Frontline.

The newsletter of the MK WFA, September 2024.

Barry Kitchener's talk, 'The Forgotten Germans,' throws a spotlight on a little known and rarely mentioned aspect of the Great War. During the First World War the British government wanted to utilize the symbolic power that the Tower of London had become by executing eleven German spies convicted of espionage within the same walls that saw the deaths of prisoners such as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Thomas More, and Queen Anne Boleyn. Barry will reveal the fascinating story of the German spies executed in the Tower of London: who they were, their activities, their capture, their imprisonment, their execution, and the often-unexpected fallout Many of the spies became martyrs to the German cause and public relations disasters were all too common. A great story, thought-provoking, and not to be missed.

Seminar update October 19th 'A Great War Miscellany.'
Unfortunately, although we sent in an amended poster to 'The Bulletin', they, through some oversight, re- published the old one advertising talks by Peter Hart and Major Barrett, which is causing occasional problems and disappointments with people wishing to book. Hopefully you already know that the new speakers are Alan Wakefield with 'Twisting the Dragon's Tail -The Zeebrugge Raid.' about the famous 1918 naval raid to block the port, where 200 medals were won in a single hour; and Jerry Porter, with 'Good night darling – God bless you – Heaps of love, Mother', telling the story of a mother (the speaker's great grandmother) who lost a son, his and his brother's time in the trenches, her own experience of coming under enemy attack, and her visits to France in the early 1920s to visit her son's grave. An intensely personal account, it nevertheless gives universal insights into war, family, and loss. Added to this are four short talks by the Great War Society – early and late war German infantrymen, a British tommy and a tank crewman, plus militaria displays, a Vickers Machine gun, bookstall, excellent buffet, and a raffle.
Pass the word around, tickets on sale now, see poster inside for details. **Please order your tickets soon!**

Finally we wish our members who are going on the HGWS trip to Salonica in a few weeks' time an excellent trip.

September

Lance corporal John Boyd Macfarlan, A&S Highlanders, killed in action 19th September 1918. Stuart's great uncle.

John attested on December 10th, 1915, in the 5th Battalion Reserves, and joined the British Expeditionary Force on 22nd December 1917 with 12th Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. He served for seven months at home and was sent to Salonika as a Lance corporal. A little more than a year later he was killed on the Bulgarian front, on 19th September 1918, in the attacks on Pip Ridge and Grand-Couronne. His company was cut off from the rear, and he and two others went back to establish communications - all being killed. He is buried in Dorian Military Cemetery.

Private Everard Barker, Leicestershire Regiment, killed in action 25th Sept. 1916. Kevin's great cousin.
Joined the Leicestershire Regiment, 8th Battalion as a Private in 1915, service number 15140. Killed at the Somme on the 25th September 1916. He has no known grave and is listed on the Thiepval Monument.

Private Harry Hardy, Canadian Infantry, killed in action 11th Sept. 1916. George's great uncle.
Harry lied about his age to enlist in the 29th Bn Canadian Infantry (British Columbia Regiment) with the service no 431118. He was killed in action aged 22 and is buried in Courecelete British Cemetery. The inscription on his grave reads 'The strife is o'er, the battle won, he rests in peace with God.'

Mentioned in Despatches

Hi everyone, hope you all had a great Summer. No lecture to report on this time, as August is our summer break, but plenty has been going on in the last month, as you will see here and elsewhere in the newsletter. Many thanks to Gary and Eric for sending in reports on their adventures, and if anyone else has anything they would be willing to mention, please send them in. All very gratefully received!

Stow Maries Great War Living History Weekend (Gary Short)

The sun was shining as we headed off to our muster point at Stowe Maries Great War Aeordrome, where many a brave soldier had gone before us.

Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome, is the largest surviving Great War aerodrome in Europe! situated between Chelmsford and Maldon in the Essex countryside, the aerodrome has a unique and captivating history spanning over a century.

As the largest intact group of Royal Flying Corps (RFC) buildings from WWI, Stow Maries is a treasure trove of historical significance. Unlike other aerodromes, it was not adapted for further military use, preserving its original charm and character.

Opened in 1916, Stow Maries was home to B Flight of No 37(HD) Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. It played a pivotal role in the Air Defence of Great Britain during the first raids by Zeppelins and Gotha bombers. On 1 April 1918, it was at Stow Maries that No 37 Squadron transitioned from the Royal Flying Corps to the Royal Air Force. The aerodrome continued its crucial role until May 1919, after which it returned to its farming roots.

The Stowe Maries site had been taken over for the weekend by the 10th Battalion of The Essex Regiment, who were making themselves at home in their recently erected tents and camp. Between their duties and roll call they took time to talk and demonstrate their kit and activities to the public.

The The Essex regiment didn't need to look far to find their enemy setting up camp as the Germans were making themselves at home just across from the trenches that had been installed for the weekend.
Essex regiment didn't need to look far to find their enemy setting up camp as the Germans were making themselves at home just across from the trenches that had been installed for the weekend.

Stow Maries was designated a conservation area in 2009. By 2012, all 24 surviving buildings were listed as Grade II*, earning a spot on Historic England's 'At-Risk Register'. Later that year, thanks to a campaign led by Essex County Council and Maldon District Council, the site was acquired for the nation and is now managed by the Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome Ltd, a dedicated charity.

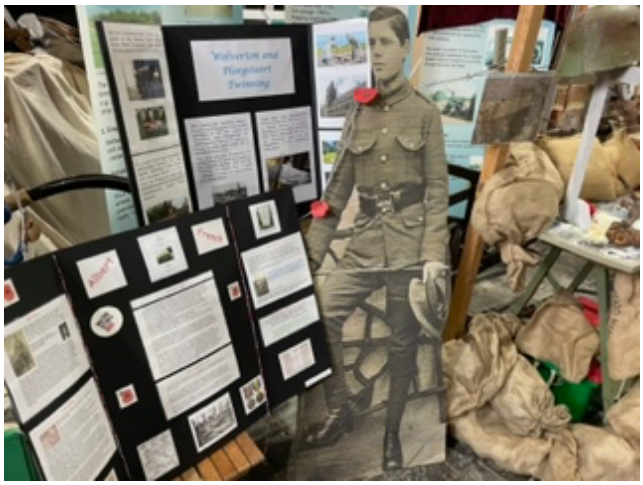
There is no doubt Stowe Maries is historically significant to the nation and the Great War as a whole. It is a site that needs to be preserved and continue in its program of renovation.
For those who haven't visited I would recommend a trip to Essex to see it for yourself, especially when they have a special event taking place.
Any support for the work this small charity undertakes would help in keeping it up and running for generations to come.

MK WFA at MK Museum Heritage event - September 14/15/16th

For Heritage week, as part of Milton Keynes Museum's open days, we set up our display in the great barn, nestling in between various farming implements, ploughs, and the occasional tractor. We were

not in our usual spot because the beer festival had migrated from its tent into the barn with us. (Not, as it turned out, a bad thing!). This caused Anne and I a bit of head scratching because we had to totally rethink our display layout, but things soon fell into place, and in the end it turned out to be a really good spot. Anne, as always, had prepared some excellent display boards on the Heritage Week theme of 'Communication' to add to her already impressive and interactive displays, and although some visitors passed right through with barely a glance at our display, (probably a downside of being next to the beer festival!) others lingered for ages reading the material, lifting the flaps on the 'How Much Do You Know about WW1?' display, and generally showing a lot of interest.

The museum staff had dragged out their trench recreation to add to our display, both the soldier dummy's feet had broken off, a somewhat gruesome sight for our younger visitors, but nothing a couple of strategically placed sandbags couldn't resolve! Also back from 'first aid' was our life-size photo cut out of Albert French, who had started to de-laminate after his soaking at the MK Rose celebration, and had undergone emergency surgery (card re-enforcing and copious injections of copydex.) Finally, I had added a new signboard, so all in all we were very pleased with the way it all



turned out. The sweet shop in the street to our left with its little paper bags of jelly babies and toffee bon bons, and the beer festival on our right with several, I have to say, very tasty ales, ensured that we were well supplied throughout the three days we were there.

This relic Lee Enfield 303 was a Somme find and caused quite a lot of interest. You can clearly make out the magazine, the trigger and bolt, but what really intrigued people was the upward curve of the barrel. If it was crushed by some heavy force surely the barrel would have snapped or have a crease where it folded? Unless it is a result of different metals used in the barrel and the rifling reacting with each other after 100yrs underground, or, more likely, a result of an exploding shell. Any ideas, anyone?

Perhaps the most interesting part of the event was the conversations held with the visitors. One lady showed us original photos of the Grand Fleet at Scarpa Flow, including the 'Repulse' on which her grandfather served. One visitor's grandfather won the DCM by taking out a German machine gun position, another drove lorries in the Crimea. Harry Townsend was in the OXs and Bucks and was at Ploegsteert. Before the war he might well have known Albert French as he was also employed at the Wolverton works. Harry was killed April 1916 and is buried at Hebaturne Military Cemetery.

Amazingly one visitor's **father** had fought in WW1, he was in the RFA on 18 pounders, and fathered his son at the age of 60! It wasn't all WW1 - one Norwegian visitor served in a frigate in his navy in the 1970s and took part in a recreation run that the Artic convoys took to Murmansk, smashing inches of ice off the deck superstructure. When discussing helmets, one ex-soldier, left 2008, was on rapier missiles with the Royal Artillery. He said the helmets they used were uncomfortable, and the rain ran off into their faces. They used a field dressing as extra padding and cut the tops off their boots to go round the rim of their helmets to keep the rain off. British soldiers – always resourceful!

An Air-Raid Remembered

Eric Webb

On 12th February 1916 and again on 4th May, Austrian seaplane bombers attacked Ravenna, 85 miles (140Km) southwards down the Italian coast from Venice. Ravenna was an ancient city, its history stretching back unbroken to the Classical Era. From around 20 BCE its large commercial port Classe (today entirely silted-up) became also the Roman Navy's chief naval base on the Adriatic. Come 402 CE as the Roman Empire in the West tottered under the impact of barbarian incursions Ravenna, more defensible than Rome, became its capital, the seat of the Caesars; until the very last of them Romulus Augustulus was deposed, in Ravenna, on 4th September 476 and the Empire ceased to be. During that period, and later, Emperors, Kings and Christian bishops built there a collection of grand basilicas, to the glory of God and their own, many of which survive to this day.

The earlier Austrian attack killed 15 people and damaged the civilian hospital, also the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo; erected by Theodoric the Great, King of the Ostrogoths, in the first quarter of the 6th century and with the greater part of its original décor still intact. Ravenna was a legitimate target: a significant logistics hub with a main-line railway station and still with a modest port on the Adriatic; both of which however remained untouched. It was less fortunate in WW2 when these and more besides were pulverised by no less than 52 Allied bombing raids; and Sant'Apollinare suffered further damage.

At the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, Italy was a longstanding member with Germany and Austro-Hungary of the Triple Alliance; formed in 1882: a pledge of mutual support in case of attack by France or Russia. In the event, the Italian government held aloof, on the good grounds that far from being attacked, her co-signatories had themselves been the aggressors.

Far-sighted wisdom might have counselled continued neutrality but that was not to be. After a few anxious months, on 23rd May 1915, in hopes of territorial gains from Austria in the Trentino and eastwards and under popular pressure, Italy declared war on Austro-Hungary; thus joining the conflict alongside the Entente powers: Great Britain, France and Russia. Of the other nations involved on the Entente side, Belgium had of course been very largely occupied and crushed in 1914; and after earlier

repelling an attempted Austro-Hungarian invasion in July-August 1914 Serbia was soon to suffer a similar fate in November 1915. Meanwhile the Ottoman Empire had joined in on the side of the Central Powers on 29th October 1914.

Before long some 420,000 Italian troops, including reserves, and approaching 138,000 Austrians were deployed along a 370 mile (600 km) front from the Stelvio Pass at the border between Italy, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland to the Isonzo. Three-quarters of that total length ran through mountainous terrain, where the so-called White War ran its course at dizzying altitude amidst ice and snow; while the greater and eventually decisive battles were largely fought in the lowlands to the east. Initially the Austrians were largely content to bide their time, establishing a strong defensive line whilst awaiting further reinforcements; the Italians meanwhile, hampered by shortage of materiel of every kind and by deficient logistics, failed to exploit their early numerical advantage.

By July 1916 Austrian strength had risen to 300,000. Heavy fighting commenced on 23rd June with a two-week Italian offensive, the First Battle of the Isonzo; largely unsuccessful in the event. They gained ground in a Second Battle commencing on 18th July but after a further fortnight this ended in stalemate when both sides ran out of ammunition. There followed lengthy periods of attritional trench warfare interspersed by further major battles all along the front until the War's end. In total, 531,000 Italians died; the Austrians had 155,000 killed in action with an unknown further number, but certainly in the tens of thousands, died of wounds.

Alongside the ground fighting there developed a significant air war, not only above the battlefields as on the Western Front but involving also extensive strategic bombing of towns and cities on either side. Often this seems only nominally, if at all, to have been directed at recognisable military or logistic targets; terror bombing of civilians did not commence with the London Blitz, nor yet at Guernica.

At the outset in 1915, neither side possessed a large or well-equipped air force. The Austrians, already with close-on a year's experience of warfare, an active if limited aircraft industry of their own and access to German machines, held the upper hand, but only by a narrow margin. At the end of 1914, they

had just 147 operational aircraft deployed in 14 units, across all theatres. After Italy entered the War Germany somewhat reluctantly sent them a small consignment of Fokker E.IIIs but these were already nearing obsolescence.

Nonetheless the Austrian *K.u.K. Luftfahrtruppen* (Imperial and Royal Aviation Troops) had joint airfields / seaplane bases on the Adriatic from which Lohner seaplane bombers were soon making repeated raids, at first facing little opposition. Venice was a prime target and remained so almost until the War's end; so much so that by September 1915 the Venetians had instituted a nightly blackout. Besides Ravenna many other towns and cities were raided too, across the north-eastern Veneto and Emilia-Romagna regions of Italy and as far afield as Milan and Florence. That Rome was spared may have been a matter of range but perhaps more of politics; it would not do accidentally to bomb the Vatican.

The Italians quickly hit back; by their own account taking care to select specific military or strategic targets whilst the Austrians bombed indiscriminately. Whether or not that was so, and whether it will have made the slightest difference is moot; given the notorious inaccuracy of aerial bombardment even a generation later 1939-45. Certainly though, bomb maps of Venice show no obvious pattern; nor is it easy to imagine any practical purpose in the destruction.

In Italy the *Corpo Aeronautico Militare* (Military Aviation Corps) formed only in January 1915 entered the war with just 86 aircraft and 70 pilots organized into 14 squadrons. It had no single-seat scouts with a forward-firing gun. Such was the deficiency that in August 1915 France posted a squadron of six Spads at Mestre to defend Venice; later re-equipped with Nieuports in increased numbers and relocated to the Lido where it remained until the War's end. The aircraft industry had under development a heavy 3-engined bomber, named the Caproni for its designer, which achieved its first operational sortie on 20th August that year and went on to prove outstandingly successful. Matching the Austrian Lohner it had a bomb load of 200Kg, usually comprising 4 x 50Kg bombs, sometimes clusters of incendiaries; with modest adaptations it could later carry a single British 500lb bomb.

The Italians had also a number of semi-rigid airships; at least two of which subsequently fell victim to Austrian fighter aircraft. The survivors continued in use until the War's end; flying 52 missions in 1917 and 114 in 1918. But there were no home-produced fighter aeroplanes whatsoever, beyond the drawing-board, so that Italy relied throughout on French aircraft: Nieuports, supplied direct or built under licence, and Spads.

Consequently it was April-May 1916 before the *Corpo Aeronautico* had built up a body of trained pilots and established squadrons equipped with Nieuport 11s, so that it could now begin effectively to hit back at the bombers and to provide close aerial support on the battlefield. From August 1916 escort fighters began also to accompany Italian bombers, to ward off Austrian interceptors. Come September 1916 it comprised 42 squadrons crewed by 369 pilots 162 observers, and 123 air-gunners. By the year's end these could claim 56 enemy aircraft shot down to date. Fleets of Caproni bombers, sometime 20-strong, regularly hit Trieste (then in Austria) and many other key targets, although Vienna was spared, save for a leaflet drop in 1918.

As shortages of coal and other supplies increasingly impacted Austrian industrial output, the Italians drew steadily ahead. Production figures tell the story: wartime aircraft production in Austro-Hungary totalled 5,180 over four years, including 100 or more Lohner seaplanes; in Italy, 18,000 over three years, including 250 - 300 Caproni bombers. Bombs dropped by Italian aircraft, including airships, in 1917 totalled 254 tons on 1,298 missions; in 1918, 491 tons on 2,730 missions. (By comparison, on the night of 14th November 1940 the Luftwaffe dropped an estimated 500 tons of bombs on Coventry.) No comparable figures are to be found for Austrian bombing but their response certainly grew ever weaker as the War progressed, with aircraft numbers a crucial factor.

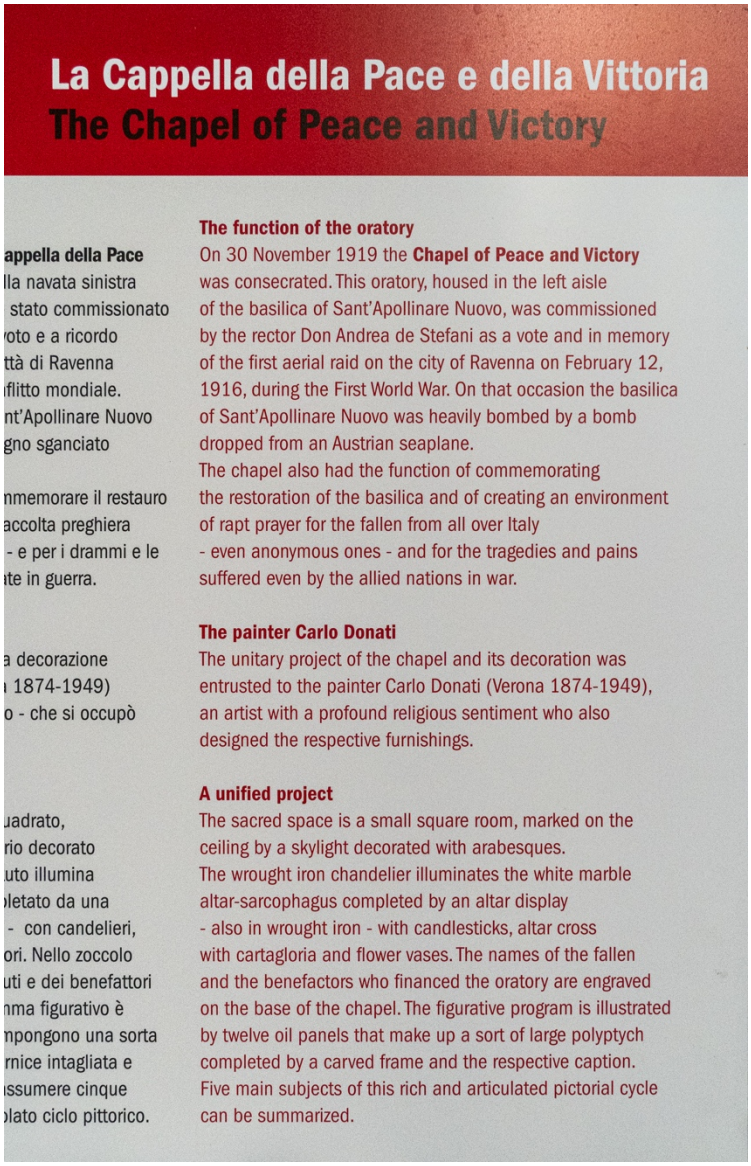
Post-war, the 1916 damage to Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, at the western end of the Basilica's north aisle, was repaired and a Chapel of Peace and Victory established there; dedicated on 30th November 1919.

Designed by the modernist painter Carlo Donati (1874 - 1949) this includes memorial panels bearing the names of Ravenna's fallen and mural paintings reflecting aspects of the War by Donati himself. Any close connecting thread between the images is open to speculation: perhaps War Sanctified through Sacrifice. A selection of Italy's war leaders and fallen heroes are depicted. Two honour her allies: France and Great Britain. Curiously, a signal British achievement, in the artist's eyes, has been the capture of Jerusalem: Tommy proudly offers forth a model of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: for believers, the holiest site in all Christendom.

WW2 bombing badly damaged the apse behind the high altar which had to be rebuilt. Fortunately, and unlike some of Ravenna's other ancient Basilicas, Sant'Apollinare otherwise survived largely intact.

My own photos reproduced here scarcely do the Chapel justice. Those who are interested will find more pictures at:

https://www.ravennamosaici.it/en/the-chapel-of-peace-and-victory/ *24th August 2024*



La Cappella della Pace e della Vittoria
The Chapel of Peace and Victory

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ttà di Ravenna
flitto mondiale.
nt'Apollinare Nuovo
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1874-1949)
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The function of the oratory
On 30 November 1919 the **Chapel of Peace and Victory** was consecrated. This oratory, housed in the left aisle of the basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, was commissioned by the rector Don Andrea de Stefani as a vote and in memory of the first aerial raid on the city of Ravenna on February 12, 1916, during the First World War. On that occasion the basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo was heavily bombed by a bomb dropped from an Austrian seaplane.
The chapel also had the function of commemorating the restoration of the basilica and of creating an environment of rapt prayer for the fallen from all over Italy - even anonymous ones - and for the tragedies and pains suffered even by the allied nations in war.

The painter Carlo Donati
The unitary project of the chapel and its decoration was entrusted to the painter Carlo Donati (Verona 1874-1949), an artist with a profound religious sentiment who also designed the respective furnishings.

A unified project
The sacred space is a small square room, marked on the ceiling by a skylight decorated with arabesques. The wrought iron chandelier illuminates the white marble altar-sarcophagus completed by an altar display - also in wrought iron - with candlesticks, altar cross with cartagloria and flower vases. The names of the fallen and the benefactors who financed the oratory are engraved on the base of the chapel. The figurative program is illustrated by twelve oil panels that make up a sort of large polyptych completed by a carved frame and the respective caption. Five main subjects of this rich and articulated pictorial cycle can be summarized.

(Here is Eric's introduction to his article.)
Herewith a contribution – if suitable. My discovery on holiday earlier this year of a WW1 memorial chapel in an Italian basilica prompted many questions. Civilian bombing? Seaplanes? This was unfamiliar territory. I have eventually spent a couple of days researching some highways and byways of the air war between Italy and Austro-Hungary 1915-1918, with the end result that sandwiched together here are two rather different themes. You must tell me if you think the approach 'works'. (Or not!)
(Definitely does Eric! Cheers.)
No captions. The fist bomber aircraft is a Caproni (Italian), the second - Lohner (Austrian) These are originals restored – photos from Wikipedia. The others are 'all my own work'. The mosaic shows the 'three wise men' – just in case you wanted anything to indicate the splendours of Sant'Apollinare. Those of the Chapel itself I largely cannot caption as the Italian description - translated into rather broken English - on the web simply doesn't match the pictures; several seem to be missed-out altogether. 'Tommy' at least is obvious – and the Italian take on a Scotsman's kilt raises a smile.

Trench Art Shellcases.

Pictured above is part of Kevin's collection of trench art that has been featured in various 'Frontlines' recently. Trench Art is a term to describe art and decorative objects made by soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians, often using materials such as spent shells, shrapnel, and other items that were readily available during times of conflict, although very little trench art would have originated in the actual frontline trenches themselves. This type of art originated during World War I, when soldiers behind the front lines found themselves with a lot of time on their hands and needed relief from the boredom and stress of war. Trench art is notable for its ability to turn the remnants of war into something beautiful and enduring. Today, trench art remains an interesting and significant aspect of military history, providing a unique glimpse into the lives of those who lived and fought during some of the most tumultuous times in human history.

Decorated shell cases are perhaps the most common type of trench art. In the photo above you can see a couple of French soldiers transforming some of the millions of discarded shell cases that littered the landscape, so many they vastly overwhelmed efforts to recycle them. The soldier at the back seems to be working on something quite ornate but difficult to identify, the soldier in the foreground has probably taken a design from a stencil, painted the design onto the case with iodine, and is busy engraving the design into the metal with a kind of bradawl, although a bent nail was often used.
Hundreds of millions of shells of all sizes were produced during the Great War—between April 1, 1917, and Armistice on November 11, 1918, France alone manufactured almost 150-million rounds of artillery ammunition. Of that output, 75mm artillery shells (the dimension refers to the width of the base, or about 3 inches) were especially common, so much so that soldiers referred to them as "75s".

The reason for their ubiquity was the *Canon de 75 modèle 1897*, a 19th-century French-designed field gun that could fire as many as 30 shells a minute and was relatively manoeuvrable compared to German guns of a similar (77mm) size. By war's end, 12,000 of these French guns were in the field, which stoked the demand for 75mm ammunition. While the spent brass shells were intended to be melted down and made into new live ones—salvage crews were a key part of military support forces—there were plenty of uncollected shell cases to go around.

The transformation of artillery shells from war debris to something to put on the mantel and fill with flowers was not that easy. The shells were made of brass, an hard alloy of copper and zinc that would have been difficult to work on, especially in the confines of a trench, which is why most examples of objects that were actually created in trenches were not trench art as previously defined but souvenirs made of wood or bone, either of which could be carved with a common pocket knife. Therefore, most trench art shells were created behind the lines, often in the many and varied workshops that tended the needs of the modern army, with its increasing use of vehicles and technology. Here would be found forges, as the shells had to be heated to make them malleable. Though brass is typically brought to a temperature of around 1,500 °F for forging, a good wood fire

will hit 1,100 °F or more, which is hot enough to soften or anneal the material, making it easier to work while simultaneously protecting it from stress cracks caused by constant hammering.

Mix of raised and punched engraving.

Because shell casings were often intended to be flower vases, it shouldn't be a surprise that so many of these relics feature floral motifs. American soldiers in the Signal Corps were known for adding birds, while soldiers in aviation and observation balloons represented their service with aircraft designs. Many flowered shell cases were created by French and Belgian civilians for sale as flower vases to battlefield tourists. Printed templates with outlines of shields, flowers and leaves became available later in the war from commercial publishers, including ready-made patterns that could be wrapped around a shell and tied with string. Details and background stippling could be added afterward. Reusable zinc templates were used to create pairs of decorated vases.

In the trenches, the tools required to etch, engrave, emboss, flute, and flare an artillery shell were primitive. Although ball peen and other types of hammers were readily available, the fine tools on the receiving end of each hammer blow were not. Accordingly, infantrymen regularly resorted to nails, straightened bedsprings, and screwdrivers to produce their designs. Eventually, as trench art took off, Allied soldiers purchased fancy embossing punches in Paris to achieve the designs specified on some of the trench art patterns that were also available for sale.

Embossing was so hard on the artillery shells that in addition to repeated annealing, the shells had to be filled with sand, or even lead, to keep them from cracking or deforming while being worked. Artists looked for shell casings free of cracks and other damage, often tapping them with a metal object and listening for a singing resonance passing through the cases' walls. Cases were then annealed to soften the brass, which made them easier to engrave, hammer or emboss. The cases were usually annealed several times during the process by placing them on a log fire until they glowed. Engraving, embossing, hammering, Repousse, acid etching, lathe turning and soldered appliques were the most common methods to decorate shell casings. An artillery gunner could anneal a shell casing and press it into the gears used to raise or lower the barrel of his gun, and a soldier with access to machine shops could create indented flutes using a similar technique on a metal press. Often, a wooden dowel was inserted into the interior of the shell to prevent the fluting from distorting the opposite side and help evenly space the flutes. The case was then placed on a sandbag, and a hardwood paddle was pounded on each line in sequence to achieve the desired depth.

Regardless, if a shell was to feature fluting, that work was completed before the trench artist decorated the rest of the piece via engraving or embossing. In the wake of hostilities, soldiers cleaning up after the war effort were able to purchase professional engraving tools, including fancy punches that made crosses, stars and pyramids

In a class by themselves are the tops or openings of the shells, which were scalloped, rolled, pinched like pie crusts, flared, or cut into shapes like thistles, oak leaves, and French *fleur-de-lis*. In some cases, the tops of trench art vases were rolled, flared, and then woven with wire, giving these pieces a basket-like appearance.

The soldiers viewed trench art as mementoes of service, and brought many pieces back after the war, where they remained in family homes for decades. In the years following the war, bereaved parents, widows, and fatherless children visited the old battlefields and often returned home with trench-art souvenirs to place on the mantelpiece or in the hallway. They became raw emotional substitutes for husbands and fathers who never returned, but whose memory was only ever a glance away. For many war widows, who had patriotically made artillery shells in munitions factories during the war, it could be painfully ironic, because they often bought similar but now empty shell-cases decorated as trench-art souvenirs and carried them home. And, to help with their grief, many cleaned and polished metal trench-art obsessively, translating household chores into sacred acts of remembrance.

World War I shell cases were often decorated with flutes near the base. The four cases at front were fluted by using gears of an artillery field gun or in a machine shop. The flared tops were usually created by pounding a wooden wedge or a modified paddle.

Shells were decorated to commemorate the end of a battle campaign, the end of a war or service with a particular unit. Shells marked "1919" were made by or for soldiers waiting to go home. To occupy the time of soldiers and keep them out of trouble, American officers arranged for lathes and tools in the Army's machine assembly lines to be used in creating fluted shell vases, with soldiers having artistic abilities decorating on a production-line system. The artists kept some for themselves, but most were sold to other soldiers as war souvenirs. Many of these wore blank shields incorporated into the designs so the buyer could have his name, unit or location of service engraved later.

This engraved shell case of Kevin's was hard to photograph but shows a solder holding a girl. Their features look oriental, so we think this was produced by a member of the Chinese Labour Corps, recruited by the British and French for labouring duties along the Western Front from 1917 to 1921. They soon began making their own highly distinctive trench art – 'flower vases' made from artillery shell-cases, stunningly decorated with dragons and birds singing in blossom trees and occasionally Chinese calligraphy as well. Not for the CLC the usual European-style Art Nouveau flowers, buildings, and war scenes, but rather romanticised evocations of traditional Chinese culture, revealing how they made trench art affirming their own, not European identity, even if most examples were made for sale to battlefield visitors and those involved with the post-war clearance of the battlefields, (which many CLC men also were.)

Finally, a wonderfully crafted and decorated box made from a shell case.

Two London War Memorials

Eric Webb

In the Royal Parks and other green spaces of London stand many memorials commemorating the war service of particular military units; *ie.* rather than name individual servicemen and women. Most of these have to do with the Great War, although one exception comes readily to mind: the Bomber Command Memorial in Hyde Park, unveiled as recently as 2012. Some are familiar to those of us who take an interest in such things: as example the Royal Artillery Memorial, also in Hyde Park, designed by Charles Sargeant Jagger and unveiled in 1925; the Machine Gun Corps Memorial at Hyde Park Corner by Francis Derwent Wood with its controversial quotation from 1 Samuel 18:7, also unveiled in 1925; the Guards Memorial opposite Horse Guards, designed by H. Chalton Bradshaw with its bronze sculptures by Gilbert Ledward, unveiled in 1926 and bearing honourable scars from WW2. Others less familiar are discoverable on-line, or on the ground.

Beyond these well-known examples, I have my own favourites: two in particular:

The Imperial Camel Corps Memorial stands in Victoria Embankment Gardens, no more than 200 yards from Embankment Underground Station. The Corps was a camel-mounted unit, originally raised in December 1916 from troops that had served at Gallipoli. It eventually grew to a brigade of four battalions, one each from Great Britain and New Zealand and two from Australia. Support troops included a mountain artillery battery, a machine gun squadron, Royal Engineers, a field ambulance, dental and veterinary units. At its largest it comprised 4,150 men and 4,800 camels. It became part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force; fighting in the Senussi Campaign, the Sinai and Palestine Campaign and the Arab Revolt; with a total of 346 men killed throughout. It was disbanded in May 1919. Statistics of men wounded and missing are not to be found.

The Memorial, unveiled in 1921, was sculpted by Major Cecil Brown (1868 – 1926) a Scottish painter, sculptor and medal maker, who had served in the Corps. It comprises, atop a Portland stone pedestal, a small bronze statue of a trooper riding a camel; on the pedestal's sides are four bronze panels: two listing the names of the fallen and a pair of bas-reliefs: one of two soldiers running, the other of two

officers with a camel; below, incised on the pedestal itself, are a dedication and a list of the Corps' engagements.

The Memorial is Grade II listed by Historic England: no. 1238057.

I go back a long way with this memorial, to age 10 - 11 when an intrepid schoolmaster used to take groups of us up from Surrey on Saturday mornings, by train, to the Robert Meyer Children's Concerts at the Royal Festival Hall. Afterwards we would walk across the Hungerford Footbridge to buy lunch at a café in Victoria Embankment Gardens, beans on toast for 6d as I recall, before visiting some or other London attraction in the afternoon. The café stood, still does, just by the Camel Corps Memorial. At the time I had no idea what it was all about but this statue, of a camel of all things, lodged in my childhood memory.

The 24th Division War Memorial stands in Battersea Park not far from the Millenium Arena, a short walk + bus ride across Chelsea Bridge + walk again from the National Army Museum. It commemorates the War service of 24th Division, a New Army division raised in September 1914, which went on active service to the Western Front in August-September 1915 and received its baptism of fire as part of the General Reserve at the Battle of Loos (25th September - 8th October 1915). It was the chaotic mishandling of that Reserve, most particularly of 21st and 24th divisions, which led to Sir John French's

dismissal as C.in C. of the British Expeditionary Force in December 1915 and his replacement by Douglas Haig. 24th Division went on to see action at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917 and the Final Advance in 1918. It was disbanded in March 1919. Over the course of the War it lost 4,865 men from all ranks killed, 24,000 wounded and 6,000 missing.

The Memorial was sculpted in 1924 by Eric Kennington (1888 – 1960) until then better known as a painter; this was his first substantial sculpture, but by no means his last. On 6th August 1914 Kennington had enlisted with 13th (Kensington) Bn. London Regiment. He went on to serve on the Western Front but was wounded in January 1915, evacuated back to England and eventually discharged unfit that June. In December 1916 he visited the Somme as a semi-official war artist, the following May he was granted official status; he went on to make further lengthy visits to France. In November 1918 he was commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Scheme to depict Canadian troops in Europe and returned again to France for 8 months as a temporary first lieutenant in the Canadian army.

Kennington had his commission for the 24th Division Memorial from Lt.Col Murray .V.B. Hill DSO MC (1887-1986) with whom he had stayed as an official war artist. Hill, a connoisseur of the arts, was then CO of 9th Bn. Royal Sussex Regiment, formerly an officer in 1st Bn. Royal Fusiliers: both of these, as component units of 17th Brigade, components also of 24th Division from October 1915. As an expression of gratitude, perhaps too because he was not entirely confident whether his skills were yet equal to such a large work, he undertook the commission free of charge, buying the block of Portland stone himself at a cost of £300: £21,000 at today's values using the RPI as comparator.

The finished memorial depicts three soldiers at life size, marching close together in full kit and treading down the serpent of war. The figures are modelled on veterans of the War, friends of Kennington: centrally stands Sergeant J. Woods, of 9th Bn. Royal Sussex Regiment who had been Kennington's batman during his time as an official war artist; to the viewer's right, Trooper Morris Clifford Thomas of the Machine Gun Corps who had transferred to 24th Division's machine gun battalion in 1916; to the left Captain Robert Graves, of 3rd Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers (portrayed as a sergeant) who requires no introduction.

At the close of *Goodbye to All That* (1929) Graves writes: 'At the age of thirty-four many things still remain undone.' There follows a long list. 'On the other hand . . .' There follows a list of achievements, concluding:' . . . had a statue of myself erected in my lifetime in a London park, and learned to tell the truth – nearly'. This is that statue. It is mounted on a columnar base encircled by representations of the twenty badges of the Division's constituent units carved by Lucy Sampson; and bearing the inscription XXIV DIVISION FRANCE 1914–1918.

The memorial's location in Battersea Park was selected by ballot amongst troops who had served in 24th Division. It was completed in August 1924 and unveiled on 4th October that year by Field Marshall Sir Herbert Plumer and the Bishop of Southwark.

Since 2005 the memorial has been Grade II* listed (no. 1391503) by Historic England; so that it cannot be refurbished, modified moved or otherwise interfered with without consent. Its importance is summarised: 'The 24th Division war memorial in Battersea Park is not only of historic interest due to its link with world events, but it is also of visual interest, due to the elegant sculptural quality of the depiction of ordinary infantry men by the highly regarded war artist Eric Kennington. This is an unusually avant-garde war memorial with a very interesting depiction of Robert Graves, author of the outstanding war memoir 'Goodbye to All That'.

However Listing does not compel maintenance or repair and on my own recent observation in August 2024 the statue's condition is certainly deteriorating, as compared with 10 years ago when I last visited. There is substantial staining and appreciable erosion; the brims of the figures' Brodie helmets in particular are looking decidedly moth-eaten.

I am taking such steps as I can to wake-up relevant authorities to their obligations! Thus far, alas, with a total lack of response.

2nd September 2024

Good to know Eric wasn't alone on his trip. Cheers Don!

Did YOU go to the MK WFA Conference Daddy?

THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

Following on from the success of last year's seminar, Milton Keynes Branch is hosting a 2024 event

"A Great War Miscellany"

on 19th October 9.30am – 4.30pm

There is an excellent line up of professional speakers on a wide variety of topics :

Nigel Crompton – *'Women's Police Service in the Great War'*
Helen Frost – *'When the Land Ships came to Town'*
Jerry Porter - *'Good night darling – God bless you – Heaps of love, Mother'*
Alan Wakefield - *'Twisting the Dragon's Tail - The Zeebrugge Raid.'*

Ticket includes an excellent buffet lunch, and free tea & coffee will be available throughout the day.

Static displays and second-hand book stall (cash please).

Venue: The Old Bath House, Wolverton.
205 Stratford Rd, MK12 5RL (Free car park, 4 minute walk from Wolverton station, buses from CMK.)

Book early to avoid disappointment. Tickets available priced £30 each by emailing wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com

Additionally, there will be short talks and demonstrations by

The Great War Society

September 20th 'The Forgotten Germans'- Barry Kitchener
October 19th SEMINAR 'A Great War Miscellany' at the Old Bathhouse, Wolverton
November 4th John Nichols at the Royal and Derngate, Northampton,
November 15th 'The Lost Battalion' – Jim Nicolson (with fish and chip supper!)
December 20th Christmas review, slide show and quiz, plus festive fare.

Meetings are 7.30 – 9.30.at Wolverton Working Men's Social Club, 49 - 50, Stratford Road MK12 5LS

Committee members are...
Stuart Macfarlan – Chairman (macfarlan87@gmail.com)
Anne McIntyre – Secretary/historical events co-ordinator (annefmmcintyre@gmail.com)
Ian Wright - Talks organiser
Caroline Wright - Treasurer
Jim Barrett - Seminar and visits co-ordinator
George Maby - Wolverton Town Council liaison (Twinning and Albert French commemoration)
Gary Short – Social Media co-ordinator.