report, 994,138 deaths, the total figure comes to 1,829,625. That's 4 percent of the total population (again, which is listed by Corrigan as being 45,750,000 in 1914), 8 percent of the males, 16 percent of adult males, and of course an even higher proportion of men of military age – 19 to 41, which Corrigan has factored in, hence his slightly higher figure of 19 percent. It is worth pausing for a moment to consider just how significant an impact almost 1 in 5 young males across an entire nation being killed or permanently impacted by a war really is. However, even this might underestimate the scale of damage because, as Len Deighton says on page 153 of 'Blood, Tears and Folly': "*Pensions for the widows and disabled were minuscule, and the cruelly contrived demands of postwar medical boards persuaded some veterans to give up their pensions rather than annoy their employers by frequent absences.*"

We can therefore surmise that some who suffered the long-term effects of war wounds may have been dissuaded from even seeking pensions, given that they could have been aware of the 'minuscule amount' possibly being received by a family member, friend or neighbour. Turning to the back of Deighton's book reveals the source of his information on what he says were the paltry sums paid out. The attribution reads simply: "My father was one of them."

Thanks to the CWGC, Dr. Stephen Bull, the RAF Museum, the Lancaster University Maths Department and Alan Ogden, Regimental Archivist for the Grenadier Guards, for assistance with this article. For more information, read Michael Clodfelter's 'Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopaedia of Casualty and Other Figures' 'Mud, Blood and Poppycock' by Gordon Corrigan, 'Kaiserschlacht 1918' by Randal Gray and 'British Tommy 1914-18' by Martin Pegler, both from Osprey Publishing, 'Blood Tears and Folly' by Len Deighton, 'Trench Warfare 1914-18: The Live and Let Live System' by Tony Ashworth, 'On a Wing and a Prayer' by Joshua Levine, 'Eye Deep in Hell' by James Ellis and 'World War I' by Ken Hills for an illustrated depiction of the war that might be suitable for service members with children.