



frontline.

The newsletter of MK WFA, September 2023.



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. The photograph above is from the National Army Museum archives, World War One, East Africa (1914-1918), 1914, captioned 'British troops and locals stand with two guns salvaged from the cruiser HMS 'Pegasus' that were mounted on ox-drawn carts. The 'Pegasus' had been sunk at anchor on 20 September 1914 in Zanzibar harbour by the German cruiser 'Konigsberg'. Six of her guns were eventually salvaged and went on to be used in the East African land campaign.'

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>



September

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

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

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

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





Mentioned in Despatches

October Seminar

We are really pleased with the venue and the line-up of speakers, lots of interest and variety in the talks, and the planned displays should look great. Our MK WFA display will be there, Kevin and Keith are supplying some militaria, and Helen Frost, for her talk on the Womens' Land Army, is bringing along a laminated display of captioned photographs and contemporary documents to create an informative, respectful display that remembers the crucial work that these women did during the Great War. She is also bringing along a reproduction Landswoman uniform and a large, pull-up banner showing a Great War Land Girl wearing the standard issue uniform, so there should be plenty to see as well as hear when it is all set up. There will also be a second-hand military book stall to hopefully increase our coffers, so donations of any military or aviation books beforehand would be especially welcome, as would be any donations of raffle prizes. At the current time ticket sales, despite our efforts with publicity, are still worryingly low, so **please, please** get yours asap, (and bring some guests with you!)

Remembrance 'Frontline'

Thinking ahead to November, the edition of 'Frontline' will be our special 'Remembrance' issue. Last year we included a moving section on our relatives who were involved in the Great War, both those who fortunately survived, and those who sadly and tragically did not. (This has also formed the basis for our monthly 'Lest We Forget' page.) I intend to repeat a modified version of this article again, slimming some of the details already given down to hopefully include some new entries, so please, any new information on those relatives who were remembered last time, and especially any new 'entries' would be very much appreciated for a very close to home Remembrance for MK WFA. Gary does an excellent job of including local casualties on our Facebook page and we include as many as we can in our newsletters, but, as the saying goes, 'This time it's personal.'

Keep 'Em Coming!

'Frontline' is the newsletter of the Milton Keynes and should be especially about our members' (and friends) interests and experiences, then the impact of the First World War on our locality, and about our branch talks and events. Therefore, any articles about special connections or interests, or relatives, or battlefield visits, or local trips to places of interest, or even just a comment or addition about any talk we have had would be very gratefully received. (For example, our little series of Objects of WW1 is very nearly at an end - I have one more article in my collection to add and that's it, even though Kevin is always ready to bail me out!) A massive thanks to everyone who has helped in the past, all I can say is "Keep 'Em Coming!"

Heritage - MK WFA at MK Museum.

Amongst the host of special events are three days at MK Museum where our display forms part of the MK Museum Heritage Open Days and Beer Festival, where history comes to life: fascinating stories, memorable events, exhibits you are encouraged to touch, and lots to see for every age and interest. Four fantastic days when you can enjoy the museum with no entry charge - plus real ales and ciders.

Times: 14,15,16 & 17 September, 1030 - 1630. www.mkmuseum.org.uk



World War 1 Display by the Milton Keynes Branch of the Western Front Association. A Great War exhibition with details of local men like Wolverton's Albert French. See what life was like in the trenches and learn about the creative heritage of the Great War - displays of War Artists both official and unofficial, and poets of the time. Learn about trench art- how ordinary soldiers turned the debris of war into beautiful objects. We are there Friday 15, Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 September, so please pop along and pay us a visit. Location: MK Museum, McConnell Drive, Wolverton, Milton Keynes MK12 5EL

Mike Chapman is running the CWGC tours of Bletchley, Cranfield and Wolverton cemeteries, hopefully you will have already booked, but here is the information from the HoDs brochure just in case -

Wolverton Cemetery, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Please join us for guided tours of Wolverton Cemetery to hear about the lives of the nine casualties buried here from the First and Second World Wars, many of whom were from the Wolverton area. You will also hear about the history of the CWGC, the organisation set up by Royal Charter in 1917 to ensure that the men and women who died in the service of their country will be remembered forever more. Pre-booking is required. Sunday 10 September, www.cwgc.org/our-war-graves-your-history/what-s-happening-near-you/ www.facebook.com/commonwealthwargravescom

Tours of Bletchley (Manor Road) Cemetery

Please join us for guided tours of Manor Road Cemetery to hear about the lives of the twenty-two casualties from the First & Second World Wars buried here, many of whom were from the Bletchley and Fenny Stratford area. You will also hear about the history of the CWGC, the organisation set up by

Royal Charter in 1917 to ensure that the men and women who died in the service of their country will be remembered for ever more. Pre-booking is required.

Times: Wednesday 13 September 1030 - 1130 Saturday 16 September 1400 - 1500

Location: Bletchley (Manor Road) Cemetery, Manor Road, Fenny Stratford, Milton Keynes MK2 2HW www.cwgc.org/our-war-graves-your-history/what-s-happening-near-you/

Tours of St Peter & St Paul's Churchyard, Cranfield

Join us for guided tours of the St Peter & St Paul Churchyard in the Bedfordshire village of Cranfield. The churchyard is the final resting place of fifteen First & Second World War casualties. A number of the WW2 graves are linked to the former RAF Cranfield air station. Sign up to hear the casualties' stories and to learn about the history of the Commission. Pre-booking is required.

Times: Friday 15 September 1030 - 1130, Sunday 17 September 1400 - 1500

Location: St Peter & St Paul's Church, Court Road, Cranfield, Bedford MK43 ODR

A Trip to Stow Maries

Earlier in the year I had a tour of Stow Maries Aerodrome with the Milton Keynes Aviation Society. Many years ago, I watched an amazing wildlife programme on television that featured barn owls etc hunting in a nature reserve that turned out to be a snow-covered abandoned airfield somewhere in Essex. I was puzzled as to the identity of this airfield as I presumed it would be one of the fighter stations that formed the defensive ring around London during the Battle of Britain, and I couldn't imagine which one it could have been. It was several years later, on an earlier trip with MKAS, that the penny dropped, and I realised that this was in fact the airfield featured in the programme, not a WW2 airfield at all, but a genuine WW1 airfield that had remained almost untouched since the First World War.



View from the entrance



Several period vehicles are on display.

Stow Maries Aerodrome is a historical airfield located in the village of the same name in Essex. The airfield was built for use by the Royal Flying Corps during WW1 to defend London against attacks by Zeppelins or Gotha bombers, flying mainly BE 2cs with a smattering of other aircraft types. It has been given listed status on account of being the best-preserved airfield complete with First World War era buildings and is open to the public as a museum, going from strength to strength as a visitor attraction as more and more of the original buildings are being restored.



Relaxing in the barrack hut



Getting a dressing down!

Even more exciting, since my first pre-covid visit, is that several airworthy First World War era aircraft and vehicles are now based there. For the pilots, often inexperienced and flying at night with

only flares to mark the runway, and struggling to get anywhere near the height that the Zeppelins operated even if they could locate one, it was a very dangerous experience

In April 1918, the aerodrome was handed over to the newly formed Royal Air Force, with a complement of 219 personnel and 16 Camel aircraft assigned to No 37 Home defence squadron. Some of the buildings were not yet finished, being completed in December 1918. The domestic accommodation was furnished with enough space for 204 men and 15 women. By the time of the abandonment of the base after the Armistice in 1919, it had over 500 personnel and 36 aircraft based there. Originally the aircraft were housed in two Bessonneau Hangers, a timber and canvas construction that many early airfields employed, but these were replaced with two permanent structures in 1917. These hangers have long since disappeared, although the volunteers manning the site are hoping for a lottery grant to replace at least one of them. There is a small metal hanger and a canvas one on site which house the collection of aircraft.



Albatross and BE2C, both airworthy



An original Avro 504k, and Sopwith Tabloid.

A gap in the hedge surrounding the airfield is known as Milburn's Gap. In April 1918, Lieutenant Cyril Milburn's Sopwith Camel went through the gap after it stalled on take-off, killing the pilot. These aircraft were known to be unreliable, owing to the torque from its rotary engine, and of the ten pilots killed operating from Stow Maries, eight died in accidents, whilst two were shot down by the Royal Navy. Milburn is buried in the graveyard of the Church of Saint Mary and Saint Margaret in Stow Maries village, under his real name of Edward Gerald Mucklow. Details of many of the pilots, and memorabilia from the time are on display in the buildings around the airfield, and there is also a memorial to those who lost their lives.



Lots of recreated sites to see.



Fokker Triplane being built in the canvas hanger.

The airfield was not re-used during WW2 although it was surveyed twice, bombed by the enemy as it still looked like an airfield, and saw at least one hurricane from 242 Squadron land there after it was damaged during an aerial battle in 1940. After 1945 the buildings, grassed fields and most of the surrounding area were returned to agriculture. In 1997, the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments in England surveyed the site and found evidence of 47 buildings. At least twenty-four of the original buildings have survived and have all been given listed status. In 2009, efforts were made



by a group of enthusiasts to return the base to as close to its original state as possible, for use as a light aerodrome and museum, as it was the most complete World War I era aerodrome left in England. In 2017, it was formally opened as a museum, and has been improving and expanding ever since. There is plenty to see there, and the volunteers are very helpful and knowledgeable. Particularly evocative is the Officers Mess, with its polished wooden furniture, piano and wind-up gramophone. It takes very little imagination to transport one back to 1917. Even better is that it houses a quality cafe and a good second-hand bookshop. In the cement floor of the corridor to the toilet is a line of footprints made by some unsuspecting moggie when the floor was new-laid all those years ago. I expect it was promptly put on a charge! Stow Maries is a bit of a drive from MK but is very much worth a visit. (Perhaps that would make a good destination for us as a group?) Also check out their website for details of flying days and other special events.

Some better-quality photos, and more details on the vehicles and aircraft resident at Stow Maries, will be included in next month's 'Frontline'.

Their website address is - <https://www.stowmaries.org.uk/>

And you can view a short video of their air display here. (Ordinary open days are obviously a lot quieter!) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tO0tvnxn7vI>

Bibliography

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stow_Maries_Aerodrome

World War One in Objects, 16. British Army Water-bottle.



Shown above is another new addition to our display, an original British water bottle from the First World War, found as a battlefield relic on the Somme, and purchased by me from Gdad's Antique Centre (well worth a visit, at least two cabinets specialise in military items, and lots of other interesting items are inside - Pinewood Farm, Haversham MK19 7DP). With a capacity of two pints, this type of water bottle, with its blue enamel and cork bung, was the standard issue to the British army during the First World War and was designed to be carried with a leather strap and later a felted web cradle, on the 1908 pattern web equipment. This bottle remained army issue up to the time of Dunkirk.



The above photo is from a collection that I have about the Hull British Legion pilgrimage to the French battlefields in the 1920s. It shows the members of the party in a restored (or original?) section of trench. What is definitely original is the amount of battlefield debris that is lying around. Shrapnel damaged helmets are obviously abundant and the chap on the top middle of the trench is holding a British army issue water bottle. The cheery lady in the trench looks like she is pouring from one. (It might be a new one, or maybe they found one that still had rum in it!) My grandad is in there somewhere, but I guess he's out of shot.



The blue enamelled bottles were covered with 'shoddy' cloth, a cheap but tough material made from chopped wool compressed into a material resembling felt. Shown above are bottles with the webbing holder, and the earlier leather strap. Officer's bottles were slightly more rounded in appearance and instead of a simple cork bung had a nicely turned and furled brass hinged stopper. Of course they did!



Ten decades later, and also on a battlefield pilgrimage, are Gary, Clare, Martin, Sally, Anne and Steve; to Arras and St. Quentin with the Herts War Society. More photos and information about their trip next month.



*Did YOU go to the MK WFA Seminar
Daddy?*



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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.