

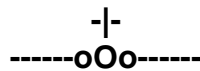
Branch Newsletter – January 2024

Next Meeting:

Will be on Saturday 13th January at St Peter's Collegiate School, Compton Park, Compton Rd. West, Wolverhampton WV3 9DU. 2.00pm for a 2.30 kick-off.

Following the AGM our very own Chris Twiggs will be giving us a talk reflecting upon 40 years of battlefield touring.

AGM details will be e-mailed out to everyone separately.



And a good time was had by all:



January Meeting – a brief announcement by our inimitable Chairman, Alan Angell:

“We are having a book sale at the January meeting which is also the AGM.

All proceeds will go to the donation to SSAFFA, along with the money from the calendars and John White's DVD sales.

Many thanks for our members generosity and support in everything we do as a branch. Alan.”

Richard Pursehouse shares an interesting website with us:

Hi ,

I thought this link might be of interest - the oft overlooked (and jokingly referred to sometimes as the definition of an oxymoron) Intelligence Corps of the British Army

[The Intelligence Corps / Mil Intel Museum \(militaryintelligencemuseum.org\)](http://militaryintelligencemuseum.org)

Armistice Day 2023 at the Cenotaph, Whitehall:



See anyone you know? The WFA have released a cleaned-up version of their recording made on the day [Click HERE](#). The important bit starts at 32mins 50 seconds...

Our very own Pete Langford attended the ceremony. In his own words: *It was a very proud moment when I had the honour of laying a wreath at the Cenotaph, in Whitehall, on the 11/11/2023 on behalf of Wolverhampton Western Front Association Branch. It was quite an emotional experience that I will never forget. The men and women who gave their all for this country should never be forgotten.*

Pete told me of the very smooth and slick operation, and his surprise when he learnt he was going to lay the Branch Wreath at the foot of the Cenotaph rather than just hand it over to someone more important. If any other Branch member intends to attend this national ceremony, I'm sure he'll be only too pleased to advise you.



Thanks to Nick Baker for another entertaining article:

Anyone for a Kipper Tie? *By Nick Baker*

As regular viewers of 'Antiques Roadshow' will know, the word 'Birmingham' can have an odd effect. A previously perfectly acceptable piece of jewelry or fine silverware, once



examined by a team's expert and declared, "Made in Birmingham" often results in a disparaging 'umph' and suddenly becomes non grata. This is unfair, as only us Black Country folk should be allowed to take the rise out of the Brummies on the basis they live at the bottom of our garden, but sadly the whole country 'piles on' when there is a hint the Second City might actually have produced something worthwhile (have you noticed Aston Villa never win according to MOTD but the other team lose). Anyway, what's this got to do with anything.

Well, the recent sale of a Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar awarded to Captain Solomon Clifford Joseph in 1918 resulted in a comment, couched as something remarkable, in the antiques trade press that Joseph was, wait for it, shock horror, a native of the Second City. It was accompanied by the qualification that he was, after all, 'the only Ace of the conflict to hail from Birmingham' (so nothing to worry about you

good people of Tunbridge Wells). Possibly airoplanes were too complicated for simply Brummie folk, or maybe no-one from the city could be posh enough to fly one (“Sorry Old Chap, but your vowels are just too flat for takeoff.”)? Whatever. Joseph was born in Bordesley Green in 1893 and at the outbreak of war was living with his family in Speedwell Road, Edgbaston – not too shabby then or now. Joseph was accredited with 13 victories between May and October 1918. The 6th of June 1918 was especially notable with two kills in the space of thirty minutes. Most of his career was spent flying the iconic Sopwith Camel. He was gazette DFC in September 1918 and Bar in November; he was also wounded twice including during a crash landing. You can’t help thinking that for Solomon Joseph the end of the war probably came just in time. As with most air aces (even one from Birmingham) Joseph’s career is well documented and it’s worth looking him up if you are an aviation enthusiast. Less well known is his post war civilian life which includes a couple of incidents ‘you couldn’t make up’.



After the war Solomon Clifford Joseph went into engineering and founded a number of firms which grew into the Clifford Group. During the Second World War these supplied parts for fighters and bombers built in Birmingham. Meanwhile, obviously a bit of a ‘risk-taker’, between the wars he had been fined on a number of occasions for speeding. He was also involved in a flying accident. Well sort of, because although it involved a machine in flight it didn’t actually involve a flying-machine. What...?

In April 1931 whilst on holiday in North Devon, Joseph was driving at night along the cliff road above Lynmouth Bay. An eyewitness saw the lights of Joseph’s car casting beams though the mist and was then astonished to see them plunge over the clifftop and follow a “topsy turvey” almost vertical dive onto the beach some 500 or so feet below. There followed

an enormous crash which could be heard over a mile away, after which the lights went out. The alarm was raised, and the local policeman and ambulance made their way to the scene to find Joseph's car smashed to pieces (the engine was some eighty yards from the main debris), and Joseph himself "groaning", but conscious and lying clear of the wreckage. The injured man, after telling his rescuers he had been alone, was transported to hospital where, incredibly, he was found to have sustained only minor injuries. Clearly, Solomon Joseph's number was not yet up! In 1951 he married Lily Deutsch, the widow of Birmingham born (who would have thought it!) Oscar Deutch founder of the Odeon cinema chain (Oscar Deutch Entertains Our Nation, in case you have ever wondered...one for the pub quiz) a lady so well off, and burgled so often, the police mounted a special guard over her Edgbaston house whilst the marriage ceremony took place. Her late husband had previously had his own brush with aerial warfare when he was violently blown out of bed by a Luftwaffe bomb during a WW2 air-raid from which he never really recovered. Not one to miss out, in 1963, Solomon now retired and aged 70, blew himself up in the basement of his Alexander Road home when he tried, unsuccessfully, to light the heating boiler. Once again he survived. We can only assume the Grim Reaper wore carpet slippers when he finally crept up on Solomon Clifford Joseph three years later. He is buried in Witton Jewish Cemetery.

Joseph's DFC and bar, together with British War and Victory medal's, was sold by Noonans of Mayfair on October 11th. Estimated at £15,000 to £18,000 the group just exceeded the upper valuation to fetch £20,000, being sold to a private collector (not one, so far as we know, from Brierly Hill).

It was a wet November in Belgium:



Brandheek New Military Cemetery No.3, by Rob Bradford. Thankfully it was a bit drier than this when we visited on the May 2016 Branch Tour.

And seeing as the Branch Tour for 2024 is based around Ypres:



From the "In Flanders Fields Museum" FaceBook page-

Camille Delaere, pastor of the Sint-Pietersparochie in Yeper, sees the Lakenhallen catch fire. "Sunday 22 November, the day the Halls were bombed, the grandiose, lavish and renowned monument from Iperian art history. The grenades hit their target from a distance of 13 to 15 km with unprecedented precision; astonishing. From the middle of the street, I was the powerless witness to that senseless vandalism. First a hole was punched along the sides of the tower, then the clock came down and collapsed the tower; at 11:30 the tower caught fire; soon the whole monument was in light drawers. In the afternoon I heard from an official source that the Cathedral would also be on fire. "

Alfred Bastien - "The fire of Ieper" can be viewed in the museum. It is a study for the panoramic painting "The Battle of the Iron". This scene depicts the fire of the Lakenhallen on November 22, 1914. The painter was based among other things on photos of the Antony brothers.

As it is the start of a New Year, our worthy Secretary Bill Pinfold had been doing some research:

Fun with Statistics.

For many years the branch has kept a record of attendances at meetings with the primary source of information being the signing in sheet which also acts as our register in the event of a fire alarm. As some members forget to sign in or by pass the system, Mike Dainty who sits on the back row does a physical count as a back-up.

For the five years before the lock downs attendance at Branch meetings averaged 63.

When meetings resumed in October 2021 the next 15 meetings averaged 43 attendees a 30% drop on pre pandemic levels. Had many of our members passed away with Covid, lost the habit, or found other interests? Who were the 43 people turning up? Was it the same people every time or a larger group coming less often. If 43 was the new realism, we would have to review the running of the branch and possibly move to a smaller venue and restrict speakers to home grown and locals.

Talking to Andy we realised that many of the answers were in the signing in sheets. The first good news was that 84 members attended at least twice so the underlying support was still there. We then emailed the 20 or so people who had not returned to inform them of the speaker programme and asked if they would be attending in the future. Many who replied were recovering from operations or caring for a relative and hoped to return in the future, a few said that they had lost the habit and others thanked us for the reminder and have returned. Sadly, we have been informed of 3 members who have died.

In January 2023 we took advantage of WFA National's offer to do a mail shot to all WFA National members in our postcodes which has yielded some new attendees. Attendance at meetings in 2023 has steadily increased and the average was 54, not back to previous levels but getting there and we now know that the average was made up by 88 individuals attending more than twice and 31 occasional visitors.

In 2023 6 stalwarts attended all 12 meetings; - Nick Baker, Peter Dufton, Sue Hill, Andy Johnson, Bob Loudon and John Scott.

Numbers can only grow with a friendly welcome given to all visitors, an excellent speaker programme arranged by Chairman Alan and Mrs. Cullen's excellent cakes.

Bill Pinfold

Who wouldn't pay 6d for one of these?



Family History Seminars from The National Archives via Zoom

“Our friend from up the mountain, Anne Pedley, has pointed out the following free seminars from TNA. Even if you're an experienced user there's always something to learn. The Second World War Army Records (3rd Feb) may be interesting as some WW2 personnel records have recently been transferred from the MOD to TNA.

- 1. Saturday 13 January, 10:30: Using First World War Army Records*
- 2. Saturday 20 January, 10:30: Using Civilian Internee Records – probably WW2, but doesn't say*
- 3. Saturday 27 January, 10:30: Using Prisoner of War Records (WW2)*
- 4. Saturday 3 February, 10:30: Using Second World War Army Records*

You will need to book to get the 'invite', see: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whats-on/online-events/>

Andy Johnson”

Dates for your Diary

- i. **Thursday 11th January 2024 – “The Poet and the Rogue: Wilfred Owen and Horatio Bottomley”** by Paul Norgate.
Venue: Kidderminster Historical Society at the Museum of Carpet, Stour Vale Mill, Green St, Kidderminster DY10 1AZ (adjacent to Morrison’s).
2.30pm. £4 admission

[Kidderminster History Society programme](#)

- ii. **Tuesday 30th January – “From disaster to triumph: the British campaign in Mesopotamia 1914-18”** by Gary Sheffield. A Gallipoli Association Zoom talk.

Details and how to book your (free) place [HERE](#)

- iii. **Saturday 2nd March – “Heroes & Ghosts”** by Michael H Hallett. Heroes & Ghosts is the story of Michael’s grandfather Harold Blackburn, a pioneer aviator before World War I and war hero. After the war, scandal struck the family and plunged it into shame for three generations. Along the way, his story was lost, his memorabilia buried for decades. This presentation brings the story of his amazing career to light .

Venue: Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret St, Birmingham. 14.00 – 16.00hrs. A Midland Ancestors Event

[Details HERE](#)

- iv. **Saturday 9th March – 5th Annual Gallipoli Association Regional Conference.**

Venue: Coten End Primary School, Coten End, Warwick, CV34 4NP
£25. Lunch is NOT included – bring your own. 9.15 for 10.00 start
Details and booking form [HERE](#)

Stephen Chambers: *“Jack Tar: Churchill’s Little Army at Gallipoli”*
The Royal Naval Division was conceived and founded by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, in late August 1914. The Royal Naval Division may have become one of Britain’s elite divisions by the war’s end but they had to learn their fighting craft first.

Paul Colbourne: *“Feeding the Front. British Army Logistics 1914-1915”*

This will focus on the challenges faced during the early months of the war in setting up, what would become, a robust system to keep both men and livestock fed and watered.

Clive Harris: “Football in the Dardanelles”

This talk will look at the impact of sport as a vehicle for morale and fitness during the Gallipoli Campaign. It features several fascinating characters, on both sides of the wire, including some who never came home.

Steve Warburton: “A Campaign in Two Halves”

The 29th Division’s ‘Incomparables’ from September 1915 to January 1916.

This talk will explore the reality of the neglected second half of its “first to last” service on the Peninsular: Morale, casualties, training, personalities, disease and Christmas dinner!

- v. **Saturday 9th March – “From Trams to Trenches – the men from Birmingham Tramways who died in the Great War”** by Doug Smith.
Venue: Kidderminster Historical Society at the Museum of Carpet, Stour Vale Mill, Green St, Kidderminster DY10 1AZ (adjacent to Morrison’s).
11.00am. £5 admission (inc. Cake!)

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... No money will change hands, but you have a reasonable chance of your article being lifted by Head Office and reproduced in the Bulletin.

John Hale
Branch Newsletter Editor