



frontline.

The newsletter of the MK WFA, April 2023.



'Jig-a-jig Tommy' - Bruce Cherry

Bruce Cherry is an author, tour guide and former university lecturer with a PhD in military history. Amongst other titles, is his book 'They Didn't Want to Die Virgins; a study of Sex and Morale on the Western Front'. Bruce's talk includes the British Army's attitude toward sex, the soldier's moral code, army morale, and the sexual lives of troops on the Western Front. Beyond the topics of venereal disease and sexual violence, Bruce explores the 'hidden' part of the Western Front story; how the military turned a blind eye to, and supported, the use of pornography, prostitution, and fraternization with local women - always mindful that this is also the story of a survival strategy for women. The picture above is one who unfortunately didn't survive - Mata Hari. Don't miss this riveting and exclusive talk!

Mike Chapman's CWGC tours are now open for booking. Eventbrite has:

Manor Road Cemetery - Saturday 20/5 14:00
& Friday 26/5 10:30 -

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cwgc-war-graves-week-tours-2023-bletchley-manor-road-cemetery-tickets-612301158247?aff=>

Wolverton Cemetery - Saturday 27/5 14:00 -

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cwgc-war-graves-week-tours-2023-wolverton-cemetery-tickets-611162021057?aff=>

St Peter & St Paul, Cranfield churchyard -
Sunday 21/5 14:00 and Tuesday 23/5 10:30.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cwgc-war-graves-week-2023-cranfield-st-peter-paul-churchyard-tickets-617631501447>

www.cwgc.org/tours won't be updated until all Eventbrite entries are live and War Graves Week is announced, but will be the place to read about and book tours (there will be other sites in the wider area led by other people which may also be of interest).



APRIL



L/Cpl Wilbert Devine (2nd Bn E Lancs) Killed in Action 24th April 1918, aged 22

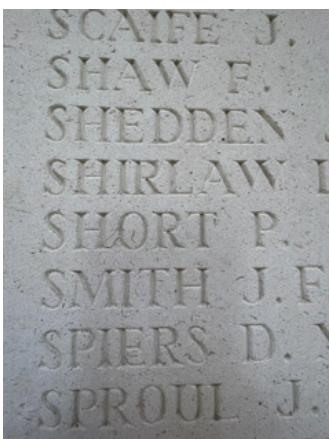
(Great-uncle of Anne McIntyre)

He lost his life in the battle of Villers-Bretonneux. On the 23rd April 1918, the German attacked and captured the village. The Allied troops were positioned to the south and east of the village and the German attack reached them in the early morning of the 24th. It started with a short artillery bombardment with mustard gas and high explosive shells which resulted in the soldiers having to wear gas masks for two hours. The attack resulted in the first ever tank vs tank battle between 3 German A7V tanks and 3 British MkIV tanks. Wilbert was buried initially at Chalk Lane

Cemetery near Villers-Bretonneux and later moved to Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux.

Private Percy Short (6th/7th Bn Royal Scots Fusiliers) who died in action on 18th April 1918 aged 19. (Great Uncle of Gary Short).

The youngest of three brothers who lost their lives in the Great War, Percy is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial, panel 4. During March 1918, Percy's battalion had been continuously in the front line attempting to resist the German Spring Offensive near Vaulx-Vraucourt, east of Bapaume. At the beginning of April the battalion moved to Ypres and relieved the 18th Middlesex Pioneers at Middlesex Camp. They mounted working parties to repair shell damage to infrastructure such as railway tracks. By 15 April the battalion was defending the front line near Bailleul. On 17 April 100 rifles from 'A' company were placed at the disposal of 100th Infantry Brigade for a counterattack which took place that night. There were 20 casualties, of which Percy was most likely one.





Mentioned in Despatches

'The Russian Front' - Phil Tomaselli

Phil started his talk with a map of Russia, showing firstly how huge the country is, and secondly how much of it was forest, with most of the population situated on the right side. Russia and Serbia had always been allies. Tzar Nicholas and his predecessors had ruled with absolute power for three centuries and he was arrogant enough to believe his people loved him.

Russia was beginning the process of moving from a peasant-based to an industrial society. It had vastly improved both its army and navy after being hammered by the Japanese in the 1904/1905 Russo-Japanese War that resulted in Japan's emergence as a great power and a decline in the Russian Empire's prestige and influence in Europe. Russia's incurrence of substantial casualties and losses for a cause that resulted in humiliating defeat contributed to a growing domestic unrest which culminated in the 1905 Russian Revolution, (the first one) and severely damaged the prestige of the Russian autocracy. Nevertheless, by the time a Serbian revolutionary had discharged his pistol at a Austro-Hungarian Emperor and his wife, there was a Russian steamroller of six million troops ready to roll. It was when this huge force mobilised, and it did quite quickly and efficiently, that the other countries on both sides realised that war was inevitable. Russia attacked from the South and East and claimed some early victories. The two controlling Russian generals, Samsonov and Rennenkampf didn't like each other or work well together. This was further exacerbated by the fact that the two armies used different codes, so they couldn't understand each other, and used morse which the Germans easily intercepted. At first the Germans were wary of a trap, but those who knew the Russians said it was just typical incompetence. The Germans had Hindenburg (aristocracy) and Ludendorff (brains) in control. Ludendorff moved men from the East rapidly by train to outnumber Samsonov. It was difficult terrain for both armies but when the Russian cavalry prepared a vast charge the German artillery caused so many casualties the dead horses couldn't fall but remained propped upright by the sheer weight of numbers. It was a massive defeat for the Russians, 250,000 casualties in a fortnight.



Samsonov



Rennenkampf



Ludendorff

Where the Russians faced the poorer Austrian Army they fared much better. The first engagements were fought a bit like Waterloo, artillery on the front line, columns of troops and lots of cavalry. The Russians had planned to advance into Hungary but didn't make it. In the bitter winter in the Carpathians snow covered the barbed wire, enabling the Russian attack to be successful. As a reply the Germans withdrew troops from Belgium to re-enforce the Austrians. The Russians had stockpiled

weapons and ammunition but used it up very quickly, and their fledgling industry could not keep pace. Also Russian ships could not get past the Dardanelles, hence Churchill's plans to free the supply routes up. The Germans moved up as much artillery as they could and started to shell the Russians out of existence. Like Verdun, there ensued a killing machine that sucked huge numbers into oblivion. However Ludendorff's plans for advancing were continually blocked by the Russian's ability to march quickly over long distances. At the end of 1914 Tzar Nicolas's belief that his people loved him utterly caused him to take overall command of the army, believing that morale would improve.

In 1915 there were no major attacks on the Western Front because the Germans were concentrating on Russia. The first use of gas was on the Russian front but the weather was so cold the chlorine fell like rain and didn't travel as a cloud. In 1916 the British, French and Russians planned synchronised attacks, but because of Verdun the French were drawn away. The British attacked on the Somme and the Russian's attacked at the same time. The Russian commander, Brusilov, thought sheer numbers was their one asset, and planned a huge attack, designed to draw in the German reserves, across the whole front. Artillery was dug in and disguised, and saps were dug. Even the Russian general's mistresses were sent away so the generals could concentrate on the task in hand! At first the attack was successful, but with terrible casualties on both sides. However, the Tzar started overruling Brusilov's plans. Sensing a German/Austrian defeat the Romanian Army joined in with Russia and attacked, their usefulness was probably epitomised by the major order that no officers taking part in the attack should wear lipstick or mascara! This gave the Germans and Austrians leave to invade Romania and capture the all important oil fields, which they rapidly attempted. Major Norton Griffiths, the British tunnelling and engineering expert, was given the task of denying the Germans this resource. He persuaded the oil barons to destroy their equipment and set the wells on fire. Ludendorff was of the opinion that this vastly shortened the war because the Germans ran out of oil.



In 1917 Rasputin suggested to the Tzar that the Russian people were suffering dreadfully, and he ought to end the war. This caused Rasputin's enemies to suspect he was a German agent, and he was swiftly and brutally murdered. Russia had a vast wheat harvest, but all their trains were involved in moving troops, so it couldn't be transported to where it was needed. Russian cities were seeing massive queues of hungry citizens, and were swamped with wounded soldiers begging. In a bread queue in Petrograd, someone threw a brick through the bakery window and Petrograd erupted. The police withdrew, the army were called in, and shots were fired. The police station was ransacked, the army refused to fire on any more rioters and the prison was broken into and political prisoners released. The Tzar went down by train to try and calm the situation but couldn't get there because of striking railwaymen. From then on it was all downhill. The Tzar abdicated, (and was eventually murdered), the government was overwhelmed, and elements of the army and navy set up their own revolutionary governments. The Germans assisted Lenin and other revolutionaries to return to Russia

and cause trouble, including funding their propaganda efforts. The final Russian push that included British pilots and armoured cars, and the Russian women's battalion of death, made some headway but the Germans lured them into a salient and destroyed them. Kerenski's government armed Trotsky's Bolsheviks to help fight the Germans but they merely attacked the Winter Palace. Lenin tried to sue for peace as the German army advanced without opposition and the Germans finally accepted terms, very much in their favour. Huge quantities of goods and materials, such as wheat and cotton, fell into German hands, utterly dismaying the British, who saw the Germans, after all the blockading and effort, being refreshed and replenished. Also, massive numbers of battle hardened German troops were released to go back to the Western Front. The British came up with a plan to destroy the Russian fleet using Russian officers, which failed. Polish Russian troops wanted to free Poland, then part of the Russian Empire. Slavic Bohemian units surrendered to Russia as they wanted independence from Austria and took over the Siberian Railway and the ports of Murmansk and Archangel. British troops moved in to protect arms dumps etc, and supported the White Russians against the Reds through 1919. For a while it was touch and go for the Bolsheviks but in 1920 the last White forces were evacuated from their last stronghold in the Crimea by the British and French Navies. It was finally over! Many thanks to Phil for a riveting and very informative talk.

Wolverton Drill Hall Before our last meeting I was approached by a member of the Working Men's club who is trying to research the drill hall in Wolverton. All I can remember personally is that in the 1980s/90s I remember seeing a Hawker Hunter there, probably something to do with the local ATC but I know nothing about its WW1 history, except it was built in 1914. There isn't much on-line about it so if anyone has some information I can pass on that would be very useful. Might also make an article for our own newsletter!

Message from Gary, (our social media co-ordinator, who has done wonders updating our website page.)
Hi all,

As a branch we have now entered the world of social media, we have an online presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

To access our pages on the social media platforms you will need to have your own accounts that you sign up to.

To find: Facebook: search for Western Front Association Milton Keynes Branch

Twitter: The Western Front Milton Keynes Branch @WesternfrontMKB

Instagram: wha_mk_branch

We will be posting regular updates and information across all three platforms as we move forward as a branch.

If anybody requires help or assistance with setting up accounts or finding our pages, please let me know and I will assist when at our meetings.

We have also updated our webpage on the main Western Front Association website, have a look and see what you think.

Thanks, G

MK WFA Seminar, Jim and the committee have organised a seminar for this October. The venue is The Masonic Centre in Bletchley, easy to get to, plenty of parking, and perfect for our needs. Peter Hart is giving a combined talk with Gary Beale entitled "Life or Death in the Trenches" and Alex Churchill and Charlie Barrett are booked. Tea, coffee, and a buffet lunch are arranged. A display of militaria, a second-hand militaria bookshop, and our own display will provide added interest and atmosphere. (Please donate any of your unwanted militaria books about any conflict for the book stall, and any donations for a raffle would also be very much appreciated. Many thanks to Bob and Keith for sorting some out already.) We are hoping that most of our membership, including those who are unable to join us at our regular meetings, will be able to attend our seminar to make it a truly memorable event. Please make sure that you reserve Saturday October 14th in your diaries, we need a great turn-out! Tickets are £30 and will be available shortly.

Fred Mower, Then and Now



A couple of photographs to complement last month's article of the Stony tram tragedy, where Private Frank Mower was killed in an accident involving the steam tram. So, two new photos to make up a 'Then and Now' section, except we have one then and two nows. Many thanks to my pals Ralph and Dave for taking them for me, Dave said sorry that he couldn't line up the Tram then and now exactly because there was too much traffic, and he didn't want to suffer the same fate as Fred! The picture is taken with the bicycle shop at the end at the small roundabout. The tram in the old photo is positioned roughly alongside the car in front. Look carefully and you will see that the buildings have changed very little since then. The second colour photo shows the house where Fred Mower was billeted, and where he set out for the White Horse on that fateful day. It's the house with the blue door, 150 Church Street, just a street away from where MK WFA meet each month.

Abington Park Museum, Northampton.

Abington Park Museum is a beautiful Grade 1 listed building set in the grounds of Abington Park. Collections include military and the Northamptonshire Regiment, social history, natural science, Egyptology and costume. It is not to be confused with the bigger Northampton Museum with its shoe collection and art gallery, although Abington Museum often has displays of these as well. It is in the park, on the main road that runs through, and there is usually plenty of parking along that road. The museum is usually open at weekends but check times beforehand on their website if you go. The church alongside has a number of military graves, including a Battle of Britain pilot, but none from the First World War that I could see. The park is also worth a wander, with an aviary with some amazingly colourful parrots. But it is the military section in the museum you really want to see.



(Notwithstanding The Ox and Bucks Regiment) Northampton and Bedford, as major towns, attracted many recruits from the Milton Keynes area to join The Bedfordshire Regiment or the Northamptonshire Regiment and the Northamptonshire Yeomanry. The stories of the two latter are told in the Military Galleries at Abington Park Museum.

The Regimental Collection was based at various barracks in Northampton since it was first formed in 1933. In 1960 a major reorganisation took place of the Army. The Northamptonshire Regiment was included in this and the collection was moved to Gibraltar Barracks, Northampton before being moved to Abington Park Museum in 1970. The timeline of the Northamptonshire Regiment and the Northamptonshire Yeomanry records their formation, significant battles and campaigns, home service in Britain and overseas service throughout the world, involvement in major wars, and post war National Service to their amalgamation or suspended animation.



Both played important roles in the First and Second World Wars and the Yeomanry story contributes to a wider story of the Territorial Army. The Northamptonshire Regiment was amalgamated and today remains in the Royal Anglian Regiment. The story is told through personal photographs and objects alongside objects issued by the military and more formal military history.



Those who died from the Regiment and Yeomanry during the First and Second World Wars are commemorated in the Memorial Gallery either on memorial wall panels or in remembrance books.

Recently, Northampton Museums Service, which currently looks after the collection on behalf of the Regimental Association, has been working to digitise the photographic archive. The results, over 1700 images so far, can be seen on the Northampton Museums Flickr stream: <http://ow.ly/6H5Kq>

World War One in Objects, 14. Trench Periscope



Photo - Chris Bland



This is a photograph of our display at the Heritage weekend at Milton Keynes Museum. On the extreme left is a new addition to the display. Behind the board with the field orders pinned to it is the top of a trench periscope, which adds a little more interaction to the display, especially when a child is looking through it and their parent looks in at the top! (The German helmet on the table comes, courtesy of Anne, from the bell tower at Loughton Church where it doubles as a bell rope holder!)

As of early 1915 soldiers on the battlefield were spending most of their time inside trenches and dugouts. Such conditions posed special challenges related to observation. Sentries needed to be able to watch over no-man's-land to warn of enemy attack. Artillery observers needed to be able to scrutinize enemy positions to identify targets and to gauge the accuracy of gunfire. However, a

soldier who raised his head above the trench parapet to observe instantly made himself a target for enemy snipers.



Resourceful soldiers looked for a solution, such as using their shaving mirror on the end of a rifle and bayonet. This was a temporary solution that worked, remember the attack on the machine gun nest behind the bunker in 'Saving Private Ryan'? Wrong war I know, but still effective.

More efficient periscopes were made by installing two mirrors at 45-degree angles at either end of a long box or tube. During the winter of 1914-1915, soldiers on the front lines used these improvised box periscopes, also known as hyposcopes. Most measured between two and three feet in length and were similar to the one in our display. By 1915, commercial manufacture of box-type trench periscopes began in the United Kingdom. However, demand exceeded supply until 1916.



'The Lifeguard' concertinering periscope with case.

To make up for the shortfall in commercial supply, British Army workshops behind the front lines started to manufacture trench periscopes in mid-1916, and many private companies made smaller brass periscopes, mainly for private purchase by officers, see below for a typical example.

During my search for a trench periscope for the display I came across several of these on ebay and other sites but, firstly, they were rather expensive (but very nice) and secondly, I wanted a wooden one, and I guess not many of those have survived. I was toying with having a go at making one but eventually came across a replica one on a school equipment supplier website (never needed one of those when I was teaching, but I guess there were rougher schools!) Seriously, they had replicated quite a nice selection of WW1 artifacts for history departments, and their trench periscope suited me just fine. Job done!



(Stuart)

A Corner of a Friendly Field - The 'Gate' Group, Part 1

Stoke Goldington

Not all those who fell in the Great War are buried in a corner of a foreign field that is forever England - to quote those famous and evocative lines from Rupert Brook's poem, 'The Soldier'. Many of the fallen, perishing in accidents or from disease, or succumbing to their injuries whilst at a military hospital at home, rest in quiet churchyards across the United Kingdom. Other reminders of the Great War and its impact also abound, memorials of many kinds, to one person or sadly to many, some old, some quite modern, often also in churches or in some central public place.

Stoke Goldington is a village and civil parish in the unitary authority area of the City of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, England. It is located about four miles NNW of Newport Pagnell, on the road to Northampton. St Peter's church Stoke Goldington is a relatively ancient 12th Century mediaeval village church. It shares a rector and services with others in the 'Gate' group - Ravenstone, Weston Underwood, and Gayhurst, all of which are adjacent villages/hamlets, each of which have a single scattered grave from the First World War, with just Ravenstone exempt. (These will be covered in part two.)

The road from Newport Pagnell to Northampton forms the main street through the village, and the war memorial is in the middle. The memorial was paid for by public subscription and placed on land given by the Carlile family. It consists of a two-stepped square base surmounted by a square sectioned tapering plinth with incised inscription panels. Rising from the plinth is a boss with an octagonal sectioned column plus a further boss, topped by a wheel cross. The whole memorial site is paved with a low perimeter chain and posts. A path enters this enclosure from the roadside pavement and there is a memorial seat from the centenary on the far right, visible in the photo below. The memorial lists 31 names from WW1, and 3 from WW2, including Walter West, see below. There is a



Percy West on the 1918 panel, but no indication whether the two were related. Some of the names are also commemorated on other 'Gate Group' memorials, and most of the men on the memorial joined up in Northampton and enlisted in the Northampton regiment.

Heading towards Northampton, the church of St Peters is found down a lane to your left, virtually right out of the village, and called, naturally enough, Church Lane. Built originally in the 12th Century the Church was added to in the mid 13th Century when the South aisle was built, followed 10 years later by the North aisle. In 1330 the Chancel was rebuilt, and the South Chapel added, along with the South Porch. The West Tower was added in 1435. The Clerestory was added in the 16th-17th Century. In 1625 a ring of 5 bells was hung in the tower. In the 19th Century much of the Church was rebuilt. It wasn't until the 1940s that electric lighting replaced the original oil lamps, firstly with a generator and then mains electricity in the 1950s. You need to park up at the end of Church Lane and enter the churchyard via the steps and along the path to the church porch. When I visited, the church was locked, although there are keyholder's phone details in the porch if you wish to gain entry. (As far as I can make out by research online, there are no memorials or references to the Great War inside.)

Continue from the porch virtually straight ahead across the grass towards the very tall and impressive yew tree with accompanying manicured bushes. Just behind and to the left is the CWGC



headstone to Corporal 14737 Walter John West MM., 7th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment. Born in Stoke Goldington in 1886 to Henry and Sarah, he worked, like his dad, as a farm labourer. He enlisted in Northampton, like many of the local men, volunteering in September 1915 and being drafted to France. There he played a prominent part in several battles and was awarded the Military Medal (M.M.) for Conspicuous Bravery in the Field. He was wounded in action in July 1917 and was invalided back to England. Sadly, he died as a result of his wounds on 3rd November 1917, aged 31 and buried in his home parish. The personal inscription on his headstone reads 'In the Midst of Life We

are in Death', (placed there, if you look at the forms below, by a different next of kin than his parents - his mother had passed away before the war.)

0650 W1 1707/1720 20.000 1705 146 F & S

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

139/15648

Name of Cemetery STOKE GOLDINGTON (ST. PETER'S) CHURCHYARD Report Number London 983
 Parish STOKE GOLDINGTON WITH GAYHURST Certified Correct and Complete
 County BUCKINGHAMSHIRE Signature [Signature] Temp. Area Inspector [Signature] Schedule Number 1
 Category of Graves d

Unit	Regtl. No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Number or letter of			Type of Memorial	Type of Grave	Remarks
					1st	2nd	3rd			
<i>7/</i> Northants	<i>14737</i>	<i>WEST</i> <i>N/H Father</i> <i>M H West</i> <i>Stoke Goldington</i> <i>Newport Pagnell</i> <i>Bucks</i>	<i>Opl. W.</i>	<i>3.11.17</i>				<i>N.M.</i>	<i>Pr.</i>	<i>M.M.</i> Certified that a plan of this churchyard is not necessary <i>[Signature]</i> Temp. Area Inspector London Area

1.

STOKE GOLDINGTON (ST. PETER)
CHD. BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

1043/10 *14* IN THE MIDST OF LIFE WE ARE IN DEATH
 (Mrs. T. Kightley, 70 Queen Ann St., New Bradwell, Solverton, Bucks.) 26

Name and Address of Next of Kin are shown in brackets, and will not appear on the Headstone.



I could find no references to the circumstances which led to Walter being awarded the Military Medal, but many of the records were destroyed in the Blitz.

It is possible that his citation, and even the medal itself, still exist somewhere.

Also in the churchyard are three burials from WW2, a Royal Marine with a private headstone, Leslie James French, who died on Tuesday 28th of October 1941, and a single CWGC stone marking the last resting place of two brothers. 1109105 Sergeant D.C. Watkins, Pilot, Royal Air Force, 13 April 1943 aged 32 and 1128603 Sergeant G.H.C. Watkins, Wireless Operator, Royal Air Force, 17th May 1943 aged 22.

The RAF lads are over towards the far-right corner, and you can see their headstone from Walter West's resting place. From them, if you walk towards the back hedge there are a number of graves with tumbledown headstones and here you will find, very weathered, the family plot to the Worrells, which includes the following inscription,

Also of **GEORGE DOUGLAS WORRELL** eldest son of the above
killed in France No2 1918 aged 32
Prince of Wales Own West Yorkshire Regt.

Peace be thine



This is the only other reference to the Great War that I could find at Stoke Goldington. George was the son of Mr George Worrell (buried in London but commemorated, like George, on the headstone) and Eliza Worrell, (who's grave it is.) George was the husband of Mrs Dutton (formally Worrell) of 27, Foss Road, Lower Tooting, London. He was a private, service number 42401, in the West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own) and died on 1st November 1918 (always seems extra poignant just before the Armistice) aged 32. He is buried at Premont British Cemetery, Aisne, France.



British troops advance on the Somme.

'I shall hope to try an officer and at least one corporal for cowardice' - Michael de Cicero

1916 was a pivotal year for the British Army, a year of intense combat defined by the Battle of the Somme and the appalling casualties of 1916. Yet it was also the year in which the British Army began to master industrial warfare and the tide of the war began to turn in favour of the Allies. Michael's talk looks in detail at the German Trench Raid at La Boisselle, 11 April 1916 and the British response to this attack. Michael is Commissioning Editor at an esteemed publisher of military history and an established author himself. He has a PhD in Modern History and his research interests are the Victorian/Edwardian Army, Second Anglo-Boer War, Western Front, Mesopotamian and Gallipoli campaigns 1914-18 with a specific interest in the Third Battle of Ypres. Not to be missed!

Our Events Programme.

May 19th - 'I shall hope to try an officer and at least one corporal for cowardice' - Michael de Cicero

June 16th - 'Now the War is Over' - Dr Daniel Weinbren

July 21st - 'Britannia's unruly stepchildren', Americans in the British Armed Forces- Michael O'Brien

September 15th - 'Logistics of the East Africa Campaign' Dr Anne Samson

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.