

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

January February 2026 VOL No

CHAIRMANS REMARKS

This year the WFA Christmas gift came early in the form of Peter Hart whose talk on the French at Gallipoli was delivered in his usual energetic, over the top, manner. A suitcase full of his military books to flog, as always, accompanied him.

Personally, I'm always pleased when we are treated to a talk on one of our allies. Sometimes we need reminding that for the early years of the war France was the main ally protagonist. During the Gallipoli conflict the French were already fully committed in the Artois and Champagne regions. The country did not really need to be involved in the ill conceived Gallipoli campaign. But then politicians were too occupied with planning how to exploit Middle East gains that might be won.

Some years ago I made the pilgrimage to Turkey and my enduring thoughts were the searing daytime temperatures on those beachheads, spiteful thorny bushes and almost impenetrable mountainous areas. How soldiers managed to even consider fighting under those conditions astounds me. Almost every soldier memoir mentions the almost constant thirst as water was always in short supply. Any wells on the peninsula were hard fought over to gain access.

Christmas time in the trenches on the Western Front during WW1 is well documented and mostly romanticised in numerous publications. Whatever the degree of fraternisation Christmas 1914 it was never to be repeated, courtesy of high command.

At this peaceful time in our country give thanks for the freedom to celebrate this most important time of the year. Seasonal greetings to you all. I wish you a healthy, happy New Year. Let's hope and pray for a little more peace in the world during 2026.

Kindest Regards,  
Rob Burkett

FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20<sup>th</sup> February by post to Mrs J Berry, 8 Fairstead Rd, Norwich NR7 8XQ or by email [jackie.berry3@btinternet.com](mailto:jackie.berry3@btinternet.com), items can also be given at meetings.

## MEETING REPORTS

Two interesting evenings ended our 2025 program of talks. Nik Chapman CBE talked to us about the Imperial War Graves Commission - Revolution and Challengers in Commemoration in November. It was interesting to hear about and see some of the work that goes into looking after all the graves both locally and abroad.

Roger and I had joined Nik for a walk around Earlham Cemetery during 2024 and thought he would make an interesting option for a speaker, we hope you agreed. If you get the chance to go on one of his walks it is worthwhile.

As for December, well what can you say, Peter Hart on form as per usual!

Interesting talk on the French at Gallipoli, yes he is correct on it being a subject many of us know little about, even from the British angle I would not say I know too much, perhaps it is because of the Anzacs always saying that it was their battle and having read a few books and histories online from Australia's point of view....

Back to Peter with lots of plugs for his books, his dislike of raffles - till he won a prize he could take to take back to his wife then he was happy!! And he is coming back next Christmas I gather.....

The usual sandwich's were joined by Stollen and mince pies as a nod to the Christmas season.

## FUTURE PROGRAMME

February 3<sup>rd</sup> - Three men of the 9<sup>th</sup> Norfolks - Steve Smith

March 3<sup>rd</sup> AGM followed by The 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers: From Horse to Horse Power - Major Phil Watson

Attached at the end of the Poppy is our 2026 program of talks.

## IN THE NEWS

A project has taken place in Lewisham with the local council's bereavement department joining the CWGC and the Friends of Ladywell and Brockley cemetery to research and find the locations of 23 men and 1 woman (WRAF) buried over a hundred years ago in paupers graves, these people died after returning from war service. This project began when the CWGC was looking for information on just a few men. Now all the graves discovered will be given CWGC headstones. Once all is in place the names of these people will be removed from the Hero's Corner memorial as is required. This memorial will be restored at the same time.

The names of the people and in some cases information on their lives are -  
Phyllis Purdy born in Hastings and died in December 1918 from pneumonia and exhaustion in hospital at Greenwich, she had joined the WRAF when it was formed earlier in the year, she is the only female listed.

William Jackson was 37 when he died, he was married with children. He joined the army in July

1916. He served in the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment as a Private, later he was transferred to the Labour Corp.

It is thought he was discharged unfit in April of 1919, he had suffered health issues for some time and died in hospital in June 1920.

Charles Gerhardt was a career soldier having served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the East Surreys, and Royal Garrison Artillery and was discharged in 1913. He was re-enlisted when war broke out, serving as a Private in the Royal Defence Corp. He was married and between his military life worked as a labourer carrying heavy loads on and off ships, He died in April 1921 age 37. Twenty two other men will who will receive their own headstones include -

B Davis - Sapper in the Royal Engineers who died on October 12, 1920, age unknown.

Thomas B Wright - Driver in the Royal Engineers who died on July 27, 1919, aged 24.

Henry Charles Winder, - A Private in the London Regiment, Royal Fusiliers who died on October 22, 1916 at the age of 24.

Owen Stanley Curtis - Served as a leading telegraphist in the Royal Navy, HMS Victory who died on June 4, 1920, aged 26.

T Fung or Funge - A Private for the Northamptonshire Regiment and later transferred to the Labour Corps who died on October 21, 1917, age unknown.

L G Sheldrake - Served as a Private in the Royal Sussex Regiment who died on October 22, 1920, aged 40.

Reuben Harvey - Served as a Private in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, Third Battalion who died on May 15, 1920, aged 49.

Alfred James Hoare - A Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery who died on December 1, 1919, aged 27.

William Smith - A Private with the Royal Army Service Corps who died on December 2, 1919, aged 48.

Arthur Robert Whithead - Serving as a Private in the 14th Battalion Welsh Regiment who died on December 7, 1919, aged 30.

Walter Lake - Served as a Gunner for the Royal Garrison Artillery who died on July 13, 1916 aged 38.

Harold T Mann - Served as a Private for the County Yeomanry and then the Middlesex Hussars who died on May 16, 1920, age unknown.

Edward Smith - Served as a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery who died on June 6, 1919, aged 27.

W J Franklin - Served as a Private in the Royal Defence Corps who died on January 16, 1920, aged 41.

E Southwood - Served as a Bombardier in the Royal Field Artillery who died on February 10, 1918, aged 25.

All graves are located in one area of the cemetery and new information on any of the above is always welcome. Including on the following men who need more research but will get headstones - D Bruce, J French, J Hoare, W W Rawson, and Edward Charles Winder.

And finally a strange situation around one grave in that two bodies are interred there, both are Foxwell, one is WW1 and the second is a 20 year old Spitfire pilot killed in a tragic accident with a fellow Spitfire over the Channel in WW2. Leslie Foxwell has a headstone, but it maybe replaced by one with both on it.

It makes you think how many other cemeteries may have a similar situation, but no one has given it a thought, especially in our big cities..

*It only takes one person to find something and history can be restored. The following case proves this:*

Rona Houlton spotted a name on a memorial in Selby Yorkshire and spent about 10 years researching it, with the help of a few others and online information. The man Private Emmanuel J Foxton was listed on a local Catholic Church memorial and it was eventually found he was buried in an unmarked grave in a nearby churchyard in Escrick. Of all the men named on the memorial nothing was found about him to begin with, but this young man who had served in the West Yorkshire Regiment from 1915 was discovered to be buried in Escrick, where other family are interred, after his death at home in 1919, age 22, from the effects of gas and poor conditions he had fought in. Now he has his CWGC headstone following a service, last post sounded etc. Sadly no family could be located..

#### **SUFFOLK WFA**

Meetings held at the RBL Club, Tavern St, Stowmarket IP14 1PH 7.30pm

January 14<sup>th</sup> WW1 Aerial Photographs at the IWM - Alan Wakefield

February 11<sup>th</sup> Raiders on the Battlefield - Dr James Pritchett

#### **WHISKY DISTILLERIES WW1**

With the New year or Hogmanay celebrations upon us once more and a time when whisky is drunk freely by Scots and others to toast the coming year, it seemed right to see what happened to distilleries in WW1.

Probably the biggest issue was workers going off to war, but also issues with grain supplies now needed for the war effort, the start of the temperance movement and prohibition kicking in as far as sales were concerned in America. But some distilleries were taken over by British and American Navy units to become mine factories making these for use in the North Sea, etc.

One of the distilleries was at Alness on the Cromarty Firth near Inverness, Dalmore. Dalmore was started way back in 1839 by Sir Alexander Matheson, who had made his fortune in exploration and adventuring - possibly involving opium..... He was no good at making whisky and leased the distillery to members of Clan Mackenzie who later bought the premises. When war came the distillery was requisitioned by the Navy for mine work, and badly damaged by an explosion. It was returned to the Mackenzies in 1920 but would take the company a good few years to get damages from the government.

Women did take on work at those distilleries that were able to continue, but when the war ended everything was a mess, many men came home scared for the rest of their lives, jobs were an issue, especially in the Highlands where small communities lost so many men to war and the flu, so much so that once again many opted for a new life in the North Americas, Australia and New Zealand. Men who would have taken the whisky industry further were dead and the owners were getting old, many closed and did not reopen. Some have now begun again in modern times with the modernising of whisky making for the modern market..

*Did you know - the whisky slogan "Afore Ye Go" was from this time, Bell's gave men bottles of whisky to take with them when they went to war.*

## FELTHORPE HALL VAD HOSPITAL

Looking up something totally different to WW1 - well looking for a place to meet for a meal after a walk in the area, Felthorpe Hall came up on my screen.

The Hall it seems served as a British Red Cross VAD hospital from November 1914 to January 1919. It cared for around 430 soldiers during the war years. This grand Georgian house was converted to treat wounded soldiers again during WW2.

Felthorpe church has a plaque commemorating the Hall's service as a VAD hospital in WW1.

The Hall having changed hands several times during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in later years it was home to Norfolk Business man Geoffrey Watling who rescued Norwich City a few times apparently.

## BATTLE FIELD CROSS CAUSES CONFUSION

A post appeared on a WW1 Facebook recently from a lady who visited a churchyard in Formby. There she found a cross that had once stood on the battlefields of France and Flanders. A chat with the vicar revealed a story of a cross rescued and brought home to Britain and placed in the graveyard. This beautifully restored, possibly??, original cross, is dedicated to the officers of the Kings Liverpool Regiment who died in a field hospital, were buried and then in further fighting had their graves lost.

It is the words on this cross that cause some confusion for some who don't know its story - "near this spot." The cross says "In memory of the following officers of the 12<sup>th</sup> Kings who gave their lives near this spot Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> to Oct 7<sup>th</sup> 1916, visitors ask what on earth happened in Formby to so many officers were killed.....you can see why they think it and wonder. - Why no one has made up an information board?

## COODEN CAMP BEXHILL SUSSEX

This camp was set up in 1914 to train locals of Sussex 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Battalions, also known as the South Downs Battalions, Pals Battalions. The site would go on to train men from South Africa and Australia, before becoming a Princess Patricia's Canadian Red Cross Hospital in 1918, it closed in 1919.

In recent months an archaeological dig took places finding all sorts of items associated with a military camp with the site to become yet another housing estate.

It was a comment about the Sussex regiments and a Battle of Boars Head in the region of Richebourg-l'Avoue that caught my eye, I don't recall hearing the name before, but probably had read about it as part of the diversionary tactics in the run up to the battle of the Somme in 1916. The battle took place on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1916, hence when the July 1<sup>st</sup> fighting began, this deadly battle for the Sussex Regiments got lost in history, except for the people of Sussex who lost so many young men that day. A veteran of the battle would go on to coin the phase The Day Sussex Died. Over 350 officers and men were killed, some 1000 were taken as POWs, the bulk of the 13<sup>th</sup> battalion wiped out.

The name of Boars Head came from the trench systems formed during previous fighting. Some of the graves of the men killed can be found in the Richebourg St Vaast Post Mill cemetery. The poet Edmund Blunden was officer in the Royal Sussex Regiment and struck up a friendship with a fellow soldier, Frank Worley, of lower standing, which would last a life time. You can read about this online, it is called A Poet and a Butcher go to war by Brenda Collins in West Sussex

County Council 1914-1918.

## ERNEST SAUNDERS MM

Many moons ago as children me and my siblings used to visit our Uncle and his family in Croydon with our parents. I have no idea whereabouts now. What I don't recall seeing or hearing of is a place called the Old Palace, a building standing there for hundreds of years, but recently listed as part of the Heritage listings for this year, apparently it was where WW1 soldiers were recruited. Somewhere along the way I found out about Ernest Saunders who as a young man worked for the local Council - so did my uncle any years later.

With the outbreak of war in August 1914, Ernest joined the Surrey Yeomanry as a trooper. He served in France, Belgium and Italy, surviving all through the war, but later being attached to the 10th Royal West Surreys.

In March 1917, Ernest found himself at the centre of the fighting. He and two others were on a cavalry patrol near to St Quentin when they came under sniper fire.

One of Saunders' comrades was hit, together with his horse. They were in real danger of being captured, or killed. Saunders thought he had spotted where the snipers were located, so he dismounted and hid his horse. It is said Saunders crept up on the enemy position, where shots were exchanged. The military records do not disclose how many snipers there were, but Saunders' conduct caught the attention of the officer in charge of the patrol who noted Saunders' bravery, as he and his two colleagues escaped, albeit one of them wounded.

Saunders was mentioned in dispatches and recommended for an award.

Just before the end of the war at Croydon Town Hall in November 1918 the mayor of Croydon proudly watched as one of his own staff was awarded two medals, Saunders received both the Military Medal and the French Croix de Guerre. The Military Medal was awarded to other ranks for "acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire". Many present there in the Town Hall would have known Ernest from before the war, and he was still only 21 years old. He would go on to marry, have a family and work in various roles till his death.

Also listed were several war memorials around the country, details for those can be found on Historic England listings for 2025 and include the pill boxes in Norfolk mentioned in the September/October Poppy.

And finally

With Christmas pudding on many menus of late it reminded me that someone posted on one of the WW1 Facebook pages about a catering soldier who managed to drop a heavy Christmas pudding he was removing from a boiler on his foot and ended up in hospital. Did he get in trouble if the story was true, officers were always worried about self inflicted injuries.....

## Norfolk Branch WFA Speakers List 2026.

### **13/1/26 Dale Wiseman: 'St Andrews Hospital Norwich, The Norfolk War Hospital.'**

The presentation will look at some of the people who worked, visited or been patients at St Andrews since it opened in 1813. It will feature two Asylum patient records made possible through a project called 'Change Minds'. The challenges and changes that were imposed on the hospital when it became the Norfolk War Hospital in 1915 through to 1919 will be discussed. It will also feature a nurse who worked at the hospital in WW1 and was sadly killed in WW2. It will finish on the closure and conversion of the hospital in the 1990s.

### **03/2/26 Steve Smith: 'Three Norfolk Heroes'.**

This talk looks at three men who served with the 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment who wrote diaries and memoirs of their time serving with them in the Great War. They were the C.O. of the battalion, Lt Col Bernard Leathes-Prior D.S.O., who commanded from October 1916 to July 1918, Captain Cyril Bassingthwaite M.C. & Bar, who became the Adjutant for the battalion serving with them from October 1916 to the end of the war and Private James Cooper who served as a stretcher bearer and bandsman between January 1917 to the end of the war. Their memoirs have enabled Smith to understand what the battalion went through from the Somme to their move into Germany at the end of the war.

### **03/3/26 Major Phil Watson: 'The 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers: From Horse to Horse Power'**

In 1928, a decade after the end of the First World War, the 12th Lancers and 11th Hussars were the first two cavalry regiments to modernise (mechanise) to the armoured car. The talk will examine why it took a decade, the process of mechanisation, and briefly how the Lancers used these skills during the Retreat to Dunkirk. Significantly, the Lancers were carrying out the same reconnaissance role in 1914 as they were in 1940; however, this time in armoured cars.

### **07/4/26 Scott Lindgren: 'The Zeebrugge Raid'**

On 23 April 1918, the Royal Navy made a daring coast assault raid on the Belgian port of Bruges-Zeebrugge. This talk discusses the logistics, limited effects and future influence of this famous Naval attack.

### **05/5/26 Dr Peter Hodgkinson: 'Evolving Meritocracy in the BEF'**

The British Army went to war with a cadre of officers who had been promoted largely on the basis of seniority. With the rapid promotion of junior officers and the influx of civilians, did a meritocracy establish itself? This talk focuses on the development of a skill-based partial meritocracy within infantry battalion command. Who were the men who commanded the infantry battalions of the BEF in 1918? What were their qualities and how were these developed?

### **02/6/26 John Chester: 'Cesari Battisti - Traitor or Martyr'**

The story of the Austrian politician who fought for the Italians and his subsequent capture, his trial and his execution with two friends. A somewhat different talk, the details of Cesari's life and his execution capture the imagination. It also raises several interesting questions and looks at the Battisti Memorial in Trento

**07/07/26 Jonathan Dutton: 'Collecting of war related memorabilia at the time of the war and after'**

An antique, art and ceramics expert, Dutton will cover all aspects of war memorabilia from the collection of Trench art to paintings.

**04/08/26 Andy Stuart: 'Tall Tales or Real History'**

Stuarts Grandad, Arthur Walton, enlisted in Trafalgar Square on 17th August 1914 at the age of 16. Why? When he died in 1972, he left a bunch of unbelievable tales. But what if they're true? 'Bottles with gold nuggets floating in them.' 'Shamrock cap-badged Russians?' 'We stole a train to escape the Bolsheviks', 'Liverpool Jail', and why 'Cosher' Walton? These tales are from Stuart's books. During this talk he will compare them with real history ... to see if they could actually be true.

**01/09/26 Simon Shepherd: 'Breaking the Hindenburg Line'**

In February 1916 J.F.C. Fuller's sought to explain the Principle of War, as laid down in FSR's 1909 in an article in the Journal of the Royal United Services Institute. Using Fuller's explanations this presentation examines whether and to what extent they were effectively applied by 46th (North Midland) Division on 29 September 1918 to cross the St Quentin Canal and break the Hindenburg Line

**06/10/26 Nic Chapman: Subject to be confirmed**

**03/11/26 Stuart Hadaway: 'On to Aleppo'**

This talk focuses on the 1918 campaigns in Palestine, the Trans Jordan, and Syria. They culminated in the Battle of Megiddo (Sep-Oct 1918), between the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and the Ottoman forces.

**01/12/26 Peter Hart: 'I'm Out: Escape from German POW camps 1914 - 18'**

This old friend of the branch will return to provide another of his lively (by which I mean very!!!), and outstanding talks. While officers were exempt from labouring for their captors, 80% of the 170,000 British POWs held by the Germans faced more challenges than boredom. Always hungry, they worked, were frequently subjected to vicious beatings and faced a litany of casual cruelties. While 54 officers and 519 other ranks managed to escape (largely to neutral Holland), a similar number were killed by their guards (there were over 12,000 deaths overall).