



frontline.

The newsletter of the MK WFA, August 2023.



Hello everyone, I hope you all are having an excellent summer's break. Because of timing problems we didn't get our trip to The Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum organised, but it is now scheduled for 2nd December. Following our August break, we are preparing to get busy again. In September we have our talk on 'The Logistics of the East Africa Campaign', details on the back page, followed immediately by three days at MK Museum where our display forms part of the MK Heritage event. Mike is running the CWGC tours of Bletchley, Cranfield and Wolverton cemeteries, so plenty to look forward too. Hopefully, some of you managed to make it to the seaside, like the characters in the wartime postcard above, but, holidays over, our main emphasis is now on our October seminar. We are really pleased with the venue and the lineup of speakers, lots of interest and variety, and the displays are looking great. At the current time ticket sales are low, so please get yours asap!

Milton Keynes WFA Seminar



14th October 2023 - Bletchley Masonic Centre
9.30am - 4.30pm

Renowned expert speakers covering an exciting variety of aspects of the Great War, including Alexandra Churchill: 'The Hejaz Railway', Peter Hart and Gary Bain: 'Laugh or Cry: Life or Death in the Trenches', Michael O'Brian: 'Gabriel D'Annunzio - The Pirate of Buccari' and Helen Frost: 'The Women's Land Army in WW1'. Buffet lunch included plus tea, coffee and biscuits throughout the day. Book stall, militaria and branch displays. Tickets available online from Eventbrite - £30:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417>



August



4783 Private James Ross Duperouzel, 51st Battalion, AIF KIA 14/16 August 1916 (Bill's uncle)

James Ross Duperouzel was born in July 1897 and grew up on the family farm in Western Australia. In December 1915, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force at Perth. Due to his young age, he got his parents' consent to enlist for active service overseas. On 1 April 1916, Duperouzel embarked from the port of Fremantle on board the troopship Ulysses. He disembarked in Egypt, and after training he sailed for France and arrived at Marseilles in June. Here Duperouzel joined the 51st Battalion, and during July, his battalion trained and marched toward the Somme front. Duperouzel's battalion was part of the 1st Anzac Corps and was

given the task of breaking through the German lines and driving a wedge behind the German salient there. Their objective was taking Mouquet Farm, at Pozieres. On the night of 13 August 1916, Jim's battalion moved into position to the east of Mouquet Farm. The following day, despite a heavy Allied artillery barrage, four German machine-guns were still firing when the first men leapt out of the trenches and into no man's land. The Germans shelled the Australian lines heavily. At some point between 14 and 16 August 1916, Duperouzel was killed in action. He was 19 years old. Duperouzel's remains were never identified. His name is inscribed on the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery in France.





Mentioned in Despatches

Michael O'Brien talk

On July 21st the excellent Michael O'Brien (remember his talk on Baron Von Trapp?) visited us again to present his talk entitled 'Britain's Unruly Stepchildren', the story of some of the Americans who joined the conflict before America officially entered the war.

Before America entered the war in April 1917 Woodrow Wilson with his neutrality act was trying to keep some sort of political balance, especially as a vast number of American citizens were of German descent. In fact any American who went to Europe to fight for a foreign government stood to lose their citizenship (This happened to communists after the war who were deported back to Russia). There were ways around this. The vast majority, and we are talking about 20 - 30 thousand, crossed the border and joined the Canadian forces, but a smaller number did travel to Europe to join the British or French forces. As Michael said, the 'toffs' pulled strings and talked their way in, others 'just winged it'. Churchill for one was all in favour, he thought that 'blood sacrifice' would help to bring America in.

When the 'travellers' to Europe made their way to the recruiting office, a similar experience to underage volunteers was encountered. For example, R Derby Jones, attempting to join The Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment, and giving his birthplace to the recruiting officer as being in America, was turned down. As he left the recruiting office, the sergeant on duty suggested he returned the following day, but to think carefully about his place of birth. The next day Jones returned and saw the same officer. "Where were you born?" came the question. "Cambeta Island "(Canada) returned Jones. "Sign here." The officer who recruited James Hall, later to become a Hollywood scriptwriter in the 1920s, actually told him to say he was English.

Any American who did join up could ask to be sent home at any time. When America did join in this clause did not apply any more. In his research Michael found this could cause problems. Harry Allgood from Georgia joined the King's Liverpool Regiment, However Harry is not on the Regimental roll. Despite this the Chaplain of the regiment wrote to the family saying that Harry had been killed with the Liverpool Brigade. Despite this there was no mention of this in his father's obituary. After 1917 there is no mention of Harry at all. Michael wondered if he had deserted and lived afterwards under an assumed name. Many Americans worked their passage over on ships transporting animals. (This suited the ship's captains too as they didn't have to pay wages for the trip home). Often these Americans joined The Liverpool Irish, because the recruiting office was the first that they would come across when they stepped off the ship in Liverpool Docks.

Harold Marion Crawford-Stowe (whose son played one of the officers in 'Lawrence of Arabia') didn't fancy business at home so worked with great success in a rubber plantation in Malaya. He travelled to England in 1914 to get married, and when war broke out joined the Irish Guards. He became the bombing officer. In June 1915 he was in charge of training men in grenade throwing. The grenades they were using were button operated. Behind him a line of men waited in turn for their throw. The

nineteenth in line had been nervously fiddling with his grenade while he awaited his turn and had pressed the button. The grenade exploded, killing both of them. At that time military pensions were reduced if death had not occurred on the battlefield. Harold's widow went to her friend Lord Sudeley who managed to change the law to include all deaths. Some of the Americans Michael included in his talk had led really colourful lives. One example was John Prentice Poe, cousin of Edgar Allen Poe. John was a star American football player but dropped out of college to go and fight in Cuba. When hostilities there finished, he returned home and became a gold miner and then a deputy sheriff. When war broke out between Nicaragua and Honduras John decided to join the action but didn't know what side to fight on. The first ship he could get on sailed to Honduras, so that was the side he joined. The war soon fizzled out and John returned home. The outbreak of WW1 found him in Dublin, where he joined up, claiming to be related to a famous Irish family. He joined the Garrison Artillery but managed to charm his way into the Black Watch, partly because the artillery was too far back from the action, but also so he could wear a kilt. This colourful character then was involved in the Battle of Loos, thought by many to be worse than the Somme, less troops but higher casualties. John was carrying a box of grenades when he was shot in the stomach and killed. He is remembered on the Loos Memorial.

Another American who was told at the recruiting Office to come back the next day as a Canadian was William Nicholls. Born into an influential family he attended a military academy known as The Citadel. He made a poor student but a popular one and being a social success was a big advantage, although he graduated 49th out of a class of 51. He then transferred to The Naval Academy in Indianapolis, but found peacetime there very boring, so when war broke out in Europe he resigned his commission, made his way to England and joined the Field Artillery. William was killed by a bursting shell on the second day of the Battle of Loos, and his grave was lost during the fighting. The arrival at home of his 'Death Penny' caused great excitement as the King had sent it. One American who had already lived for five years in England found it easier to enrol. Harold Chaplin was an actor, playwright and producer, giving the young Noel Coward his first role. Because of his religious beliefs Harold joined an ambulance unit. At first he was happy to go to the front, describing his experiences in letters home, and in pictures and sketches he sent home to his young son. (These letters were published after the war).



Harold Chaplin.

Eventually the horrible sights he witnessed darkened his mood, and he started drinking, describing casualties in his letters home as stage sets. During an attack on the 27th September all the available stretcher bearers were either killed or disabled. Answering a call for volunteers, Harold went out into No Man's Land in search of a wounded British officer. Shot in the ankle he continued, only to be killed by a bullet in the head from a German sniper. Michael went on to describe the lives and adventures of several other Americans, the youngest being William Chadwick, who was turned down by the American Army as being too young, travelled to Europe to join the British, and was killed near Cambrai aged 15, and Roy O'Brian, who succumbed to Spanish Flu aged 16. Michael concluded his talk with his favourite character, because of his name, Braxton Bigelow. He was working in Peru as a mining engineer when war started, and the German Bank there refused to settle his wages, so in revenge Braxton travelled to England and employed his skills in a tunnelling company, the 170th. Sent to explore German tunnels, he discovered and captured two Germans who he sent back. Finding another German, he made his prisoner disclose the position of a ladder that led up into No Man's Land. Braxton went up the ladder to emerge in the middle of a fierce firefight, and that was the last time he was seen alive.

Thanks again to Michael for a thoroughly entertaining talk, we are looking forward to another of his talks at our seminar in October.

New book.

Paul Foster emailed MK WFA with the news that he has completed a further trilogy in his series entitled 'In Continuing & Grateful Memory'. The books are based on the cemeteries in the Essex Farm sector.

- 1 Duhallows ADS and Essex Farm
- 2 Bard Cottage
- 3 La Brique Nos 1 & 2 and Talana Farm

Some information (flyer) is attached, and more information is available at his website:

<https://www.remembering1418.com/>

His next project is a book on the boys soldiers commemorated on Thiepval Memorial. He has already undertaken considerable research and have a good database of names and has researched all those recorded as 17 or under recorded by the CWGC and checked if the ages given are correct. A good number were inaccurate (due to scanning errors) and so far he has found nearly 100 additional names. He asks that if any of us know of additional unknown boy soldiers he would be pleased and grateful to learn of them.

MK WFA Seminar

Our seminar is fast approaching (See the front page) and we are now concentrating on advertising the event. We are hoping that WFA members who perhaps live too far away or are unable to make our Friday meetings will make a special effort to attend the Seminar. There are over eighty on our 'books' and it would be brilliant to meet you all! Tickets are £30 and are available via Eventbrite, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417>

Please click on the above link to get your tickets, and spread the word amongst family and friends. If anyone can print a poster off and display it, that would be brilliant.

Donations for the raffle, and any militaria books from any period very, very welcome!

**NEW.
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by Paul Foster, FRSA

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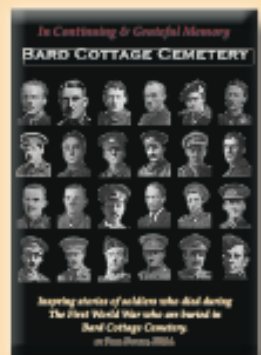
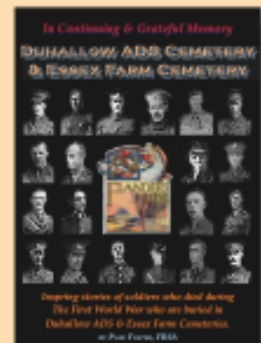
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NEWLY UPDATED AND IMPROVED WEBSITE

www.remembering1418.com

I have considerably improved and expanded my website that I hope you will use and enjoy. There is a photo gallery of covering a number of interesting events that will continue to be expanded. The Contacts & Museums section is considerably expanded providing much more information than before.



How to Wrap Your Pigeon

(A visit to the Signals Museum, RAF Henlow)

Earlier in the year I went with Milton Keynes Aviation Society on a visit to the Signals Museum at RAF Henlow. Well stocked with much interesting old equipment, this Museum tells the story of RAF signals, giving insight into equipment that was developed during World War 1 and through the '20s and '30s, as well as from World War 2 and beyond - making it a comprehensive history of RAF electronic developments. Curators were on hand to talk about the various exhibits. It was a small museum, but jam packed with radios, radar and communications equipment, much of it working. If you would like to go you need to be quick. RAF Henlow, and the Signals Museum, are due to close, the museum staying open until next May.



RAF Henlow from the air, 1918

Henlow was chosen as a military aircraft repair depot in 1917 and was built by MacAlpine during 1917 and 1918. Four Belfast Hangars and numerous workshops were erected. Intended as a repair depot for aircraft from the Western Front, the Station officially opened on 18 May 1918 when Lt Col Robert Francis Stapleton-Cotton arrived with a party of 40 airmen from Farnborough. Initially it was a depot to repair and construct aircraft and train the men who would be doing this work. After the war the parachute testing unit moved to Henlow, followed by the Officers Engineering School in 1927. In 1924 Henlow became the home of the School of Aeronautical Engineering. (The inventor of the jet engine, Sir Frank Whittle was a student at the school). In 1938, No.13 Maintenance Unit was established, responsible for assembling, repairing and modifying front line aircraft for the RAF. In WW2 Henlow returned to its original role as a repair base and was also used to assemble Hawker Hurricanes which had been shipped from Canada in shipping containers. Hurricane fighters were also dismantled there to be shipped to Malta. Henlow played a major role in the war effort, and it became one of the largest maintenance units in the country. As well as Hurricanes, Spitfires, Hampdens, Whitleys, Lancasters and Mosquitos were also handled here.

Of course, we are concentrating on the First World War here, and this is my favourite piece of communications equipment that I found at the museum.



I shall try and get a copy of the Pigeon Service Manual for the MK WFA library - bound to be a hit! Homing pigeons have been used to carry messages since ancient times, although the instincts which allow them to find their way home are not really understood. Magnetoreception (an ability to detect a magnetic field to perceive direction, altitude or location) may play a part in determining direction, as well as keen sight, ability to identify landmarks, and a superior memory. (Pigeons cannot keep flying to their home base in the dark or in poor visibility such as fog.)



'A pigeon takes flight - Illustrated London News -16th March 1918.

Messenger pigeons have numerous advantages in wartime. They are easy to transport, eat very little and can travel quickly. They are not easily distracted from their task and if captured, there is no evidence of their origin or destination. With an average speed of around 90 kilometres per hour over moderate distances, they are faster than a runner, a cyclist or a man on horseback. During the First World War were most commonly used by the British Expeditionary Force to send messages from the front-line trenches or advancing units. However, pigeons were carried and used successfully in aircraft and ships, in aircraft often as a distress signal. The Illustrated London News ran an article that explained that 'every seaplane carries two birds, to send duplicate emergency messages...they replace wireless in small vessels, and some sea planes.' Another pigeon was responsible for saving lives at sea, after a 'flying boat and hydroplane got into difficulties in stormy weather.' With all lives on board threatened, one paper tells of how a pigeon was released with a message requesting help. 'In the teeth of a fierce wind the gallant bird fought its way home, only to die from exhaustion on its arrival.' But the message was safely delivered; 'assistance was sent with all speed, and the lives of both crews were saved.'



A pigeon is released from a seaplane - Illustrated London News 16th March 1918

Meanwhile, former cricketer Harold Gilligan got into difficulties whilst flying over the German Fleet, his aircraft having been struck by a piece of shrapnel. The aircraft made a crash landing in the sea, and four pigeons were sent to cover the enormous distance home - some 400 miles. The Nottingham Journal reports how 'only one of the birds got through,' the distance being so great, and the weather condition being so awful. Finally, the exhausted pigeon landed on the coast of Norfolk, and was found by the coastguard. The airmen were eventually rescued after three days.

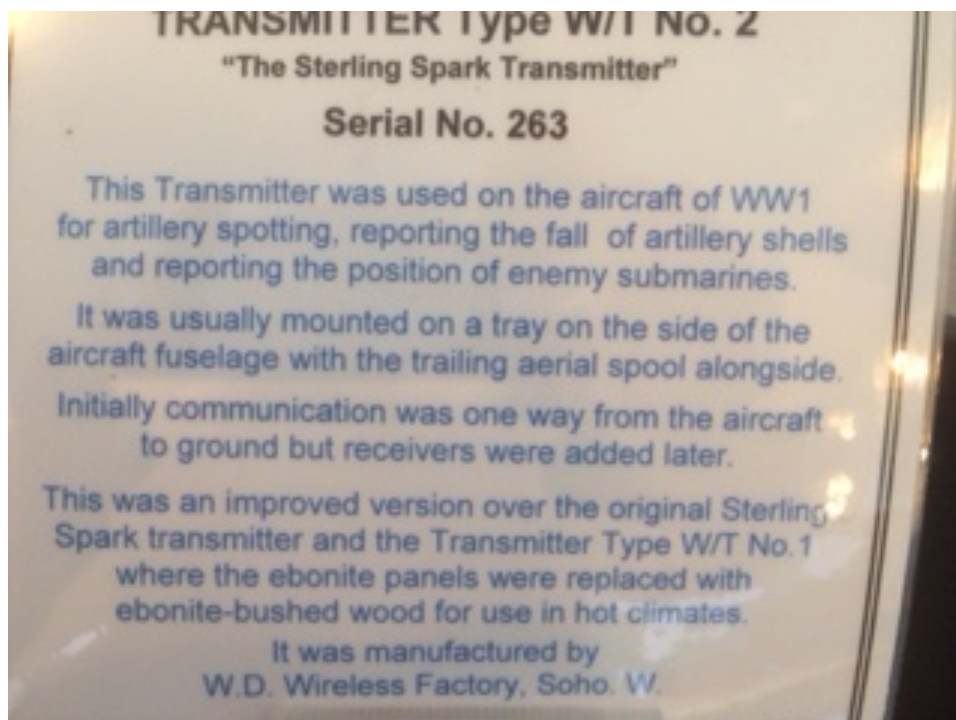
Our little pigeons were carried in the aircraft wrapped in paper, as the diagram shows, to be released by hand when needed. There was no room in an early aircraft for a bulky wicker basket.

Reconnaissance and observation were the prime purpose of aircraft at the beginning of the war. Various methods were tried to enable the pilot or observer (depending on the type of plane used) to communicate with the ground, and homing pigeons were just one of the methods employed. From actually landing, to dropping messages with a streamer attached, in weighted bags or even in a bottle,

to flares, signalling mirrors and even certain aerial manoeuvres were all tried, with varying degrees of success. By 1915, wireless radio had been developed. The RAF used the Sterling Transmitter. To save weight, the Sterling was a Transmit only radio. By leaving the receiver tubes, wiring and other components out of the set, weight was cut nearly in half. Improvements continued to be made, and by 1918, the first air to air transmission and receiver were made.



The Museum's collection has a few items from the very early years of radio, including a Sterling spark transmitter as used by WWI reconnaissance aircraft. By the outbreak of WWI the army had a small number of wireless sets. These were mainly heavy, cumbersome, unreliable spark transmitters which operated on long wave. In 1914 the Royal Flying Corps began to use wireless to direct artillery fire. An example of the Marconi transmitter - which would fit into an aircraft and send morse signal to be picked up on the ground - is seen above. This was soon followed by Sterling Spark Transmitter number two.





The wartime sets evolved into the Transmitter Type T21C, introduced in the 1920s

Henlow is a good choice for the location of the Signals Museum as it has a long-standing connection with Signals and Radar engineering. After the War, emphasis on aircraft production declined and a new rôle was found for Henlow. No.13 MU was disbanded in 1947 and in 1950, the Radio Engineering Unit (REU) was established with the responsibility for installing ground radio and telecommunications equipment throughout the RAF. The REU also supplied, repaired and calibrated a vast range of radio equipment at home and overseas. In 1980, a detachment of the RAF Support Command Signals HQ was formed at Henlow. This grew steadily until in 1981 it was split into two parts, one of which was the RAF Signals Engineering Establishment (RAFSEE), with a task to design, manufacture and install worldwide communications, ground radars and other airfield navigational aids to meet the operational needs of the RAF. In 2000, RAFSEE became the Directorate of Engineering and Interoperability (DEI) a branch of the DCSA. This changed yet again in 2007 but Henlow now provides communications facilities for all three services.

RAF Henlow celebrated its Centenary in May 2018. It is the only RAF Station that opened in WW1 that has had continuous service for the whole period, and it opened as an RAF Station only 1 month after the inauguration of the RAF on April 1 1918. The Station is now set for closure and sale, let's hope that at least some of its amazing heritage will be preserved.

Bibliography

<https://signalsmuseum.uk/>HenlowHistory>

<https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2020/07/03/brave-pigeons-of-wartime/>

<https://www.royalsignalsmuseum.co.uk/ww1-ww2-communications/>

World War One in Objects, 15. Wire Cutters.



Folded

Open

Shown above is a new addition to our display, a pair of original British wire cutters from the First World War. These were donated by Jane and Roy, having been purchased previously as part of their displays at various events and steam fairs when they were 'in charge'. Wire cutters were an essential piece of equipment for both sides, barbed wire in great swathes posed a significant obstacle to attacking troops, trapping them and making them easy targets, and they were also essential for maintaining 'friendly' wire in the defensive role. Some cutters had long wooden handles to create plenty of 'bite', others worded for easy carriage and storage, often in a canvas pouch on a utility belt, like the example shown below. One of my favourite film extracts is in 'Warhorse', where a Tommy and a German meet in the middle of No-Man's-Land to rescue the entangled Joey. Their shouted pleas for a wire cutter results in a veritable hail of cutters hurled by both sides desperate to help in the rescue attempt.

The outbreak of World War I led to a revolution in modern warfare, and the use of barbed wire on the battlefield was one of the many technologies relied upon to hamper the enemy's attack. Used by American cattle ranchers since the 1870s, barbed wire was adapted on the Western Front to serve a more gruesome purpose than containing livestock. Transformed into a weapon of war, it was shaped to create deadly obstacles in the path of assaulting enemy troops. Meant to trap, maim, and make easy targets of the opponent, they ranged from a single strand of wire arranged to trip men in the dark, to a 150-metre-long construction 30ft wide (9.1m) and 5 or 6ft (1.5 or 1.8m) tall. By the spring of 1915, barbed wire entanglements were an unavoidable element in trench warfare and posed a serious threat to all men going 'over the top'



Cutters with pouch



Wooden handled cutters.

The integration of barbed wire as an instrument of war required the formation of tactical teams, or wiring parties. Barbed wire defences needed to be maintained frequently, as shrapnel often cut the wire, or the enemy had sabotaged it during battle or the night before. Workers did not just deal with the actual wire; they also had to clear the entanglements of any bodies or body parts. Under the cover of darkness, often one-third of units stealthily climbed out of the trenches to perform maintenance on their wires, as well as investigating the status of the enemy's. They were charged with the task of repairing damaged wire and reconstructing the line if necessary. In addition, these working parties attempted to cut and destroy the enemy's wire in the hopes of preventing their troops from being stopped in the middle of no man's land during the next attack, and all through this absolute silence was essential, even though the wire could make a noise when it was severed. From as early as 9pm and as late as 3am, they were like 'so many animals, working during the night and sleeping by day'. As the war progressed, it became 'regular routine', one of the most tedious but deadly, nerve-racking and difficult duties to perform. Good wire cutters were essential equipment.



Interested in WW1?



We want YOU on the 14th October!

at the Milton Keynes WFA Seminar. (9.30am - 4.30pm)

Everyone is welcome to this special day where we have four fascinating talks -

Alexandra Churchill: 'The Hejaz Railway'

Peter Hart, Gary Bain: 'Laugh or Cry: Life or Death in the Trenches'

Michael O'Brian: 'Gabriel D'Annunzio -The Pirate of Buccari'

Helen Frost: 'The Women's Land Army '

Buffet lunch included, plus refreshments throughout the day.

Militaria and branch displays, plus second-hand book stall (cash please). Anyone interested in the First World War will find plenty to attract their attention.

Bletchley Masonic Centre 263 Queensway, Bletchley, MK2 2BZ. Tickets available online from Eventbrite - £30: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/milton-keynes-wfa-seminar-2023-tickets-641303294417> Enquiries: wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com

A Corner of a Friendly Field - The 'Gate' Group, Part 3

Western Underwood

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.

The small but extremely pretty village of Weston Underwood is situated on the road from Northampton to Olney, at the centre of the parish, and lies along a high ridge of ground overlooking the river. It consists principally of stone-built and thatched cottages and is well known for being the residence of the poet Cowper from 1786 to 1795. His house, Weston Lodge, which stands halfway up the street, is a good-sized 17th century building of stone with a tiled roof and remains practically unaltered since his day. (The pub, The Cowper's Arms, is well worth a visit!)

At the south-west end of the village is the church of St. Laurence. The nave of this Medieval church probably incorporates part of the walling of a 12th century church to which aisles were added about the middle of the 13th century. The chancel arch was rebuilt in the first half of the 14th century, but by the middle of the century its restoration was undertaken by John Olney, lord of the manor, about 1368, in which year the church was refounded. Over the next twenty years the chancel and nave arcades were rebuilt, largely with the old material, the clearstory added, and new windows inserted in both aisles. The tower and north porch were added about the middle of the 15th century. The church was restored in 1891. 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.



This photo is of the back of the church, with the CWGC headstone of Private Perkins in the foreground. His is the grave that we have come to honour, but there are plenty of other echoes of WW1 to be found here. You need to enter the churchyard from the main road, either through the barred gate or over the stone steps. Head down the path towards the porch and almost immediately on your left is a large, grey, stone tombstone, which tells a tragic story. The wording runs - In loving memory of Mary Stewart, who died 20th June 1915 aged 30 years, also of Gerald Stewart, Captain Seaforth Highlanders, killed in action near Arras 9th April aged 25 years, and of Western Stewart, Captain, Seaforth Highlanders, died of wounds at Beaulencourt 27th March 1918, aged 24 years. Also commemorated, and buried here, is their mother Marjory, who died in 1921 aged 69 and their father, Stephen, who died in 1923 aged 80. One son survived, but what sadness is reflected here.

From the Bucks Standard. Apr. 21st 1917 'Serving with the Seaforth Highlanders, during the British advance near Arras, whilst leading his men in a charge Second Lieutenant Gerald Stewart, aged 25, was killed by a bullet on Monday, April 9th, 1917. He was the third son of William and Marjory Stewart, of Weston Underwood, one of his brothers being a captain in the Seaforth Highlanders, and another in the Canadian A.S.C. Having joined the Bedfordshire Yeomanry at the beginning of September 1914, in March 1915 he was granted a commission in the 6th Seaforth Highlanders, and after being sent to France in July 1916 he became gazetted Temporary Captain, in command of a Company from November last.'

Bucks Standard Nov. 16th. 1918 - 'Information has been received from the Red Cross that 25 year old Captain Weston Stewart, of the Seaforth Highlanders, died of wounds on Wednesday, March 27th in a German Field Hospital at Beaulencourt. He had been posted as missing on March 25th and at the time of the engagement in which he was wounded he was acting Major of the regiment. The youngest son of William and Marjory Stewart, of Weston Underwood, he joined the Forces at the outbreak of war, and after a few months was gazetted to a commission in the Seaforths. He took part in much of the severe fighting in France, and his brother, Lieutenant Gerald Stewart, was killed on April 9th 1917 at Arras. His eldest brother is serving in the Canadian Forces.'

Carry on following the path which curves round the end of the church to the back. Here you need to pause for a moment to take in the magnificent view from the churchyard of the fields of the floodplains stretching out beyond. Straight ahead of you, nearly at the end of the churchyard, by the tallest clump of trees you will see a solitary CWGC headstone. This is the last resting place of 22053 Private William Cyril Perkins, Bedfordshire Regiment, who died 3rd December 1915 aged 29 years.



On his gravestone William is shown as a member of the Bedfordshire regiment, but on the CWGC site it also carefully adds Training Depot. William was the son of Frederick, a stone quarry labourer, and Emma Perkins of Western Underwood, and husband of May Lilian Perkins of 9, Cowper Street, Olney. The Roll of Honour places William in the 3rd Battalion. Most sources state that William died at home but do not give a cause of death. However, the Ampthill Camp diary for December gives his death as 'Died of Wounds' (see below). The other soldier mentioned, Leonard Petit, died of wounds received in action at Etaples. I can only assume that William received his wound(s) in a training accident at Ampthill and later succumbed at home. (Evidently there is one surviving relative in the village who might know the full story, but this relative is very frail and has just gone into a home.) There is a James Perkins, died 1922 aged 84 buried just beyond William.



Shown above is a photo of the Training Camp at Amphill and included below for interest are the details from the camp diary for December 1915.

'18641 Lance Corporal George E. Peters - left the camp last July for France and writes "The draft remained at the base a week, attached to the 4th Entrenching Battalion, At first we had four hours a day trench digging, and afterwards eight hours daily tree felling, wiring, etc., with a few fatigues thrown in. We were billeted in a wood, twelve of us in a bell tent. The circumstances were often full of difficulties but the boys all worked with a will, and remembered the Duke's parting words, 'Don't Grumble.'" The writer goes on to state that they have been in the trenches a number of times. Speaking of the future he says "We all recognise that we have a very enemy to contend with, but that doesn't disconcert us in the least. We are all prepared for a smack at Fritz, and he will have to be up early in the morning to catch the Amphill boys. Thanks to the splendid training at the camp, we can hold our own with any draft we have seen, and we have been complimented on our smartness."

- **Killed in Action**
- 19024 Private Charles Bettles of Eaton Socon on December 1
- Captain Rupert Harold Gretton (30) of Cowes on December 17
- **Died of Wounds**
- 22053 Private William Cyril Perkins (28) of Weston Underwood on December 3
- 18030 Lance Corporal Leonard Edwin Pettit (25) of Bletsoe on December 28'

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GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.

London Area **Command**

36/15647

Name of Cemetery **WESTON UNDERWOOD (ST. LAURENCE) CHURCHYARD** Report Number **London 984**

(10) Parish **WESTON UNDERWOOD with RAVENSTONE** Certified Correct and Complete Schedule Number **1**

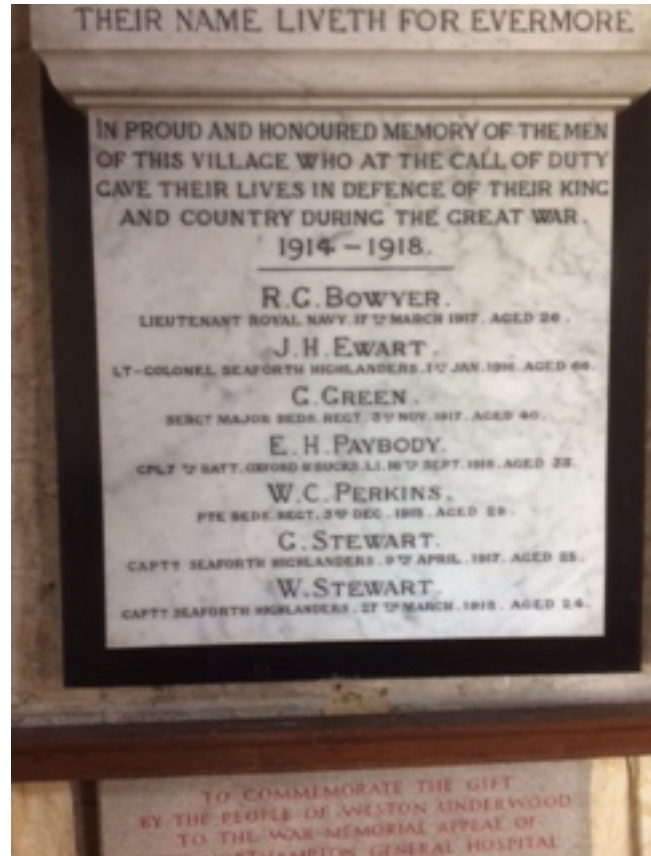
County **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE** Signature *[Signature]* Temp. Area Inspector **London Area** Category of Graves **d**

Unit	Regtl. No.	Name	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Number or letter of			Type of Memorial	Type of Grave	Remarks
					1st	2nd	3rd			
Trn. Depot Beds Reg.	22053	PERKINS	Pte. W.A.	3.12.15				M.W.	Pr.	
		<i>N/M</i> <i>W. Underwood</i> <i>Mrs M. L. Perkins</i> <i>Weston Underwood</i> <i>Olney, Bucks</i>								

Certified that a plan of this churchyard is not necessary.

[Signature]
Temp. Area Inspector
London Area

It seems that the church is usually locked, but during my visit, whilst I was studying the gravestones in the churchyard, I was fortunate enough to be approached by Jeremy, the churchwarden, who was busy strimming the grass but made the time to come over and see if he could assist in any way. I explained why I was there, and he immediately unlocked the church and showed me around inside, where there were several interesting plaques relating to the Great War, and the village war memorial. Jeremy's family had been in the village for several generations, and he had a wealth of knowledge on the subject. He is often on site, especially at weekends, so if you visit and are lucky enough to bump into him, he will happily show you around.



From 'The Bucks Standard'. April 15th 1916.

A letter addressed to the editor;

"Dear Sir, During the winter months the village of Weston Underwood has shown its sense of public spirit and patriotism by organising a fortnightly whist drive with a minimum entrance fee of 6d. The amount thus realised, viz., £5 10s., has all been sent to swell the funds of the Red Cross and St. John Ambulance. It is now proposed to carry on as long as possible a similar effort in favour of our County Regiments, the Bucks Battalion and Bucks Yeomanry. May I through your valuable paper suggest that other villages and towns interested in the regiments should follow the example of Weston Underwood, and thus help to send those many comforts which our brave men sorely need at the Front? I have been asked to collect money for the Bucks Territorial Units Comforts Fund in the villages of Lavendon, Cold Brayfield, Olney, Newton Blossomville, Clifton Reynes, Emberton, Sherington, Chicheley, Hardmead, Astwood and Weston Underwood, by concerts, whist drives, or any form of entertainment. The comforts are to be extended to the Bucks Yeomanry. I shall be glad to receive moneys for the above and will acknowledge the same from time to time in your columns. Yours, &c.,

EVA M. BOWYER. Weston Manor - Olney, Bucks, 13th April, 1916."

One of the plaques that Jeremy told me about was to Blair Swannell, the only rugby player to play internationally for England and then Australia.

From 'The Bucks Standard 1915 May 8th

News has been received of the death of Major Blair Swannell, of the 1st Brigade, Australian Imperial Forces. He was killed in action at the Dardanelles on Sunday, April 25th, 1915, and during his previous military career served through the Boer War. A native of Weston Underwood, he had been born on August 20th, 1875, at Cowper Cottage, and was well known in the district. In his earlier days he was one of the best-known Rugby footballers in the Midlands, playing first for Olney, and later for Northampton. He is buried in Turkey, but a plaque to his memory was placed in the parish church at Weston Underwood.



Blair Swannell was one of the most colourful and adventurous men ever to have played for Northampton Saints. In 1899, he was selected to play for the British & Irish Lions against Australia - making him not only the Club's first Lion, but also their first international. He toured twice with the Lions - to Australia in 1899, and to Australia and New Zealand in 1904. Swannell's appearances for the Club were restricted to 116 due to travelling the world in the merchant navy, the Boer War, and other overseas adventures - but he made his mark. A legendary character, he was loved at Saints but feared by opponents. His record with the Lions is as good as any, playing in seven Tests and winning six. After the 1904 tour he stayed in Sydney to teach at St Joseph's College. He played regularly for local Sydney clubs and New South Wales, and became the first Saintsman to play for the Wallabies in 1905 against New Zealand. Having earlier served in the Boer War, Swannell joined the 1st Battalion, Australian Infantry in 1914 and was given the rank of major. He was killed by a Turkish sniper while leading his men at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

Major B. I. Swannell (centre) in Egypt in 1915. On his right is future VC recipient, Australian Alfred Shout.





From 'The Bucks Standard' March. 24th 1917.

Aged 26, aboard H.M.S. Paragon, Lieutenant Richard Grenville Bowyer, the second son of Lieutenant Colonel and Mrs. W. G. Bowyer, of Weston Manor, Olney, was killed in action on the night of Saturday, March 17th, 1917. His last encounter with the enemy is described in the Admiralty announcement issued on March 19th;

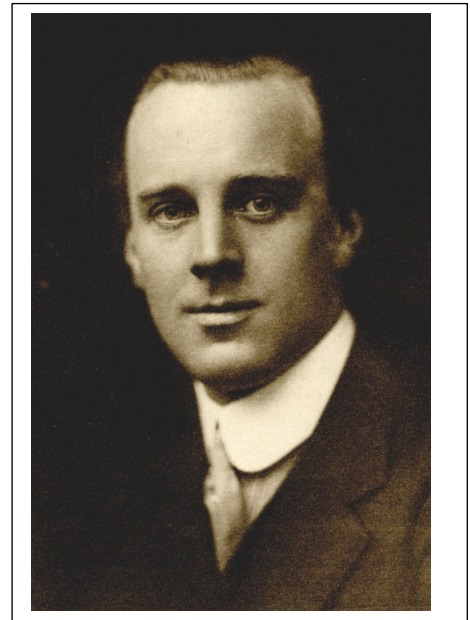
"At almost the same time (ie. during the night of the 17th-18th) enemy Destroyers engaged one of our Destroyers on patrol to the eastward of the Straits of Dover, sinking her with a torpedo. She returned the fire, using torpedoes and guns. The result is not known. There were eight survivors from the crew, but all the officers were drowned."

The third son of Lieutenant Wentworth Grenville Bowyer, and Eva Bowyer, of Weston Manor, Lieutenant Bowyer had entered the Navy through H.M.S. Britannia in 1905, and having been present at the battle of Jutland was afterwards given command of a destroyer. His brother, Lieutenant J. Bowyer, R.N., would be given command of H.M.S. Nonsuch, and continuing a naval theme at St. Augustine's Church, Dovercourt, Essex, on Tuesday, November 27th 1917 his sister, Miss Betty Bowyer, would marry Lieutenant Geoffrey Hope, R.N. After the ceremony thirty blue jackets from the bridegroom's ship would draw the carriage, before after the reception the couple left by train for London, to the accompaniment of a fog signal salute.)

From 'The Bucks Standard' May 15th 1915.

News has been received that **Captain George Bowyer**, commanding the Wolverton Company, Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry (Territorial Force), was wounded on Thursday evening, May 6th, whilst in the trenches in the vicinity of Ypres. He arrived at the Military Hospital at Hampstead last Saturday, and is making good progress. The eldest son of **Colonel W. Bowyer**, of Weston Underwood, he has been attached to the Wolverton Company of Territorials for several years, and having entered his regiment as a second lieutenant, gained rapid promotion. The wound, in the right shoulder, was caused by a rifle grenade, but since the bone was not hit the condition is not too serious.

(Captain Bowyer was educated at Eton and New College, Oxford, and joined the County Territorial Regiment (the Bucks Battalion) in 1909. He served with them until he was wounded in May 1915 in Flanders. He would then become Adjutant of 3rd Bucks Battalion until in May 1916 he would again be sent to France, as Adjutant of the 2nd Bucks Battalion. He would remain in France until early 1918 when recalled by the Admiralty on special service. Awarded the Military Cross, he would be mentioned several times in despatches.)



Egerton Lowndes Wright, born 15 November 1885, was the second son of Henry Lowndes Wright and Alice Maud Wright. He was one of four brothers; Geoffrey, Philip and Frank. All four served in the war, after which their father published a memoir entitled "Four Brothers & the World War: The Private Record of their Father for his Grandchildren". Philip Wright (DSO, MC) was also in 1/1st Oxford and Bucks before moving to the staff. Egerton Wright, known as "Toddy", was educated at Winchester College between 1898-1904, where he was in the cricket team, then he studied Classics and History at New College, Oxford University, where he also represented the University in Cricket. After this he entered a firm of solicitors in Manchester. Wright married in 1911 Miss Violet Shakespear, the daughter of Major General Shakespear of Danecourt, Chalfont St Peter. They had two children: In 1914, at outbreak of war, he obtained a commission in the Bucks Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and went to France in March 1915. He served as Adjutant to his battalion and on the staff of a Brigade, an Army Corps and a Division, being twice mentioned in Despatches and receiving the Military Cross. At the end of 1916 he was appointed Brigade Major to the 6th Infantry Brigade and served in that capacity until his death. On 11 May 1918 Egerton was killed in action at Blairville, on the Somme, and buried in Barly Military Cemetery. He is commemorated on War Memorials at Winchester College, Chalfont St Peter, Weston Underwood and on the plaque shown above. His wife Violet married again, becoming Mrs J. Bowyer.

Bibliography

<https://tommysfootprints.com/tag/war-memorial/page/2/>

<http://www.buckinghamshireremembers.org.uk/https://www.roll-of-honour.com/Buckinghamshire/WestonUnderwood.html>

<https://www.northamptonssaints.co.uk/person/blair-swannell>

<https://www.mkheritage.org.uk/archive/jt/letters/docs/letters/l-weston-underwood.html>



Our next talk is 'Logistics of the East Africa Campaign' by Dr Anne Samson. Dr Samson is co-ordinator of the Great War in Africa Association and author of numerous articles and two books on the war in East, Central and Southern Africa. Her fascinating talk considers how a 'side-show' was kept provisioned over five years of fighting, with eight administrative bodies in control. Roads and rail links were few and animal diseases such as sleeping sickness resulted in manpower literally being the dominant means of transport. Some amazing statistics will be revealed.

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

September 15th, 16th, 17th - MK WFA at MK Museum Heritage event.

October 14th - MK WFA seminar. Bletchley Masonic Centre

November 11th - WFA ceremony at the Cenotaph.

November 17th - 'He Didn't Talk About It - Analysing Veterans' Silence' - Julian Walker

December 2nd - Visit to Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum.

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.