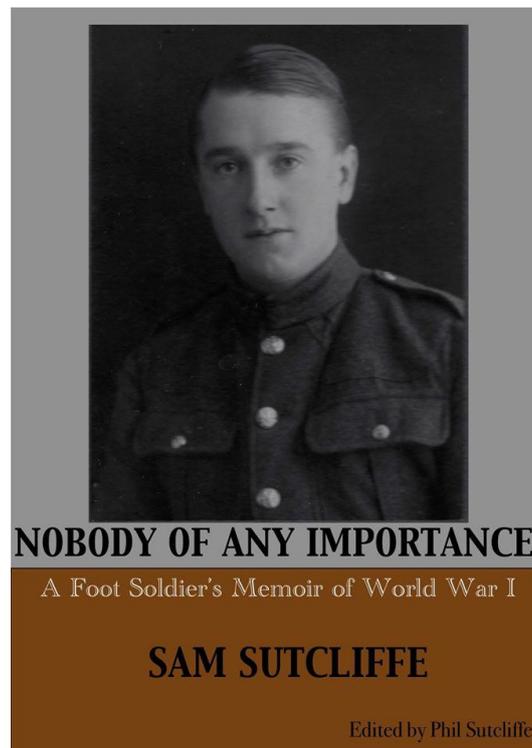


Branch Newsletter – March 2020

Next Meeting:

Saturday 14th March at St Peter's Collegiate School, Compton Park, Compton Rd. West, Wolverhampton WV3 9DU. Doors open at 2.00pm, with proceedings beginning at 2.30pm. If visiting us by car, please approach from the A454 Compton Road West, turn off and follow the Compton Park Road along for about 800 yds or so; the school is on the right, past the Wolverhampton Wanderers FC Training Ground. We park in the Staff Car Park, which is the third entrance onto the site - almost at the end of the road; you'll think you've gone too far, but you haven't.

Phil Sutcliffe will be giving a talk entitled "*Nobody of any importance – a foot soldiers memoir*".



Phil Sutcliffe writes:

“My father, Sam Sutcliffe (1898-1987), was a WWI Tommy. He grew up in Edmonton, north London, enlisted at 16 with the 2/1st Royal Fusiliers in September 1914, trained in London, Tonbridge, Malta (becoming a Lance Corporal Signaller) and Egypt, fought in Gallipoli September 1915-January 1916 (Suvla Bay and V Beach).

After his second evacuation, via Egypt again, he moved to France, and transferred to the Kensingtons for the Somme (May-September, Gommecourt around July 1, then further south). After his age was discovered –18 on July 6, 1916, still legally too young for foreign battlefields – he had a welcome (and guilty) year out, further transferring to the Essex Regiment, and “training”, sometimes without the inverted commas, in London, Yorkshire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire and Sussex.

Then, returning to France in December, 1917, he fought against the Spring Offensive near Arras where he was taken prisoner on March 28, 1918 (his Battalion was sacrificed to cover a strategic retreat), and endured eight months as a POW on the move in France and Germany until Armistice started his long totter west from a camp in occupied Lorraine to the French lines and various French, American and British hospitals before he was able to return to his family.

The Memoir continues via some interesting experiences back in England– including service at a Sussex POW camp guarding German soldiers – until the July 1919 Peace parade in Hyde Park which he attended a couple of weeks after his 21st birthday and with his brother Ted whom he’d enlisted with in September 1914 and whom he knew to be dying of poison-gas damage (which he did in 1922; Ted’s given name was Philip and I was named for him 25 years later).”



Firstly a few words from our worthy Chairman:

“Dr.Spencer Jones is now speaking on Saturday April 11th, and Dr.Irfan Malik on Saturday May 9th.

I have just spoken to Carol Longmore and there will be a cheque for £1000 going to the RNLi as a donation in memory of Geoff. Please thank everyone in our branch for their generosity once again.

The branch also donated £100 to the War Memorial Trust as requested by Carol, as this was another organisation that Geoff supported.

After the AGM,I asked for members suggestions for some way of remembering Geoff's contribution to the branch.

I received the same idea from 3 different members, and so it has been decided that the September meeting each year will be known as the Geoff Longmore Memorial meeting.

Carol is very happy with this as September 29th was Geoff's birthday, and also the day the Staffords won the war on Riqueval Bridge. Alan."

A short message from our esteemed Treasurer:

"Annual Voluntary Donation

To date 72 folks have paid an Annual Voluntary Donation, that's 10 months of room rental covered already. Many thanks, Andy."

Thanks to Nick Baker for this contribution:

Not All Pigeons Were Heroes...

Recently, at the Staffordshire County Archives, I was perusing the minutes of the First World War Staffordshire War Agricultural Committee (always a popular read) and came across an interesting note concerning pigeons in wartime.

Most people will be aware that homing pigeons were used to carry messages during both the First and Second World Wars and that a number achieved celebrity (albeit when stuffed) status. However, the Staffordshire War Agricultural Committee minutes reveal a dark side to wartime pigeon behavior and that not all pigeons were heroes.

Indeed the pigeons mentioned in a minute of 1917 were described as 'immigrants', and were guilty of eating growing crops on their journey through Staffordshire. The response of the Agricultural Committee was ask landowners through the county to organise special execution squads who, on Wednesdays, would meet to shoot these 'foreigners' dead. How they were to differentiate them from local bona fide Staffordshire pigeons we don't know. One can't help feeling mistakes may have been made.

Immigrant Pigeons.

On consideration of a Resolution passed by the Central Chamber of Agriculture as to damage done by immigrant pigeons.

It was resolved -

That public notice be given by advertisement requesting that general arrangements should be made throughout the County for shooting Immigrant Pigeons on Wednesdays.

That the attention of landowners be called to the matter in the hope that they will take steps to deal with Immigrant Pigeons.

Of course there was a serious side to this. As agricultural production became an integral part of wartime policy under the Lloyd George Government from December 1916, the control of pests including rabbits and pigeons became vitally important. Meanwhile pigeon pie and rabbit stew made a welcome addition to wartime rations, provided you didn't mind picking out the lead shot. Nick."

Pigeon Einsatzgruppen – whatever next!

Centenary Tree Planting:

Centenary of Black Country WW1 memorial trees plantings to be commemorated 100 years to the day

The centenary of a Black Country 'Green' event paying tribute to those who fell in the First World War is to be commemorated exactly 100 years to the day on which it happened.

On Sunday March 22 trees will be planted in All Saints, Wolverhampton, a century on from the day on which pupils elected by fellow pupils at All Saints, St Joseph's and Dudley Road Schools planted 30 trees in All Saints Road.

They then dedicated each tree to "the memory of the brave men who died to make the world freer and brighter" in the first plantings in a scheme initiated by then Wolverhampton Mayor Councillor Thomas Austin Henn (all correct) of Dunstall Ward.

In his mayoral address on November 10, 1919 he said he proposed to ask for money to plant 1,000 trees chiefly in streets "which were drab and dreary monotony." He said it would cost £1,200 – nearly £61,500 in today's prices – with Wolverhampton people, particularly pupils, parents and staff of schools, raising the money.

On Sunday 22 March present Mayor Councillor Claire Darke will be at new plantings at The Workspace, All Saints Action Network, All Saints Road, All Saints, WV2 1EL. (11am). The Mother's Day event will be on the site of the former All Saints School which is next to All Saints Church where a plaque commemorates 91 men who died in the WW1.

Trees are still in All Saints Road – a legacy of original plantings – along with others planted later in nearby Vicarage Road, Mason Street, Silver Birch Avenue and Thompson Avenue.

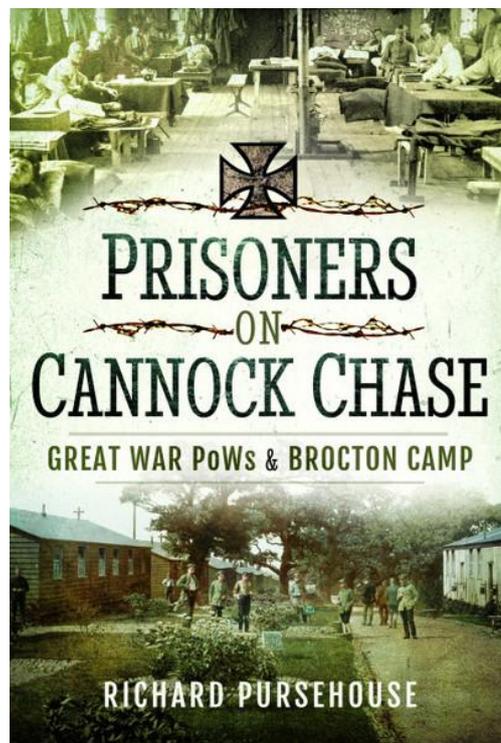
The anniversary came to light in a chapter written by Jim Barrow on Wolverhampton's memorial trees in the new book Wolverhampton's Great War 1914-1921 published by the Wolverhampton Society.

Free tickets are available at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/centenary-of-ww1memorial-trees-planting-tickets-96064679041>

A Battlefield visitor finds more than he bargained for:

Un touriste britannique découvre les ossements d'un soldat de la Grande Guerre à Ovillers-la-Boisselle

Richard Pursehouse's book on Cannock Chase is now available:



Pen and Sword Books: Prisoners on Cannock Chase - Hardback

Another statement of the obvious...

Ashford's First World War tank at risk of collapse within 20 years

And how most of them ended up:



Scrapping of a Gun Carrier Mark I, with a Mark IX and Mark V in the background, likely taken at the Steelbreaking and Dismantling Company of Chesterfield. Photo from the Evening Standard*

Another interesting barn find:

[Soldier's World War One diary discovered in Leicestershire barn - BBC News](#)

Ken and Annabelle Wright have shared this story:

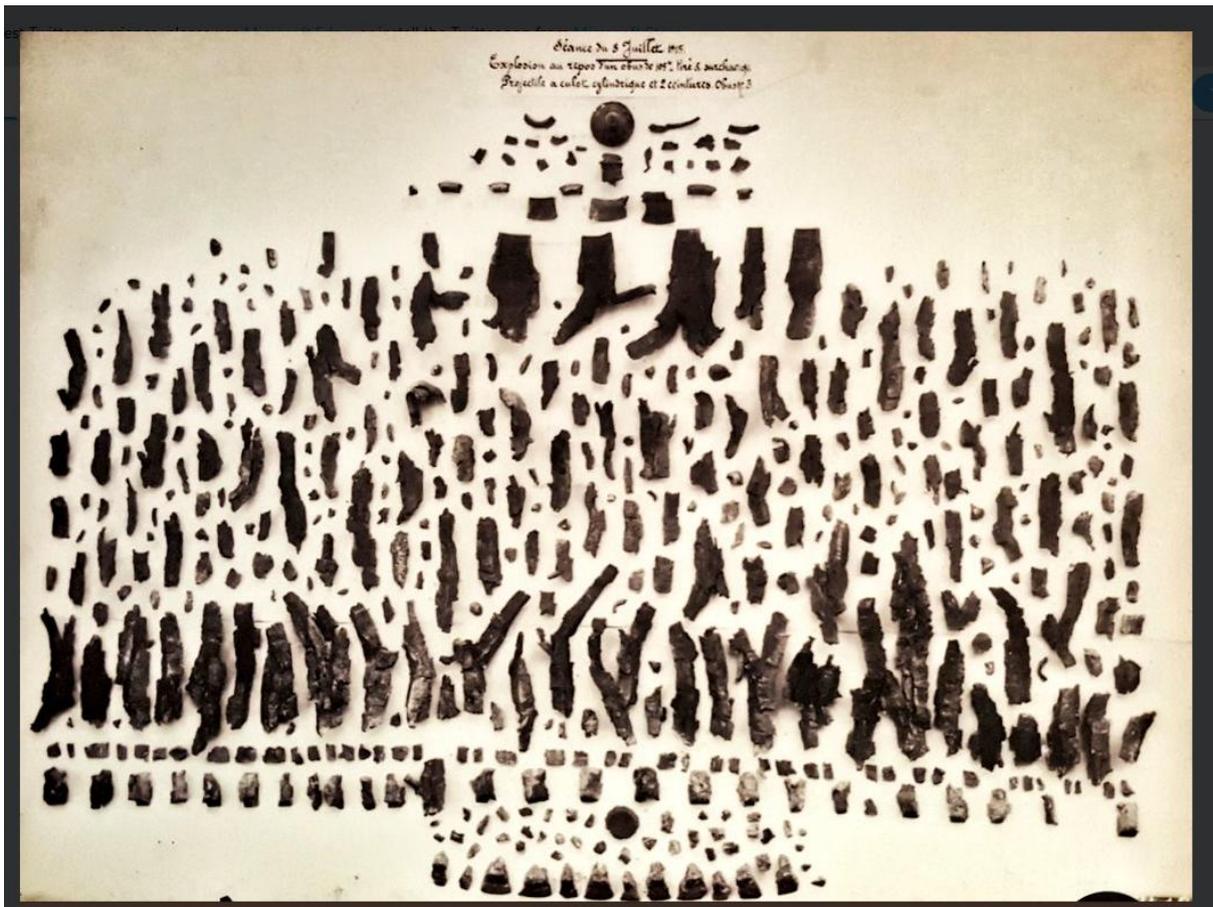
[WW1 pilot's items found in Leicestershire barn 'flabbergasts' expert - BBC News](#)

What a simply astonishing quantity of hot jagged metal that comes from a single shell:

Dan Hill @DanHillHistory

If you have ever wondered why artillery shells were so devastating during #WWI, look no further than this. All this 'shrapnel' came from ONE shell. Imagine that screaming about a battlefield glowing red-hot at a few hundred miles an hour. Awful.

pic.twitter.com/TgSUdf3Mu



But how did they collect all the little bits?

I know it's the "wrong" war – but as I found it to be of interest I've put it in anyway:

Campaign Stars, Clasps and Medals
instituted in recognition of service
in the war of 1939-45

**THE AWARDS ISSUED ARE MARKED X
ON THE ACCOMPANYING SLIP**

<i>Order of Wearing</i>	<i>Description of Ribbon</i>	<i>Clasp or Emblem (if awarded)</i>
1 1939-45 Star	Dark blue, red and light blue in three equal vertical stripes. This ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	Battle of Britain
2 Atlantic Star	Blue, white and sea green shaded and watered. This ribbon is worn with the blue edge furthest from the left shoulder.	Air Crew Europe or France and Germany
3 Air Crew Europe Star	Light blue with black edges and in addition a narrow yellow stripe on either side.	Atlantic or France and Germany
4 Africa Star	Pale buff, with a central vertical red stripe and two narrower stripes, one dark blue, and the other light blue. This ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	8th Army or 1st Army or North Africa 1942-43
5 Pacific Star	Dark green with red edges, a central yellow stripe, and two narrow stripes, one dark blue and the other light blue. This ribbon is worn with the dark blue stripe furthest from the left shoulder.	Burma
6 Burma Star	Dark blue with a central red stripe and in addition two orange stripes.	Pacific
7 Italy Star	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in red at either edge and one in green at the centre, the two intervening stripes being in white.	
8 France and Germany Star	Five vertical stripes of equal width, one in blue at either edge and one in red at the centre, the two intervening stripes being in white.	Atlantic
9 Defence Medal	Flame coloured with green edges, upon each of which is a narrow black stripe.	Silver laurel leaves (King's Commendation for brave conduct. Civil)
10 War Medal 1939-45	A narrow central red stripe with a narrow white stripe on either side. A broad red stripe at either edge, and two intervening stripes in blue.	Oak leaf

Thanks to Pam George for this snippet about the film "1917":

How accurate is '1917'?

SIR – Dr Michael A Fopp (Letters, February 11) laments historical inaccuracies in Sam Mendes's film *1917*.

After watching it, I visited the Prince Consort's Library in Aldershot, which houses First World War maps. I found the trench map for April 6 1917: the British front line was at Croisilles, facing two German defences, one of which was the Hindenburg Line.

Fontaine (the village on fire in the film) was part of the German artillery line, where retreating Germans had spiked the guns, as depicted. The succession of whirlpools flowing towards Chérisy is probably the Sensée river, and the forming-up point of the 2nd Devons prior to their advance is on its right bank.

Apart from the lack of pickets, the only other inaccuracy is that the 2nd Devons on that fateful day in 1917 were actually 18 miles to the south in billets at Moislains. The battalion war diary records that the brigade commander inspected A Company and "expressed his entire satisfaction with the turn-out of the men".

But it was a cracking good film and a cracking good story, wasn't it?

John KC Maclean

Mapledurwell, Hampshire

This item from Jeremy Banning's twitter feed is too good not to share:

"Time for a THEN AND NOW: The funeral of Major R. Bell-Irving DSO MC, 16th Bn CEF. The IWM image (CO 3445) incorrectly has the location as Cagnicourt when it should be Eterpigny. It is possible to stand in exactly the same spot now overlooking Eterpigny British Cemetery"



Thanks to John Scott for this contribution:

The week following the September Meeting my Niece Wendy and her husband Keith took me over to the Western front. We were based at Varlet Farm in the Salient and Flanders was enduring a severe drought. The original farm was called Wallermolenhof and was surrounded on three sides by a moat all that remains are two large very deep pools that were now almost dry as Dirk had used the water for his crops. Wendy had Keith and I looking around a field that had been harvested for any artefacts but just walking around covered our trousers with a fine grey dust. As we drove along we could see crops dying in the fields.

On the excellent branch trips, and also on private trips, I have visited many C,W,G,C cemeteries and also a few French and German. I thought it was about time I visited a Belgian cemetery after all if it was not for the Belgian soldiers valiant defence, and delay of the Bosh, the result of the war might have been different. We went to the cemetery at Houthulst. This is very different to our cemeteries the graves are not in close ranks but are spread out in a six pointed star and the headstones are more ornate. It still has the same peaceful and tranquil feeling that ours have. We also visited Yorkshire Trench and I am sorry to report that it was falling apart. The concrete sand bags had started to fall into the base of the trench and at several places we had to step over them. Those that had not yet fallen had started to crack and if some thing has not been done it could end up dangerous to enter. I had foolishly thought that they had replaced the remains of the original sand bags but I was wrong and I could see that they had been placed inside the trench. The water in the dugout had dropped several feet and the wooden lining was drying out and starting to collapse.

We also visited Talbot House which has had a makeover since I was last there including a new electronic guide. The chapel in the roof is no longer used for services but recently a German couple received permission to be married there. The thought of a bride in her finery climbing up the top “ stairs “ makes the mind boggle and brings back thoughts of Benny Hill.

When on a private trip I always visit the Hohenzollern Redoubt where my Uncle Albert Constable died and then go to Dud corner Cemetery where he is remembered on the Loos memorial having no known grave. Whilst there Keith received details of where his relative was buried it was in Estairs Communal cemetery extension and so off we went. In that cemetery I noticed the grave of Sir John Gough MC KCB CMG, your relation Mary ? He was killed by a ricochet bullet when visiting his troops prior to returning to Blighty.



Unusually in the midst of the serried ranks of white headstones is a dark blue stone cross marking the last resting place of captain Oldfield. We visited many other places and Wendy and Keith, on their first trip to the Western Front, found it very interesting.

John & Mandy White take us down Memory Lane:

“All Our Yesterdays.

In September 2002, Mandy & were on the branch tour to Verdun. It was the first tour to be led by Geoff Longmore, & he arranged it in conjunction with Tony Noyes, an expert on Verdun. On the journey down to Verdun we stopped at the village of Vailly-sur-Aisne & visited the Vailly British Cemetery.

In an extract from Mandy’s diary, she says...

“On to Vailly Cemetery to the grave of a Tipton man. One of the group knew something of him & told us”



The eagle eyed amongst you will have spotted that this is none other than our parsimonious Treasurer Andy Johnson. He is seen here photographing the grave of George Skidmore who was killed in action on the 26th August 1914, possibly the first Tipton man to be killed in WW1.

*Further details of George Skidmore can be found on Andy's excellent Website...
<https://www.tiptonremembers.net/index.php/skidmore-george-edward>*

It is interesting to note that he has been banging on about Tipton men for almost 18 years!

John White”

So all our indiscretions on the Tour are noted down by Mandy, and may be used in evidence... you have been warned. Whatever happened to “What happens on Tour, stays on Tour”?

Dates for your Diary

- i. **Tuesday 28th April – “The Dutch Army in Wolverhampton in WW2” by Angus Dunphy.**
Venue: The Wolverhampton Society. Further details to follow; if you can't wait, nobble Quintin at one of our meetings and I'm sure he'll tell you.

ii. **Tuesday 25th August – “Forgotten Soldiers of the Midland Railway” by Quintin Watt.**
Venue: The Wolverhampton Society.

iii. **Tuesday 27th October – “James Whale – The Father of Frankenstein” by Craig Denston.**

Venue: The Wolverhampton Society

“Have you gone mad, Hale?” I hear you cry. *“Of what possible interest is this to us?”* Well, James Whale served with the 2nd/7th Worcesters as a subaltern (he would have known 2nd Lt Cyril Cook), and was captured during 3rd Ypres, spending several months in Holzminden PoW Camp where he discovered amateur dramatics. So there!

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

Future Newsletters:

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

Don't force me to write all this – your contributions gratefully received. Many thanks to those of you who have read this sentence and contributed to this newsletter: you know who you are, and your reward shall be in Heaven... March 2020 has hit a new high – thank you all!

John Hale
Branch Newsletter Editor