

Branch Newsletter – April 2023

Next Meeting:

Will be on Saturday 8th April at St Peter's Collegiate School, Compton Park, Compton Rd. West, Wolverhampton WV3 9DU. 2.00pm for a 2.30 kick-off.

The speaker today is Christina Holstein: "Verdun-Recovering the Fallen". The talk looks at the aftermath of the 1916 Battle of Verdun and the enormous task of finding and dealing with the fallen of both sides.



Thanks to Andy Johnson for this contribution:

Yet another coincidence!

For the second month running a coincidence with the contents of our fine newsletter! In the February edition John Hale asked if anyone had submitted a missing name to the CWGC, the next day I had one accepted - a Tipton man - Driver John Hale no less.

In the March edition, John brought us the story of a hand-grenade in a Hong Kong crisp factory. The very next day I had a bag of salt and vinegar (always the last selected) and I'll be blowed - well you can see the photograph! Andy



Following up on Ron Cullen's piece last month on the new film "Tirailleurs":

[Click HERE for the trailer](#)

Thanks to Richard Pursehouse for bringing this campaign to our attention:

[Campaign to keep S/Ldr Scarf's VC in this country](#)

The GoFundMe page is here: [if you'd like to make a contribution](#)

They also serve:

[Story HERE:](#)



Another thoughtful piece from Nick Baker:

LSD and WWI
By Nick Baker

“The British fought the First World War using LSD (that is, pounds, shillings and pence, not lysergic acid diethylamide) a currency that coined a plethora of associated phrases. Soldiers

took the 'King's Shilling', the confrontational offered their 'Two-Penn'orth-Worth' and the desperate 'Spent a Penny' (and still do, never, perhaps surprisingly, updated to 'pee'). And there was the 'Penny Dreadful', a range of cheap publications specialising in sensation, horror, and gory illustrations which flourished as the 19th century educators strove to make the children of the mass's literate (possibly not what they had in mind). One subgenre was 'Police News'. Purporting to bring reports of law, order and justice to public attention, their diet of murder, divorce, suicide, fallen women, and pets occasionally eating their owners, fed a public appetite for prurience. Interestingly, whilst most of the 'dreadfuls' had run their course by the early 20th Century (passing on the pruriency to Sunday Newspapers, TV and nowadays on an unimaginable scale to social media), the 'Police News' varieties continued well into the 1930's. This means they cover the First World War thus making prurience historically interesting. Here is an example. What began for me as a passing prurient peep at a 1917 issue of the 'Illustrated Police News' revealed a story which is, I think, worthy of wider historical consideration.

One hugely important aspect of the dreadfuls was, of course, their illustrations. In the mid-1880's the proprietor of the 'Illustrated Police News', George Purkess, received the ultimate accolade of having his paper voted 'The Worst Newspaper in Britain' by the readers of the 'Pall Mall Gazette' (the self-styled 'Gentleman's Paper for Gentlemen'). Purkess, confident in both his business model and his huge circulation figures, mischievously granted a 'Gazette' reporter an interview. In this he was '....eager to attest to the accuracy of the depictions.' stating, "The artist, of course, always endeavors to get a view of the scene of the tragedy, outrage, suicide or accident...[although] from the very character of the incident, the imagination must be given some freedom." A couple of years later Purkess' paper and its largely anonymous artists made a fortune reporting on 'Jack the Ripper', some illustrations for which, it must be said, were remarkably accurate - leading to the suspicion half-crowns may have changed hands for a peek into the mortuary.

The sketch that caught my eye was from the 'Illustrated Police News' (now costing 'three half pence') of 13 December 1917. It has single front page drawing entitled, 'Frenzied Soldier Dashed to Death Near York'. A serviceman is shown hanging from a train window with civilians and soldiers attempting to pull him in by his legs – just as his head collides with a trackside wall. The story reported is straightforward enough. William Winning, a Private in the 2nd/Royal Scots had boarded the train at Edinburgh at 7pm bound overnight for King's Cross. Soldiers and civilians entraining at Durham had found Winning offensively drunk and smashing windows. Although he later 'calmed down', at around midnight, shortly before the train was due in York, Winning opened the carriage window and attempted to get out. Two men tried to stop him by grabbing his legs, but Winning's head struck a bridge abutment and he was dragged from their grasp. The communication cord was pulled and the mutilated corpse recovered from the trackside.



FRENZIED SOLDIER DASHED TO DEATH NEAR YORK

(Don't you just love those moustaches!)

Winning's service file has survived and offers us a deeper insight into the incident and its possible cause, as does a wider consideration of events at the time. He was born in Paisley in about 1865 and when war broke out was working as a labourer in Linlithgow, a town roughly equidistant between Glasgow and Edinburgh. At almost 50 years old, 5'1" tall and married with children, he was hardly a first-choice recruit. Yet with previous experience in the Royal Scots, including South Africa, when he volunteered on the 4 September 1914 he was eagerly snapped up by the 3rd Battalion of his old regiment. It would seem, like many ex-servicemen men at the time, Winning was happy for whatever reason (possibly financial) to re-join the Army at the outbreak of war. By the end of the month he had both been transferred to the 1st Battalion and promoted to Corporal. From there things went steadily downhill. At the Regimental Depot whilst awaiting transfer to France, Winning lost his stripe due to 'drunkenness'. He never regained it, although his weakness for drink remained. While his behavior was not completely appalling, Winning took the opportunity to get drunk if it arose and, on several occasions, received sentences of anything up to 42 days Field Punishment No.1. In November 1915 Wining was transferred to the 2nd Battalion and his record shows he spent most of his time at the base in Boulogne on 'B' (non-combat) duties. He also spent time in hospital suffering from a heel ulcer the cause of which was a previously broken leg, and debilitating bouts of hemorrhoids. All in all, the impression is gained of a man no longer up to the job of soldiering. Almost twenty years had passed since the Boer War and Winning,

now closer to 50 than 40 and a diminutive man with a hard life of military service and civilian labouring behind him, was simply 'worn out'. Being tied to a post for two hours a day for days at a time could hardly have helped. Drinking was possibly a solace. Unfortunately, he took to being drunk whilst on duty, which simply fed back into a cycle of crime and punishment. He was eventually seconded to the 'Emergency Stretcher Bearer Unit' at Windmill Camp Boulogne, presumably an unskilled job dealing with wounded arrivals and inter-hospital transfers [I am intrigued as to why this was an 'Emergency' unit – perhaps someone in the Branch can help?].

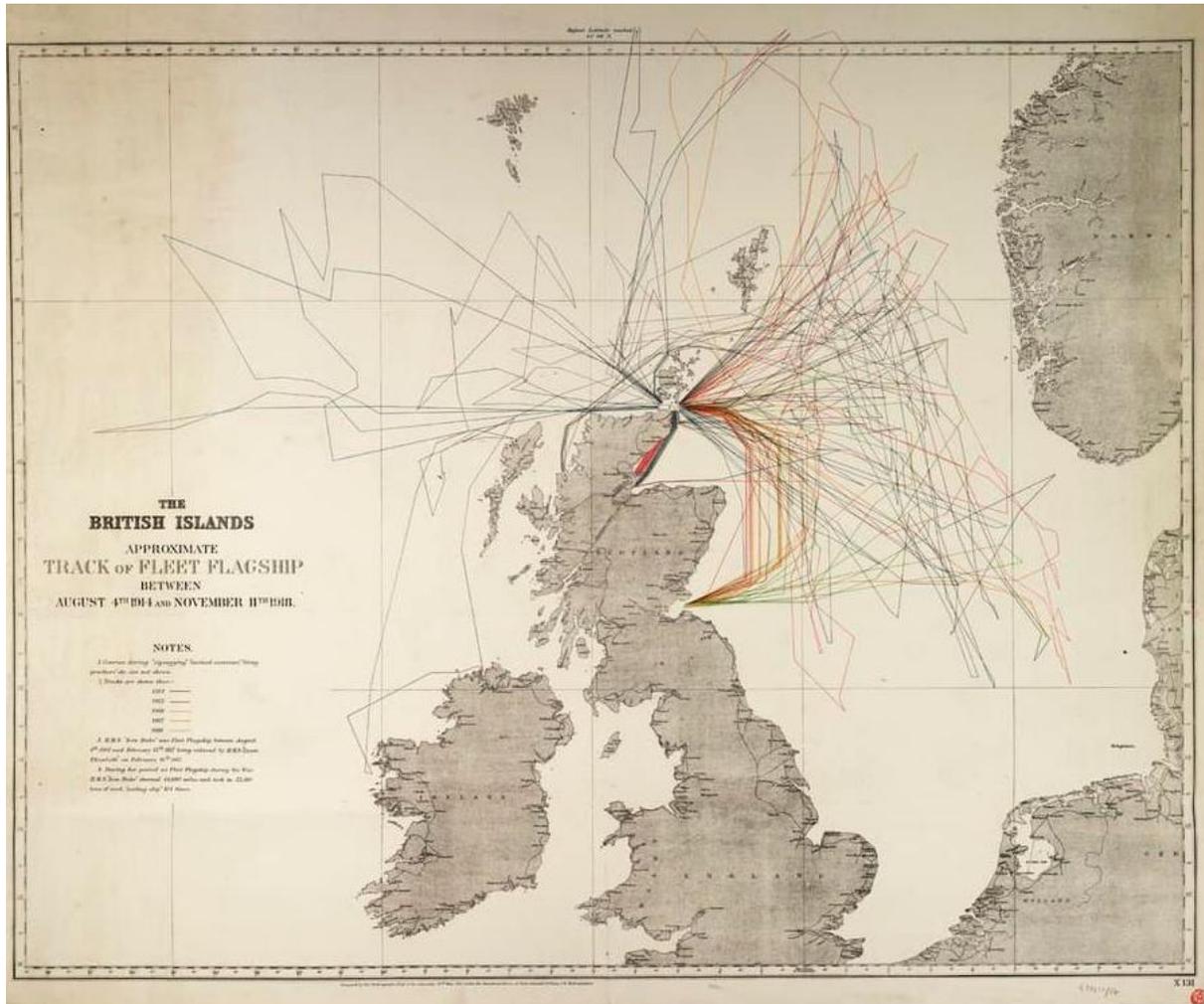
On 10 November 1917 Winning was admitted to hospital once again with hemorrhoids and whilst there was given 14 days home leave. We cannot be absolutely certain why this was granted, but there are indications that his wife Annie, now living in Dundee, was ill. Discharged from hospital on the 20th he began the long journey north. The leave appears to have passed without incident although, like many men and particularly those with extremely long journeys, he set out rather late – only leaving the afternoon before the morning he should have been back in Boulogne. He must have known he wasn't going to make it in time and that he was heading into yet more trouble. His answer was to get irresponsibly or perhaps despairingly drunk, with tragic consequences.

Two days after the recovery of Winnings' body an inquest was held in Poppleton the nearest town to the accident, a copy of which survives in his army record. His wife Annie, having been informed of his death by telegram, was required to attend even though in 'delicate health'. The various authorities involved (Amy, Police, Coroner) debated over who should pay her fare and, unnecessarily as they saw it, that of an accompanying daughter. Eventually Annie undertook the journey alone and, after identifying the badly disfigured and mutilated body of her husband, reported that as far as she was concerned he was 'a man of temperate habit'. She also stated he was 51 years of age. This is older than recorded in his army papers and implies he probably lied about his age when volunteering. This was an irrelevance to the Coroner. The other servicemen and civilians present all testified he was drunk and, despite their best efforts, thrown himself from the carriage window. A verdict of 'Death by misadventure by falling from a train window whilst under the influence of drink' was returned. At no point was suicide, which would have required consideration of Winnings' mental state, ever discussed.

As a serving soldier, Winning was entitled to a military burial. He was apparently interred in Dundee's Balgay Cemetery and although there is no known grave his name is recorded on a CWGI screen wall. His medals including a 1914-15 Star and the customary bronze 'death penny' were forwarded to his wife. One thing she did not get was a pension. The Ministry of Pensions, ever vigilant for any loophole it could exploit to avoid payment, used the Coroner's decision of 'Death by Misadventure' to conclude 'Death not due to military service', whilst, to reinforce their case, the words 'under the influence of drink' were subsequently and carefully inserted on his pension record. Although they did, as a local concession, give her a one-off grant of five pounds and, of course, they had paid her travelling expenses to the inquest. Annie Winning, clearly not grateful enough, made several attempts to gain some form of pension, but these were all turned down with a 'final, final' decision in June 1919 that she was ineligible.

Consulting the British Newspaper Archive, Pte Winning's grisly story appears in at least four different newspapers in December 1917 alone, from the *Driffield Times* to the *Cornishman*...

I have no idea where this picture came from:



It shows the peregrinations of the Grand Fleet's flagship during the entirety of the Great War. For much of this time I believe the ship in question was HMS Iron Duke, followed by HMS Queen Elizabeth. Never left its own back yard, did it?

And lastly from Andy Johnson:

Extremely Rare South Staffs Regiment book

"At the March meeting I mentioned 'The Unbreakable Coil', the very partial autobiography of Major ALK Anderson. He was a pre-war Captain in the 3rd South Staffs (Special Reserve),

as such he was mobilised in early August and by September was in France, later Belgium, with the 2nd South Staffs. He was 44 years old in December 1914 when his health was not robust enough for further front-line service and he returned to England, not to return to the Western Front. His story in this book stops at that point, but he served throughout the war in a number of roles before being deemed 'permanently unfit' in March 1919.

The book in its original format is almost impossible to get, I have never seen a copy for sale. A few years ago I was given an OCR-scanned copy, the nature of OCR is that there are numerous error. I have corrected these and have the text pretty close to the original, I have also added a short biography of the Major. As Major Anderson died in 1941, more than 70 years ago, it is now out of copyright so I decided to create a copy via on-line printing, initially for my own interest but also to play with the technology. The book is pretty much the same size and layout as the original, but the pagination differs. I think it has come out rather nicely.



I think this gives a very good feel for the Special Reserve in 1914, and is a significant book. If you want to buy a copy then it is available via Amazon. The link is:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Unbreakable-Coil-Major-ALK-Anderson/dp/B0BPR4K4CR>

and the price currently £9.68 (free delivery if Prime). Full disclosure: for each copy sold I get the princely sum of nothing, this is the minimum cost set by the printer (Blurb) and I have no control over price.

If you want a printed copy and don't use Amazon then I can help. If you would like to read the book and you're happy to read on-line from a pdf, then you are welcome to a free copy of the pdf in exactly the same format as the hard copy.

Andy”

Not a Banksy:



Mural near the site of the National Shell-Filling Factory No. 6 at Chilwell, Notts.

Dates for your Diary

- i. **Friday 31st March - The History and Ongoing Work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission – by Capt. Jay Singh-Sohal.**
A talk for the Museum of Wolverhampton and South Staffordshire.
Venue: Wombourne Library & Community Centre, Church Road, WV5 9EZ
19.30 hrs, £2 admission

- ii. **Saturday 15th April – English Civil War Conference 2023** by Helion Books. Venue: Worcester Cathedral Learning Centre. £35.00 inc. Lunch.

Tickets [HERE](#)

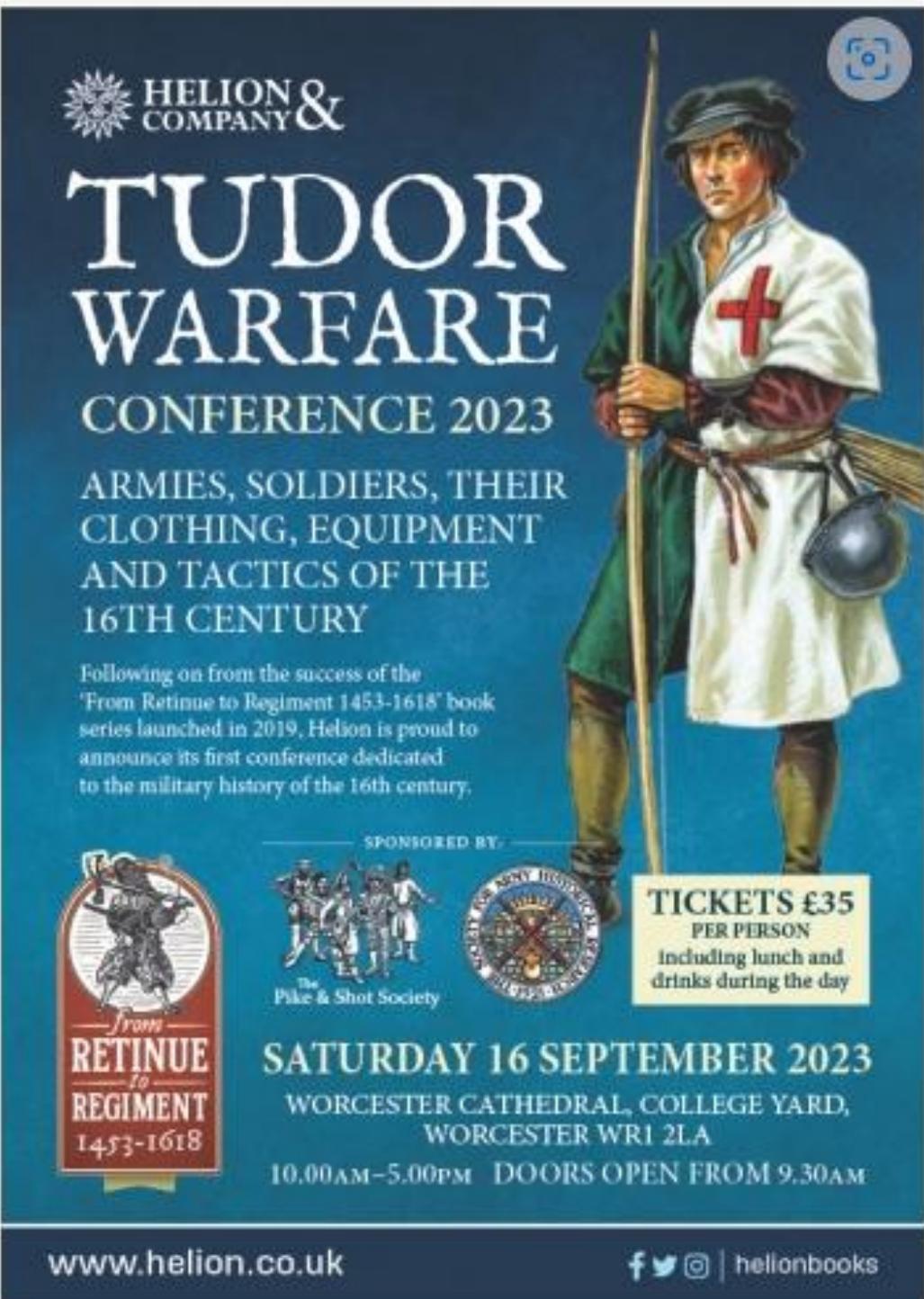
- iii. **Wednesday 10th May – Walk Round Merridale Cemetery WW1 Graves led by Quintin Watt.** A Black Country Society event. There are over 100 Great War era burials in Wolverhampton's Merridale Cemetery.

Meet at the Cemetery gates in Jeffcock Road WV3 7AE at 2.00pm.

- iv. **Saturday 20th May - The 11th WFA President's Conference : '1913 Expectations Meet the Realities of War'**
Venue: Tally Ho!, Pershore Rd, Birmingham B5 7RN.
£35 inc. Lunch
Tickets [HERE](#)

- v. **Thursday 22nd June – Clark Road goes to War by Chris Twygges**
The story of 13 men from this road who served in the Great War
Venue – The Wolverhampton Society, Tettenhall Wood Institute, Wood Rd, Tettenhall Wood, WV6 8NF. 19.00 for 19.30hrs. Modest admission charge applies.

- vi. **Saturday 16th September – Tudor Warfare Conference 2023** by Helion Books. Venue: Worcester Cathedral Learning Centre. £35.00 inc lunch.



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- vii. **Saturday 2nd December – The Royal Warwickshire Regt 14/18 in books & cartoons** by Paul Jacques and David Vaux. A Midland Ancestors event. Venue: Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret St, Birmingham B3 3BS. Free to attend.

Details [HERE](#)

If you know of any other relevant events that our members may be interested in, don't be shy – let me know and I'll put it in the Newsletter.

Future Newsletters:

Please send any items you would like to be included to me at my official e-mail address: wfawtoneditor@gmail.com

Many, many thanks to those members who have provided items for the Newsletter; you know who you are, and your reward shall be in Heaven...

John Hale
Branch Newsletter Editor