

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

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CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

I would hazard a guess that most, if not all, of our branch members have at some time been the recipient of the following words from a friend or colleague: "A family member fought in WW1, any chance you could help me find out what they got up to.....?". For me, one such occasion was two weeks ago whilst fly fishing on the banks of the River Nar. Dave, a long-standing friend from Hessle on the Humber asked about his Grandfather Herbert Plummer and Great Uncle John Robert Plummer. It was believed that both had served with the East Yorks (Hull Pals). The family believed that Herbert had later served in the Engineers. Two weeks later I have just posted Dave the results. Herbert served with the East Yorks (Hull Pals) until he was seriously wounded (numerous GSW's to shoulder and back) during the battle of the Somme. Miraculously, he recovered and despite the level of his injuries, joined the Royal Engineers as a tunneller! He survived the war and despite a lifetime of pain, worked until retirement at Heathfield Quarry in Hessle. His brother John was not so lucky; after a protracted search, it transpired that he in fact served with the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards and not the East Yorks. He was KIA on the 27th November 1917 whilst attacking the Bourslon Woods, Fontaine, during the Battle of Cambrai. Despite the fact that the action resulted in the objective being reached, and the capture of 600 German prisoners, the battalion was decimated to the point that it was impossible to hold the line. As with all such regimental war diaries, this one bordered on the dry/nonchalant when describing an action that resulted in the loss of 300 of their own. I can not help but feel that we are blessed that access to research data bases are now at our fingers tips when previous generations would have spent hours travelling the country to visit libraries, museums, and regimental records. For many years I railed against technology taking us into areas that should remain untouched or 'old school'. I am minded of a heated conversation I once had with my brother on this very subject. For his benefit, I am willing to state that I will happily eat some of the words used that night provided that I can wash them down with a glass of Laphroaig!

I never tire of researching subjects such as the Plummer family, or listening to talks at the branch. I am often in awe of the level of research that goes into the preparation of an hour long talk. This was certainly evident in the two most recent talks. Jonathan Dutton's July presentation 'Working for the war', touched upon the lives of those engaged in the war effort on the home front in Norfolk. Fast paced, lively (not half!) and wonderfully humour filled, this talk packed in a huge amount of information. It was also a joy to listen to. Jonathan has agreed to return next year to cover Art in WW1. Jo Costin's August presentation of: 'Cambridgeshire Kitcheners', covered the recruitment and deployment of the Cambridgeshire men who answered Kitcheners call to arms. A revelation to me was the fact that the local recruitment board was largely made up of ladies (gentry based) at a time when such roles were dominated by men. Based on Jo's Ph.D. research, it quickly became evident that Jo is passionate about this subject. The talk was wonderfully prepared drawing on research from Newspapers, County Archives and numerous publications. At the start of the war Cambridge sent potential recruits to Ipswich. When Cambridge opened its own recruitment process, they were so lacking in suitable accommodation for the large number of recruits, that schools were requisitioned as temporary barracks. One can only imagine the issues this caused in many a local home when delighted children were the recipients of very extended holidays. After the meeting I discovered that Jo is currently researching conscientious objectors. I am hoping that the talk will be ready for next year.

FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20th October by post to Mrs J Berry, 8 Fairstead Rd, Norwich NR7 8XQ or by email jackie.berry3@btinternet.com, items can also be given at meetings.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

September 3rd Artillery conquers, infantry Occupies: British Artillery at the 3rd battle of Ypres. Simon Shephard.

October 1st Eight women and a boy - Serbia in the Great War. John Chester.

IN THE NEWS

HMS Hawke sunk by a torpedo in October 1914 has been located around 70 miles off the coast of Aberdeenshire, this does have to be confirmed by the Royal Navy but the divers seem confident it is the ship.. 500 men died after the ship exploded and sank in minutes, 70 survived.

This was the same ship that was damaged in 1911 when it was in a collision with Titanic's sister ship Olympic in the Solent.

SUFFOLK WFA

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

September 11th Deserters of the First World War the home Front - Andrea Hetherington.

October 9th Irish recruitment to the British Armed Forces 1914-1918 - Timothy Bowman

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Sebastian Faulk's Birdsong is coming to the Theatre Royal Norwich 12th to 16th November - see norwichtheatre.org for all details, tickets start at £10.

IRISH FORCES REDEDICATION SERVICES

During July several rededication events were held in France and Belgium for members of assorted Irish Regiments. Researchers had given the CWGC evidence to allow the names to be attached to unknown soldiers buried in various cemeteries, if they agreed, new headstones would be issued.

Capt Valentine Knox Gililand of the Royal Irish Rifles was buried in Divisional Collecting Post Cemetery on the outskirts of Ypres, his body was lost after the war but found and buried as an unknown officer of the Irish Rifles.

Six Royal Dublin Fusiliers who were listed as missing during the 100 Day Offensive and given named headstones at various cemeteries -

Sergeant Laurence Connell, MM, Dadizeele Cemetery

Scottish born Pte William McCann, Stasegem Communal Cemetery. William signed up as Patrick despite his older brother being Patrick and who also died in the war!

Lcpl George Washington, (English)

Lcpl James Edward Freer, (English)

Corporal Edward Doyle

Pte Bertie George Reynolds, MM (English), all side by side after being found together and buried in Hooze Crater Cemetery as unknown Dublin Fusiliers

CQMS John Doherty, MM, went missing in March 1918 serving with the Inniskilling Fusiliers. He is in Savy British Cemetery near Saint Quentin. Three of John's brothers were also killed during the war.

Finally two 2nd Lt's of the Royal Irish Fusiliers -

Joseph Bryson, MC.

William Cunningham, (Scottish). These men have now been found side by side in

Dadizeele New British Cemetery.
Bryson also had a brother killed during the war.

While looking at the various Irish regiments I found a very interesting website about the North Irish Horse in the Great War www.northirishhorse.com.au, this is a site by Phillip Tardif who has a book of the same name from Pen and Sword books.

DUDLEY PORT EXPLOSION 1922

Something perhaps never thought about by many of us, is what happened with unused munitions after the war ended. Did they just store them, they probably did not think just a few years later that we might have needed them. Did they dump them in some form or other. No they employed young women to dismantle them. One such location was Tipton near Dudley in the Midlands. In March of 1922 something went seriously wrong and a massive explosion known as the Dudley Port explosion happened. Several girls were injured with 19 dying, it turned out many girls were very young, the youngest 13 years old. Burns were said to be terrible.

It was a requirement that factories doing the salvaging of components were safe and had been inspected, and had a licence, but like everything in life if there was a way of making money some people broke the rules and this location was one such illegal site. As we have learned over the years from various talks, TV and reading where there was danger of explosion there should have been strict rules on clothing, footwear etc, not in this place though. Girls wore their own clothing and possibly had things on their person which would be very dangerous. Plus the building had an open fire!

The factory was run by the husband of the owner and because he had a record of illegal metal dealing he was sent to prison for just 5 years, far too short a sentence many felt. Despite their wealth the owners never paid all the compensation money they should have to the families and other injured persons.

The public erected a memorial to the girls killed but also carried the names of the few survivors and can be found in the Tipton cemetery.

So sad after the horrors of the war its self that years later people well away from the battle fields were still dying from war related happenings.

THE CHAVASSE SIBLINGS IN WW1

We all know of the bravery of Noel Chavasse during the war in his role as a Lt and later Captain in the Royal Medical Corps and his winning of a VC and Bar, MC, but he also had three brothers who also served as well as two sisters, one who did nursing in France and the other volunteering in England.

Sadly as we know Noel died in 1917 leaving his twin brother Christopher who served as a Chaplain. Christopher and Noel both competed in the 400 metres at the 1908 Olympics but neither got to the finals. Later Christopher became a Bishop

Francis known as Bernard also a Lt, was in the RAMC and Aidan a Lt in the King's (Liverpool Reg) 17th Battalion who died in 1917. Aidan was known to be brave by his officers and was sent out on a mission to check German wire near Sanctuary Wood in July 1917, wounded, he sent his men back but was never recovered despite several attempts by his brother who was attached to the 17th Battalion to find him. Bernard had been sent to Egypt before returning to serve in France, he survived the war dying as the result of a car accident in the early 40s .

There was also a sister Mary known as May who worked as a nurses helper and her twin Edith known as Marjorie

Both girls would go on to volunteer at a convalescent hospital run by an aunt in Worcestershire when war began. Marjorie stayed in England sending food and clothing to her brothers and helping in anyway she could the men who Noel was caring for. May decided to head to France in 1915 to work as a ward maid in the Liverpool hospital paid for and equipped by the people of Liverpool, (possibly the one known as Liverpool Merchants Mobile Hospital/ No 6 British Red Cross) built to be moveable as required, it could look after several hundred men of all ranks. May was there till 1918 and was mentioned in dispatches.

Marjorie would go on to work for Barnardo's post war, while May would become a qualified nurse and served in WW2 as part of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military nursing service.

Even more amazing was the fact that May and Marjorie would become the oldest twins to both reach 100 back in 1986, May lived until 1989, so 103. Marjorie died a year after her 100th birthday.

The family gained many medals over the wars in which they served, VC's, MM's Mc's etc but it was May who apparently had the most awards.

LOUISE DE BETTIGNIES

Also known as Alice Dubois, Louise Marie Jeanne Henriette de Bettignies was born in 1880 in France and spent her time travelling around Europe mixing with Royalty in various places. When war came she became a spy for the English and helped get men back to England through Belguim and Netherlands. She would also write letters in German for the dying German soldiers to be sent home to families.

As a spy she was good at her work, some messages were said to be written on petticoats in lemon juice and when heated with an iron, could be read. One of her final messages to the British told of a planned attack at Verdun, but though the British told the French, they would not believed the information. In October of 1915 Louise was caught by the Germans near Tournai and given a death sentence to be carried out in Brussels in March 1916. Whether the Germans were worried about a further backlash because of the killing Edith Cavell, they changed Louise's sentence

to forced labour. She died just weeks before war ended after an operation in Cologne which caused pleural abscesses which lead to her death.

As with Edith Cavell her body was returned home after the war and was buried in the cemetery at Saint-Amand-les-Eaux. To the British she was known as the Queen of Spies and posthumously awarded medals by the French and British.

I have to say her birth and working names are not familiar to me, and no doubt there are many other women who were willing to risk their lives for what they believed to be right back then that we don't know of yet.

FLIXTON AVIATION MUSEUM

My branch information source said to me about the Flixton Aviation Museum which he recently visited, a place we have not been to in 30 years I would think, as my nephew and our friend's son were still little, both are heading rapidly towards 40 now.

Despite aviation being in its infancy in WW1 there is things to see and learn about from that period and as my source said it is free to visit - donations welcome.

WETHERSPOONS - WILFRED WOOD, STOCKPORT

We have mentioned the Wilfred Wood (VC) pub before in relation to Wetherspoons but the pub has now been given an artwork with photos and locations of where soldiers lived who died in WW1 in the Hazel Grove area of Stockport. A sister and brother team researched the information and offered it to the pub who have placed it in pride of place. So if you are in the Stockport area it might be worth having a look and a bite to eat.

And Finally

Recently we met a great granddaughter of one of my mum's uncles at local history event and she said her family did not have any family photos, so my sister and I said we would have a look through what we had. In the process of doing this I came across photos taken on my very first trip to visit great uncle Alfred's grave in Bancourt, on the Somme. Around 50 years ago! I realised that the hotel name could be seen behind myself and my grandfather. It was the Hotel Beatus in Cambrai, I had often wondered if it still operated as a hotel, and it does! It still looks the same outside. Back then locals did not speak much English and our family little French, but we got through the trip somehow. I would guess English might well be spoken much more now at hotels, but still very basic French from us.....