



frontline.

The newsletter of the MK WFA, February 2024.



Our next talk on February 16th is 'The Doughboys 1917-18' presented by Mike Sheil. When the United States entered the cataclysm of the great War the global conflict had already lasted three long years. This talk describes what the American forces saw when they arrived at the Western Front, and their feelings and actions as they encountered bitter fighting, obliterated villages, vast cemeteries, and massive destruction. In 2016 Michael was commissioned by the US National WW1 Museum and Memorial and the US State Department to create a special outdoor exhibition of the American battlefields. This exhibition was viewed by over 6 million people in the UK and US. Mike's fascinating talk is illustrated with some of the thousands of amazing photographs he has taken since 2005, showing the battlefields as they are today.

Hold The Front Page! Dates for your Diary.

Great news, after the success of last year's seminar we are holding another this year. The venue, Bletchley Masonic Hall, and nearly all the speakers are booked, so please put **19th October** in your diary, we don't want anyone to miss this one!

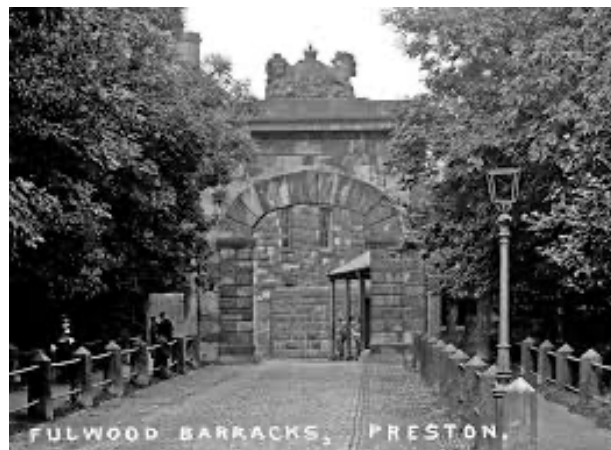
Also, after our successful group trip to the Soldier's of Oxfordshire Museum, we (mainly Gary) are arranging another outing, nearly back to the August idea (better weather and no talk in August), but not quite. We were keen to visit Stow Maries (see previous 'Frontlines') but discovered they are holding a special World War One day on the **27th July**, so that really is the day to visit. We are also intending to book a coach, so again, please reserve the date so we can arrange a good turnout. More details to follow.



February

Gunner John Sharples, died on active service 21st February 1917. Anne's grandad's 4th cousin.

John Sharples was born in Brindle on 30th March 1885, the second son of David and Eliza (née Entwistle). David was a farmer, later running a grocery shop before returning to farming. At 14, John was a cotton weaver. John's mother died when John was 22, so never saw him married to local girl, Alice Parker on 1st January 1913. John was by now a cowman for a local brewer and living at Thorp Green, Brindle. John and Alice had two daughters, Hilda, born 1915 and Phyllis born 1916. John was working as a farmer with his father at Little Holt Farm until he enlisted on the 27th March 1915 and was posted to the 8th Reserve Battery of the Royal Field Artillery.



This was a training/administrative unit based at No 2 Depot in Preston at Fulwood Barracks. Their role during the war was to train and equip the thousands of Lancashire recruits. The unit at No 2 Depot seemed to be comprised particularly of older men in their 30s - probably not in peak fitness for front line service while having more authority to teach than younger comrades.

The RFA was responsible for the medium calibre guns and howitzers deployed close to the front line.



There is no medal record for John which suggests he spent his entire period of service on home territory as medals were only awarded to those men who saw active service abroad.



John Sharples died on 21st February 1917 at home of 'acute tuberculosis aggravated by active service'. Records show there were a number of deaths from TB in No 2 Depot in February 1917 - soldiers in cramped poorly ventilated quarters would be susceptible to any outbreak.

John Sharples is buried in the family grave in Brindle St. James' Church graveyard.

John and Alice's eldest daughter Hilda died age 12 in 1927. Alice lived till her death with her younger daughter Phyllis who worked as a typist, never married, and died in 2001 near Kendal aged 85.

There are no living direct descendants of John Sharples.



Mentioned in Despatches



MK WFA's AGM, 2024.

Welcome.

Apologies for absence. (George Mabey)

Minutes of previous AGM. Read through and verified.

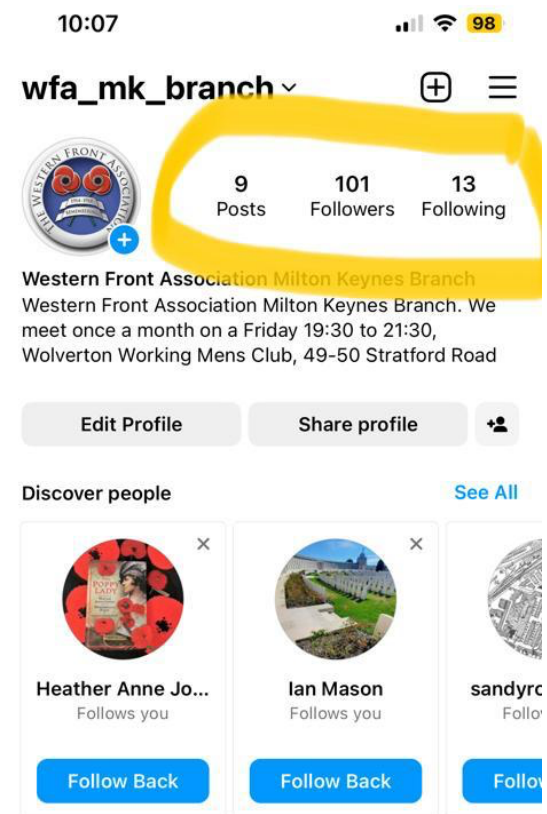
Matters arising from the minutes. None.

Chairman's report. Powerpoint presentation documenting the events of the previous year (Outlined in the January 'Frontline') and including the secretary's and social media coordinators reports. Anne provided accounts of the attendance in 2023 compared to the year before, see below, as well as a report about our membership of MKHA. Gary has also been busy, ensuring that our page on the WFA website is up to date, posting forthcoming talks, editions of 'Frontline', and a record of past talks, and also ensuring our presence on Twitter and other social media sites.



Western Front Association @TheWFA · 9h ...

Tickets here for the Milton Keynes WFA Conference 14th October. Speakers: Alexandra Churchill: Peter Hart; Gary Beale; Michael O' Brien and Helen Frost. Details here: bit.ly/48N6SbR



2023

January	WW2 VC	22
February	AGM & Quiz	18
March	Russian Front	19
April	Jig-a-Jig Tommie	16
May	Film Night	14
June	DORA	15
July	Americans	18 (1 came with speaker)
September	E African logistics	8
November	Veterans	19

2022

Feb	AGM	Anne not there so no record
March	Aleppo	18
April	Cost of War	21 (3 were speaker's friends)
May	Albert French	28 (4 were speaker's friends)
June	Italy	12
July	von Trapp	17
September	Coltman	15
Oct	Bedford Scots	15
Nov	Welsh Walter Mitty	17
Dec	Christmas variety performance	16

Branch Accounts. Balance brought forward from last year - £-1864.94.

Seminar

			2023-24
		BRANCH ACTIVITIES	
Income		Income	
		Monthly income (net)	-369.46
Ticket sales	-995	Grant	-50
Raffle	-94		(419.46)
	<u>-1089</u>		
		Expenditure	
		Speakers	76.59
		Expenses	42.4
		Equipment	100
		Seminar	
Costs		Raffle	
Eventbrite	61.05	Refreshments and wreaths	
Food	280.09	MK Heritage	10
Misc	14.86		
Raffle	29.31		-
Speakers	467.5		<u>228.99</u>
hall hire	100	Net from normal activities	<u><u>228.99</u></u>
	<u>952.81</u>		
		Seminar	(136.19)
			<u><u>(326.66)</u></u>
	<u>-136.19</u>		

Calendar of events for 2024. (See 'Frontline' back pages for details.)

Also coming up -

Albert French Commemoration (15th June) Clash with Twinning so probably no MK WFA involvement.

Twining trip to Belgium (14th-16th June)

August branch trip (tba)

MK Museum Heritage event (13th-15th September)

Possible cemetery tour (tba)

2024 Seminar (19th October)

Election of Committee 2024. All the committee were willing to stand for another year and were re-elected. Stuart outlined all their input and thanked them all for their hard work and commitment, also Rhian for her work with the monthly raffles.

Committee members are...

Stuart Macfarlan - Chairman

Anne McIntyre - Secretary/historical events co-ordinator

Ian Wright - Talks organiser

Caroline Wright - Treasurer

Jim Barrett - Seminar and visits co-ordinator

George Maby - Wolverton Town Council liaison (Twining and Albert French commemoration)

Gary Short - Social Media co-ordinator.

Any other business. (None)

The AGM was followed by a short quiz, refreshments, and a slide show by Jim about his visits to the Gallipoli battlefields.



That's all, folks

Many thanks to MK WFA

For all your support



Last year and this.

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Finally, many thanks to long-standing member Bill Duperouzel (author of the excellent 'Somewhere in France' and several other books since). I met up with Bill and he has donated some of his WW1 books to our library and raffle. Bill sends his best wishes to our members. It was good to meet up with him again.

Visit to the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum.



In December, a group of us from MK WFA visited the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum, following it up with a meal at a local pub. SOFO is Oxfordshire's only dedicated military history museum, telling stories of local people involved in conflicts throughout history. It is the home of the collections and archives for two county regiments, The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars.

The museum, attached to the Oxfordshire Museum (free entry and also well worth a visit, but we had a pub waiting for us, so perhaps another time), presents visitors with engaging and immersive experiences through temporary exhibitions and permanent galleries. We were especially interested in the First World War content, which includes a recreated Great War trench, but there are also fascinating references to other conflicts the regiments were involved in, especially a mock-up section of a Horsa Glider from D Day, the life of a '21st Century Soldier', Winston Churchill and his time in the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, and the sobering and appalling 'Liberation of Bergen-Belsen' by the Oxfordshire Yeomanry.



Section of WW1 trench reconstruction

The 2nd Battalion of the Ox and Bucks was in Britain on the outbreak of the First World War (1914-18). They were deployed straight to France and the Western Front, where they remained for the duration of the conflict. The battalion took part in the first British battle of the war, at Mons, where the British defeated the German forces that they had encountered on 23 August. The battalion subsequently took part in the 220-mile retreat in exceptionally hot weather, that began the following day, not stopping until just on the outskirts of Paris, then halting the German advance at the First Battle of the Marne (5-9 September). The 2nd Ox and Bucks later took part in all the subsidiary battles of the First Battle of Ypres (19 October - 22 November) that saw the heart ripped out of the old regular army, with 54,000 casualties being sustained. In the First Battle of Ypres the 2nd Ox and Bucks first engagement with the enemy was on 20 October, in an attack on the Passchendaele Ridge. The battalion had heavy casualties: four officers killed and five wounded and 143 other ranks killed or wounded. On 31 October the Germans launched a large-scale attack in the area of Ypres which commenced with a heavy bombardment followed by a mass infantry attack; two companies of the 2nd Ox and Bucks took part in the defence and subsequent counter-attack which forced the enemy back to their front line. On 11 November the Germans made another attempt to capture Ypres, The 2nd Battalion counter-attacked them at Nonne Bosschen wood, preventing their advance and then routing them. First Ypres was the last major battle of 1914. The 2nd Ox and Bucks sustained 632 casualties during the first five months of the war and by 1915 it was a very different battalion from that which had arrived on the Western Front at the start of the war.

In 1915 trench warfare commenced with both sides developing impregnable defences - leading to high casualties in return for minimal gains. At the Battle of Festubert (9-16 May) - which

was launched in support of the French attack south of Vimy Ridge and included the first British night action of the war - the 2nd Ox and Bucks were part of the second wave of the 5th Brigade attack and, during the course of the battle, suffered just under 400 casualties, the largest number the regiment had sustained in a single battle since the Siege of Badajoz over 100 years earlier. The 2nd Ox and Bucks were involved in heavy fighting at Richebourg l'Avoue on 15-16 May. They, and other battalions of the regiment also saw action at the Battle of Loos (25 September - 8 October) and the subsidiary attack at Givenchy with 263 casualties on 25 September. The Ox and Bucks 5th (Service) Battalion went into the Battle of Loos on 25 September 1915 at a strength of 17 officers and 767 men and only two officers and 180 men survived the battle. The 2nd Battalion took part in the subsequent attack against the Hohenzollern Redoubt (13-19 October). Following the battle of Loos few pre-1914 2nd Ox and Bucks officers remained, they had either become casualties or promoted to take up positions in other battalions.



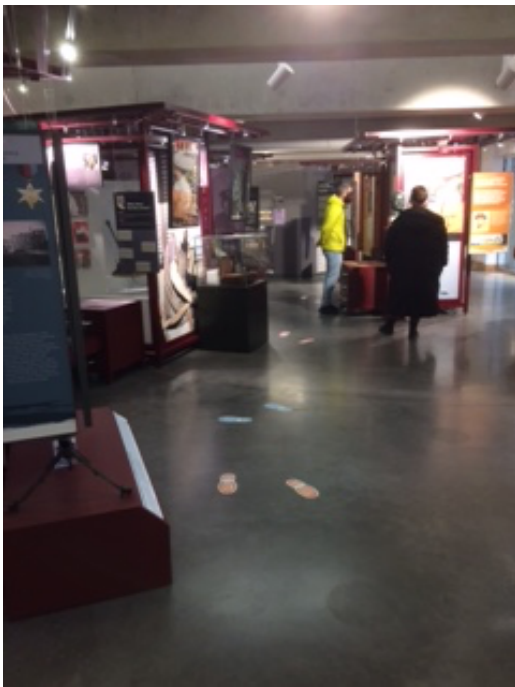
Ration party of the 2nd Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (Ox and Bucks LI) in a front line trench at Cuinchy March 1915. The soldier in right foreground rests his arm on a crate of 'Machonochie' tinned stew. (Imperial War Museum image)

In 1916 the battalion later moved to Bethune and then returned to the Festubert trenches. The 1/4th Ox and Bucks took part in the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916, in which the British Army suffered over 60,000 casualties - the largest number sustained in a day by the British Army. The battalions of the Ox and Bucks on the Western

Front saw extensive service during the Battle of the Somme, Mametz Wood, Pozieres, Ancre, Deville Wood, Guillemont and Beaumont Hamel, where they suffered further heavy casualties.

In March 1917 the 2nd Ox and Bucks moved from the Somme to take part in the battle of Arras and sustained more than 200 casualties. The battalions of the Ox and Bucks saw further service in many of the subsidiary battles at Passchendaele, Polygon Wood and Cambrai.

In January 1918, the 2nd Ox and Bucks were at Vallulart Camp, Ytres, when on 21 March 1918 the Germans launched the Ludendorff offensive, which led to the furthest advance by either side since 1914. The 2nd Ox and Bucks were due to go into the corps reserve when the enemy began a colossal bombardment of Allied positions and on 22 March 1918 were in position around the village of Bertincourt. They, and other battalions of the regiment, sustained heavy casualties as part of the defence of the Somme during the Battle of St Quentin (21-23 March), the First Battle of Bapaume (24-25 March) and in subsequent battles that saw the Germans achieve significant gains as the battalion was forced back across the old Somme battlefield to the 1916 line on the Ancre where they remained from 29 March 1918 to 3 April 1918. One soldier who arrived on Sunday 7 April as one of the reinforcements to replace the 2/4th Battalion (184th Brigade, 1st Division) recorded that they had been reduced to 22 survivors with one rifle and three sets of webbing between them, commenting, 'I doubt if in the whole war any battalion was wiped out so completely'. In April the Germans resumed their offensive which the Ox and Bucks defended against in the Battle of the Lys and subsequent actions, the German Offensive petered out and eventually failed.



In the summer of 1918, the 2nd Ox and Bucks held the line at Bailleulemont, near Arras. In August the 2nd Ox and Bucks took part in the Battle of Albert (21-23 August) and the Second Battle of Bapaume (31 August - 3 September) while the 2/4th Ox and Bucks and the 2/1st Buckinghamshires took part in the advance into Flanders, with both offensives seeing the Allies advance to the Hindenburg Line by early September. The 2nd Ox and Bucks took part in the offensive against it that saw the Allies successful in several battles including Havincourt, Canal du Nord and Cambrai. The 2nd Ox and Bucks' last action of the war was the battle for Escarmain on 23 October 1918 during the Battle of the Selle (17-25 October).

The war ended on 11 November 1918 with the signing of the Armistice. The 2nd Ox and Bucks crossed the German frontier on 9 December 1918. The battalion was later stationed in near Cologne as part of the army of occupation. At the end of the war there were only 66 2nd Ox

and Bucks of all ranks still serving with the battalion from those that had left camp at Aldershot for the Western Front on 13 August 1914: of these 39 served throughout the war.

The regiment also raised seven Territorial and five New Army battalions during the conflict. These served at home stations, and in Salonika and Egypt, as well as Italy and Macedonia.

In November 1914, the 1st Battalion was sent from India to Mesopotamia but were unfortunately captured by the Turks at Kut-al-Amara in April 1916. Reinforcements who had already set sail ended up forming a Provisional Battalion on arrival. This unit was renamed as 1st Battalion in July 1916 and fought on in Mesopotamia for the rest of the war.

The battalion took part in the march towards Kut with the intention of capturing it from the Ottomans. The battle for Kut began on 26 September 1915 and raged for a number of days until the Ottomans went into retreat and Kut was captured on 28 September. 635 officers and men of the battalion fought in the battle of Ctesiphon and 304 became casualties. The Division subsequently retreated to Kut, reaching it on 3 December, where it was besieged by the Ottomans, beginning on 7 December, with a garrison of 10,000 Britons and Indians. The Ottomans launched numerous attempts to take Kut, all of which were repulsed by the defenders, with both sides suffering heavy casualties. The British launched numerous attempts to relieve Kut, all of which failed with heavy losses. On 26 April 1916 (supplies had dwindled significantly and many of the garrison's defenders were suffering from sickness) the garrison negotiated a cease-fire with the Ottomans and on 29 April the British-Indian force of 8,000 surrendered, including 400 men of the 1st Ox and Bucks. They suffered terribly as Ottoman prisoners. On the day of the surrender, the Ottomans handed out biscuits for the POWs. The British historian Russell Braddon wrote that after eating the biscuits "The following morning, they began to die. Frothing at the mouth, their bowels and stomachs disintegrating into a greenish slime, dehydrated and moaning, they died one after the other". The British and Indian POWs were afflicted by enteritis from contaminated biscuits. One British POW, Sergeant Long, wrote about the march from Kut to the POW camps in Anatolia: "No words can adequately describe the appalling misery of that scene. Here were men who had suffered and fought the long months of the siege, although they were gradually starved and were not fit to do a day's march, yet they were being driven across the pitiless waste under a scorching sun, herded along by a brutal and callous escort of Arab conscripts. Limping and staggering along they all finally arrived, some of them being assisted along by comrades, who themselves were in dire need of assistance". Many of the Ox and Bucks taken at Kut, like the rest of the prisoners, suffered mistreatment by the Ottomans; only 71 of all ranks of the 1st Ox and Bucks who had been taken prisoner returned home to the UK. It is estimated that just under 2,000 Britons and up to 3,000 Indians perished in captivity.

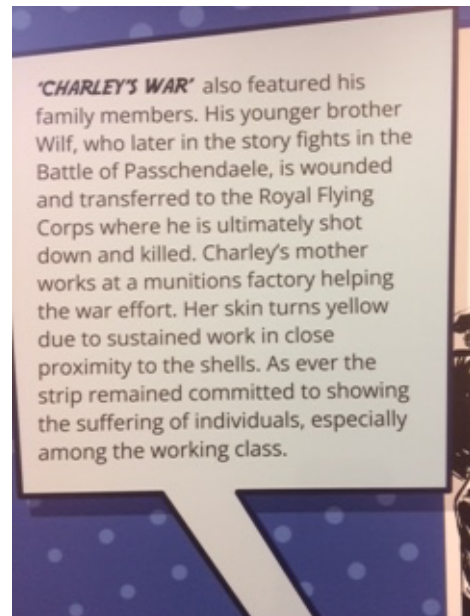


The 1/4th Battalion, Ox and Bucks and 1/1st Buckinghamshire Battalion left the Western Front for the Italian Front in November 1917—which had been a member of the Allies since May 1915—after she suffered very heavy casualties at the Battle of Carpioretto. The regiment and the rest of the British forces did not take part in a major battle until June 1918 when they participated in the Battle of Asiago (15-16 June), that saw the Austro-Hungarians successfully defeated. On 23 October the Allies launched a successful offensive against Austria-Hungary, with the regiment crossing the Piave River, taking part in the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. The Austro-Hungarians signed an Armistice with the Allies on 4 November 1918 and the 1/4th Ox and Bucks and 1/1st Buckinghamshires ended the war in Austria-Hungary.

In October 1915 the British and French landed in Salonica at the request of the Greek Prime Minister. Both the 7th and 8th Service battalions were part of the 26th Division which landed between December 1915 and February 1916. The 7th (Service) Battalion was part of 78th Brigade whereas the 8th (Service) Battalion was a pioneer battalion attached to the division. The regiment's time in the Balkans was mostly quiet, experiencing sporadic fighting, but it included the repulsing of a Bulgarian invasion of Greece at Lake Doiran in April-May 1917. The regiment saw very heavy fighting against the Bulgarians around Doiran the following September, after the Allies had launched an offensive in July 1918 with the intention of ending the war in the Balkans. The war ended on 30 September 1918 with Bulgaria signing an Armistice with the Allies. The Ox and Bucks, along with the rest of the division, was subsequently employed for a brief period of time on occupation duties in Bulgaria.



As well as exploring the permanent exhibitions in the museum, while we were there was a temporary exhibition entitled 'Into Battle! The Art of British War Comics.' This new exhibition, a collaboration between Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum and Oxford-based Rebellion publishing offered a chance to explore the history of British war comics through the archives of classic comic titles such as War Picture Library and Battle Action.



We had good fun remembering which ones we had read or owned in the past. I saw a couple that I still have somewhere in the loft! (When I was a choirboy, a very long time ago, we used to pocket them under our surplices and swop them to read during the sermons. Not very reverent I must admit, but a lot more entertaining than the sermons themselves). There is also a very extensive and impressive medal collection from all ages of conflict.





At the heart of the Museum is the rich histories of the two County Regiments; The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and the Queens Own Oxfordshire Hussars in which Churchill served and was associated with for 64 years. Apart from the two county regiments, Oxfordshire has been, and still is, heavily populated by Military, and has been for centuries. It currently hosts a Battalion of The Rifles (the successors to the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry) in Abingdon; a squadron of the Queens Own Oxfordshire Hussars in Banbury; two major RAF bases in Brize Norton and Benson; a major logistics base and the Defence Explosives Munitions School at Bicester as well as other logistic regiments within the County. The aim of the museum is to tell the stories of these soldiers, their families, the county towns in which they lived or came from and the consequences of conflict on them and the County. It demonstrates the courage, tenacity, comradeship and fellowship of the Military, their families, the towns in which they lived or were born and the close links with the population of this county of Oxfordshire. Together it exemplifies the concept of mutual support in "Conflict and County".

Bibliography

Wikipedia

National Army museum

Soldiers of Oxfordshire museum <https://www.sofo.org.uk/visit-us/>

<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/oxfordshire-buckinghamshire-light-infantry/>

World War One in Objects, 17. Crested China ships.



Delicate, hollow China ornaments were popular souvenirs in the Edwardian period, especially at the seaside resorts that were proving such a popular destination just before the outbreak of war. Decorated with the crest of the area where they were sold, these ornaments were known as 'Heraldic China' or Heraldic Souvenir Ware. Mainly made in the potteries around Stoke-on-Trent by a variety of makers, the best known being Arcadian and Goss, the objects ranged from small boxes and containers to figurines and local landmarks. On the outbreak of war in 1914, these makers also began to include designs that related to the war, shells, bombs dropped by zeppelins, ambulances, aeroplanes, and tanks, (see earlier articles written by my sister on some of these.) The two ships in the photo above also come from her collection. The larger one at the back, with its name prominently displayed on the bow, probably needs no introduction, due to the infamy of its sinking. The Lusitania, the pride of the Cunard fleet, and described as a floating palace, had left New York on the 1st May 1915 bound for Liverpool, a voyage she had made some two hundred times before, but on this one she was unlucky enough (understatement!) to cross paths with the German submarine U20, returning from patrol off the South coast of Ireland. Lieutenant Commander Walter Schweiger spotted her and ordered a torpedo to be fired. The torpedo hit the Lusitania amidships, there was a terrific explosion, followed shortly afterwards by another even more violent one, and twenty minutes later the great ship, and more than 1,200 of the unfortunate souls aboard her, were lying at the bottom of the sea. Just over seven hundred of the mainly civilian passengers were rescued. The repercussions of the sinking were massive, causing much anti-German feeling, especially against the Kaiser, and especially in America. Heraldic China producers went into overdrive, models, like the one pictured above, soon appeared, as well as all sorts of other memorabilia. Even the Germans, who had clearly stated that all American passengers travelling on British ships did so at their own risk, produced a commemorative medal which showed on one side Death selling tickets for the voyage, and on the other the sinking liner, with her decks piled high with ammunition and military equipment. The second explosion, and probably the one that caused her to sink, was most likely caused by the exploding ammunition that was on board. The medal was copied by the British and sold in an anti-German box to create further outrage amongst the public. The second ship, in the foreground, is a more generic model, although specific ships, such as Beatty's flagship, submarines and even armed trawlers were produced. This one bears the Ramsgate crest and appears to be armed with a single gun. These military models were not noted for their accuracy!



March 15th 'Robert Keable, utterly immoral WW1 chaplain?' -Simon Keable-Elliott

When Robert Keable's First World War novel '*Simon Called Peter*' was published, critics called it 'offensive', 'a libel' and reeking of 'drink and lust'. Despite this the novel became a huge international best-seller, a Broadway play, and the sequel, a Hollywood movie, making its author a celebrity. What critics did not know was that the novel, about a military chaplain and a young woman having an affair during the war, was autobiographical. Simon has used letters, books, articles, interviews and a trip to Tahiti to produce a fascinating account of the remarkable true story of his grandfather, from his studies at Cambridge, missionary work in Africa, and war experience as chaplain to the black labourers of the SANLC, where, dispirited by the appallingly treatment of his men, the horrors of the war and the implications of his secret affair, he lost his faith and eventually escaped to Tahiti. This amazing true story is not one to miss!

February 16th 'The Doughboys 1917-18' - Mike Sheil

March 15th 'Robert Keable, utterly immoral WW1 chaplain?' -Simon Keable-Elliott

April 19th The U-Boat Campaign 1914-18' - Dr Graham Kemp

May 17th 'Now the War is Over' - Dr Daniel Weinbren

June 14th - 16th Twinning Trip to Belgium (TBC)

June 21st - 'Repairs and maintenance on the Western Front' - Roy Larkin

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.