Welcome to Issue 30 - the June 2018 Newsletter and Magazine of Chesterfield WFA.

The next Branch meeting is on Tuesday June 5th where our speaker will be the popular and well respected Rob Thompson. Rob`s topic will be "Running Out of Road. Supplying the BEF During the 100 Days Offensives. 1918". This is a new talk dealing with the logistical and supply problems the BEF had as the end of the war approached (BEF needed Armistice as much as Germans).

The Branch meets at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF on the first Tuesday of each month. There is plenty of parking available on site and in the adjacent road. Access to the car park is in Tennyson Road, however, which is one way and cannot be accessed directly from Saltergate.

Grant Cullen – Branch Secretary
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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Meeting Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Jan 9th Branch AGM followed by a talk by Tony Bolton (Branch Chairman) on the key events of the last year of the war 1918. Councillor Steve Brunt (a member of the WFA) will also be present to tell members about Chesterfield Borough Council’s plans for a WW1 2018 Commemorations Group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Tim Lynch - The Unknown Soldiers - the BEF of 1918 By 1918 the BEF was mostly made up of conscripts as it launched the most successful campaign in its history. How did an army many regarded as “shirkers” fight so effectively? Tim Lynch is a freelance writer and battlefield guide. This talk is based on research into his own family’s part in the Great War.</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>David Humberston, Chairman of the Leicester Branch, will be making his first visit to WFA Chesterfield to talk about Women Spies in The Great War</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Peter Hart making his annual pilgrimage to Chesterfield. His presentation will be Not Again - the German offensive on the Aisne, May 1918.</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Making his debut as a speaker to the Chesterfield Branch will be Jonathan Steer who will compare and contrast the BEF at Mons in 1914 with the BEF at Mons in 1918.</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Rob Thompson – always a popular visitor to Chesterfield Branch. &quot;Running Out of Road. Supplying the BEF During the 100 Days Offensives. 1918&quot;. This is a new talk dealing with the logistical and supply problems the BEF had as the end of the war approached (BEF needed Armistice as much as Germans).</td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Dr. Graham Kemp. “American Expeditionary Force” – the story and experiences of the AEF, 1917-18. Talk covers the training of the new Army from the States to France. Taking in the experience, the hardship and humour. It looks at their first action at Belleville wood, and then turns to the success and tragedy of ‘Argonne Wood.’ It reveals the way the US Army contributed to the ending of the war and why afterwards US turned its back on Europe.</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Peter Dennis is an artist who lives in Mansfield but he has made a name for himself as an illustrator for the Osprey series of monographs on The Great War (as well as other conflicts from ancient times to the present) Peter will explain how he carries out his researches for technical accuracy. He will also bring some of his original artworks for members to view.</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>John Beech. “The Great Escape”. John needs no introduction to Chesterfield members as he rarely misses a meeting. In September 1917 a group of POW German officers escaped from where they were being held (now on the site of the University of Nottingham). Using his meticulous research, John will tell this story.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Making a welcome return to Chesterfield will be our former Chairman / Secretary, Peter Hodgkinson, who will explain the Battle of Selle in October 1918.</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Bryn Hammond. Another leading light in the field of historical research, study and publication on the Great War, Bryn will discuss The 500 piece jig-saw: Tank – Other Arms Cooperation in the First World War.</td>
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<td>December</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Rounding the year off in style will be Dr Phylomena Badsey on Auxiliary Hospitals and the role of Voluntary Aid Detachment Nurses during the First World War.</td>
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1  Meetings and Speakers Calendar
2  Contents Page & Upcoming WFA Events (advert)
3  Personal Note from the Chair - 23
4 & 5 Secretary`s Scribbles
6  Backs to the Wall` - new WFA mug (advert)
7 & 8 Be part of Chesterfield Community Poppy Cascade (advert)
9  Worksop armed Forces Day (advert)
10  Nottinghamshire Remembers the Great War (advert)
11 - 23 May Branch Meeting
24 - 29 Their War and Ours - The Impact of The Great War on Society (conference)
30  Book Review  `Britain Goes to War``
31 - 33 Plaque unveiled at former home of Albert Ball, Nottingham's greatest First World War hero
33 - 36 The Munitions Crisis - part 12
36 - 39 9th Annual Great War Forum Conference
39 - 49 The Scottish Island that buried America's dead

Any opinions expressed in this Newsletter /Magazine are not necessarily those of the Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch, in particular, or the Western Front Association in general.

We received the undernoted e mail from WFA Branch Coordinator, Garry Trown

Good evening all

Find the enclosed I've been asked to send out by our chairman Colin Wagstaff

The WFA will receive an allocation of invitations to the National Service of Commemoration at Westminster Abbey on the afternoon of 11th November.
The target audience is people who have made a significant contribution during the Centenary commemorations.
Could you suggest anybody in your Branch who has made a significant contribution and is interested in attending the service. There will be a ballot if we are oversubscribed.

Please send the following information -
Full name and address + place and DOB + email address
Short description of contribution to Centenary
Branch which you attend

Please send to chairman@westernfrontassociation.com by Sunday 10th June

DCMS will confirm by end of June/early July
A Personal note from The Chair (23)

Having just got back from four days in France, my annual University of Birmingham MA group battlefield tour, I found that Grant needed my Notes from the Chair by Sunday in order to issue a newsletter before the meeting on Tuesday. Usually Grant’s requests fill me with a sort of sinking feeling as I strive to come up with some thoughts that are at least mildly interesting but today with the unseasonably hot tour still vividly fresh in my mind Ideas are not in short supply. My colleagues and I concentrated on the 1918 battlefields, the 21 March -Operation Michael in the 5th Army sector just north of St Quentin, specifically the XIX Corps (66 and 24 Division) front where we looked at the different approaches to the defence in depth -Forward Zone and Battle Zone. We finished our first day with a visit a bit further south to Manchester Hill a redoubt more or less on the front line. I was again surprised to see that ‘Manchester Hill’ is hardly a hill at all but a gently rising incline but from where a remarkably wide view over St Quentin can be gained after careful negotiation of the tractor tracks to protect the farmer’s sugar beet crop.

In subsequent days we did an excellent circular walk around the hamlet of Le Hamel, scene as I am sure you know of what is said to be the first demonstration of the ‘all arms battle’ and a preliminary to the Battle of Amiens the start of the Hundred Days. After Hamel we crossed the Somme to the village of Chipilly on the spur which bears its name to see how very different and difficult the ground was on the left flank of the Amiens attack. It is amazing that the British and American divisions managed to advance at all across the deep thickly wooded ravines as distinct from the rolling flat ground of the Australian and Canadian front which was ideal tank country.

Finally we identified the railway embankment near Croisilles which features in Ernst Junger’s Storm of Steel, before moving to Arras and the Canadian Corps breaking of the Wotan (Drocourt -Queant Switch). Amid this hectic schedule we also managed a brief visit to Deborah in her new home - a rather splendid museum at Flesquieres which I would recommend even to those who are familiar with her. Speaking of new museums the Monash Centre at Villers-Bretteneux is impressive provided you can forgive the film which shows only Brits surrendering and Diggers winning the war!

Tony Bolton

Branch Chair
Welcome to the June 2018 edition of our Branch Newsletter and Magazine. Tuesday 5th June will see our regular branch monthly meeting. Our guest speaker at our Branch June meeting is a regular and popular visitor - Rob Thompson. Rob began his working life as a labourer before becoming, variously, a tax clerk, motor cycle despatch rider and ‘Youth and Community Worker’ in Salford. He then took a degree in Politics and Contemporary History graduating with a First. It was here that he ‘blindly’ stumbled into the world of military history and The Great War which he ended up teaching at the Salford and Birmingham Universities, subsequently becoming an independent military historian specialising in logistics and engineering in the development of the BEF’s operational method on the Western Front. His publications include ‘Mud, Blood and Wood - BEF Operational and Combat Logistic Engineering during the Third Battle of Ypres 1917’ - in Peter Doyle and M.R. Bennett (eds) Fields of Battle (Kluwer 2002) and ‘Delivering the Goods. Operation Landover Castle: A Logistical and Administrative Analysis of Canadian Corps Preparations for the Battle of Amiens 8 - 11 August 1918 in G.D. Sheffield & P.Gray (eds) Changing the War : The British Army, the Hundred Days Campaign and the Birth of the Royal Air Force , 1918 (Bloomsbury, 2013). He has also published various articles for organisations ranging from the Western Front Association to the Chartered Institute for Logistics.

Since the last meeting The Branch participated in the Local History Day in Mansfield on Sunday May 13th. This was a very well attended event with just under 500 people coming through the door to look at the stands of nearly 30 historical groups and

We will also be participating at the Worksop Armed Forces Day on Saturday 30th June 2018. We attended the first such event organised by Worksop Royal British Legion and were pleased to be invited to participate again - again full details elsewhere in the Newsletter. Not shown on the advert but confirmed at a meeting of Worksop RBL last Thursday night will be - subject to the weather being OK on the day - a flypast just after 11am of the Lancaster bomber of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Unfortunately I will miss out on this event as I will be away on holiday not getting back home until the day after the event. Last year’s event - the first organised by Worksop RBL - was good and this year’s should be even better as the organisers benefited from the experience of the 2017 event.

As some folks may know, I am a member of Worksop Royal British Legion and we are planning to commemorate the end of the Great War in a unique fashion. There are the names of almost 600 Worksop and district men who fell in the Great War on the local war memorial and it is planned to commemorate each of them - where at all possible - by affixing an ornamental poppy with their name etc., to a lamppost as close as possible to the house in the town - or surrounding villages - whose fallen are commemorated on the Worksop memorial - so that folks can see where men of the town and district lived and who went to war, never to return. The local council has promised to assist with the putting up of these poppies. Of course developments over the past one hundred years may have seen some of these houses disappear under re-development

I am sure all of you will be bored to tears with all the correspondence from every organisation they are (or indeed have been) in contact with regarding ‘GDPR’ The new EU data protection legislation which effects us all became law on May 25th. The existing Data Protection Act 1998

Those of you who are members of the WFA will receive an insert will be published into the next issue of Stand To! (due out in mid-June). This will explain the situation (in a similar manner to the previous electronic communications) and ask those members who have not consented to do so via a pre-paid envelope which will be provided. Although this mailing via Stand To! will be after the 25th May (the date on which the legislation comes into effect) it will save the WFA several thousand pounds in not undertaking a separate postal mailing.

I have already asked if those who are not WFA members could advise if they wished to remove their names from this mailing list and, regrettably a number of folks have indeed done so. Of course, irrespective of GDPR, if anyone wants to stop receiving this Newsletter and any other correspondence from Chesterfield WFA, just get in touch and your request will be actioned immediately.

Separate to this newsletter there will be an attachment to the e mail with the Western Front Association`s Privacy Notice.

As previously advised due to the encouraging response the WFA Book Discussion Group will be going ahead.

The first meeting will be held on Thursday July 19th 7pm - 9pm at the Chesterfield Labour Club Meeting Room. We would suggest attendees make a voluntary donation (suggested £3) to defray the cost of the room hire.

Those who responded to the questionnaire chose,

`How the War Was Won` by Tim Travers
Published by Pen & Sword under ISBN 1 84415 207 3. The cover price is £7.99

Although the book is `only` 187 pages, do not underestimate its length as it is set in small 9 point print. Please let me know if you have trouble getting a copy.

We hope that this Book Group will be fun, inclusive and not an `academic competition`. In the initial stages a `moderator` might ask individuals for their opinions. Obviously, we will need a couple of meetings to establish a good format. Please let me know of any ideas you may have.

Nearer the time of the meeting it may be useful to contact Andrew Kenning on mob 0795 803 1782 or via e mail adrewkenning@btinternet.com with aspects you would particularly like discussed so we can e mail these to all members for their consideration. I suggest an agenda be circulated before the meeting then we will know when topics are coming up and we won`t have too much repetition. We should also discuss if individual members would like to lead a meeting in turn.

Grant Cullen - Branch Secretary
07824628638
grantcullen@hotmail.com
'To commemorate the 1918 Spring Offensives, the Western Front Association has commissioned a Limited Edition bone china mug featuring part of Sir Douglas Haig’s ‘Backs to the Wall’ Order of 11th April 1918. '

Price: £14 (+£3 p&p)

Available from the eShop on the WFA website
Be part of the Chesterfield community poppy cascade

We need thousands of poppies to create a cascade on either side of Chesterfield Town Hall to commemorate 100 years since the end the First World War.

You can help by:
- Knitting or crocheting poppies
- Donating wool or felt.

You can pick up a free pattern and also drop off your poppies at the Town Hall.

The last date for collection is Friday 2 November 2018

Contact Rob Nash on 01246 550 516 or email: mayors.office@chesterfield.gov.uk for more information or collections.
Be a part of the Chesterfield Community poppy cascade

Community poppy cascade

This year Chesterfield will come together to commemorate 100 years since the end of the First World War. Why not get together to knit or crochet poppies (pattern and instructions provided) which will be hung either side of the Town Hall steps during the commemorative period to create a stunning cascade.

Get involved

You can start anytime and your poppies can be taken to a number of outlets in Chesterfield, see the website for information. The last date for collection is Friday 2nd November 2018.

Tell us how you are getting on

Keep us informed of your fundraising events and how many poppies you’ve made by contacting: jenny.flood@chesterfield.gov.uk or mayors.office@chesterfield.gov.uk or calling 01246 345 239.

I can’t knit
Don’t worry, we have trainers who can help you and videos you can learn from.

Can I crochet a poppy?
Yes, the pattern can also be used for crochet.

If you can’t knit or crochet you could make a poppy out of red felt.

Funding
We are seeking various funding streams but are asking local charities to donate the needles and crochet hooks and businesses to supply money or wool to help us.

Can I do it at home?
Of course, and we can help to get you started and support you.

How can I help?
Spread the word, hold fundraising events to buy the wool, needles and hooks.
WORKSOP
Saturday 30 June 2018
11:00 - 16:00

I'm supporting
ARMED FORCES DAY
armedforcesday.org.uk

SHIREOAKS
SPORTS & SOCIAL CLUB

Two Ex Royal Air Force Jet Cockpits, WW1 Western Front Exhibit
The Red Barrows Display Team, Military Style Obstacle Course by A Team Fitness

Live Music from:
Lilly Taylor-Ward, Brass Band, Harworth Corps of Drums
Automatic Fish Cake

Community Stands from:
303 Sqn Air Cadets, Worksop Sea Cadets
Worksop Lions Club, Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Association
Royal British Legion Worksop Branch, Vintage Car Club
BBQ, Hot Dogs, Dessert Stand
Tea’s and Coffee’s.

Contact Number: 07973939624
www.rbl-worksop.org | www.fb.rb-worksop.org | @rblworksop | events@rbl-worksop.org
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE REMEMBERS

THE GREAT WAR

11 November 2018 marks 100 years since the end of World War 1. The County Council is hosting a series of events, including an open air film screening of War Horse and a Heritage Day at Rufford Abbey Country Park, to commemorate the centenary of the end of the war and the sacrifice of men and women from across Nottinghamshire.

A lasting legacy to our Great War heroes

The culmination of the First World War commemorations will see the creation of a new memorial, located at the Victoria Embankment in Nottingham, which will feature the names of all 14,000 Nottinghamshire and Nottingham fallen during the Great War. Names of both forces personnel and civilians will be included on the memorial.

The memorial project is being led jointly by the County and City Councils, in partnership with other local authorities, businesses and military associations. It is hoped that a proportion of funding for the project can be raised through public donations.

Since 2013, volunteers have been carrying out the painstaking task of compiling the Nottinghamshire Great War Roll of Honour – an online database of all the county’s Great War fallen, including their place of birth, family history, military information, where they are buried and the location of any memorials bearing their name. This was part of the wider Trent to Trenches project, a countywide programme of events and activities to commemorate 100 years since the start of the Great War.

The names of people listed in the Roll of Honour will be used in the creation of the new memorial.

You can view the Roll of Honour and/or submit further information at nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour

Find out more about the events and projects commemorating the end of The Great War nottinghamshire.gov.uk/nottsremembers
May 2018 Meeting

Branch Chair, Tony Bolton, opened the meeting in our time honoured manner in front of another healthy turn-out.

Without much ado, he introduced our speaker for the evening, Londoner Jonathan Steer. Tony had met Jonathan when they were both studying for their MA degree at Birmingham University.

Jonathan said that the topic for his discussion had a lot of personal resonances for him, as would become apparent in the presentation. He began by briefly touching on the declaration of war by Britain on August 4th, 1914, and the almost flawless mobilisation of the BEF and its transport to France where it would advance into Belgium to face its first battle on continental Europe for almost 100 years since the Battle of Waterloo.

Early in the morning of August 22nd, ‘C’ squadron of the Royal Irish Dragoon guards came upon four German cuirassiers at Casteau, just to the north East of Mons.

As the cuirassiers withdrew towards a large body of German cavalry, the squadron commander Captain Charles Hornby (pictured below) led troops in a charge towards the Germans and killed one of them with his sword.

After further pursuit, the Germans turned to shoot at the British cavalry, supported by a force of Jaegers. The 4th Troop dismounted to provide covering fire for the 1st Troop, and Private Edward Thomas to have fired the first shot of the war for the British Army, hitting a German cavalryman. Thomas was later to give an account of this action:

Corporal Thomas later gave an account of what happened. “The strange thing about this episode was that I had not the slightest feeling of being in battle, not the remotest idea that I was taking a very active part, as far as rifle fire was concerned, in what was to be the greatest war of all time.”

The location where this action took place is marked by a plaque affixed to a granite structure by the side of the road.

That British cavalry were so proficient in the use of the Lee-Enfield rifle was due in no small part to Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien who insisted that all men, officers and other ranks become proficient in the use of this weapon, when he assumed the post of Commander of Aldershot Command - later to be II Corps. In Sir John French`s view (French had been Smith-Dorrien`s immediate predecessor at Aldershot) this belittled the cavalry and made them out to be no more than mounted infantry. It has been argued that without the changes and training that came about by Smith-Dorrien the cavalry would have been totally ineffective in these early days of the war.

Jonathan then went out of his way to say that in these accounts of the Battle of Mons in August 1914, one battalion - the 4th Middlesex Regiment - would predominate as he had close personal ties to this battalion.
The brunt of the Battle of Mons on August 23rd 1914 was to be borne by II Corps of the BEF under the command of Horace Smith-Dorrien who had only taken over a few days previously following the sudden death from a heart attack of Lieutenant-General James Grierson while entrained on his way to the front.

Using the above map, Jonathan explained the disposition of the opposing forces on the morning of August 23rd 1914.

Jonathan then described the Order of Battle of II Corps, its two Divisions, the 3rd and the 5th. plus the Cavalry Division and each respective location in the line

II Corps

GOC: Lieutenant-General Sir John Grierson KCB, CVO, CMG, ADC (died on 17th August 1914). General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien GCB, DSO (took over II Corps at Bavai on 21st August 1914).
3rd Division

GOC: Major-General Hubert Hamilton CVO, CB, DSO

7th Infantry Brigade
GOC Brigadier-General McCracken CB, DSO
3rd Worcesters
2nd South Lancashire
1st Wiltshire
2nd Royal Irish Rifles

8th Infantry Brigade
GOC Brigadier-General Doran CB
2nd Royal Scots
2nd Royal Irish Regiment
4th Middlesex
1st Gordon Highlanders (replaced by 1st Devons in September 1914)

9th Infantry Brigade
GOC Brigadier-General Shaw CB
1st Northumberland Fusiliers
4th Royal Fusiliers
1st Lincolns
1st Royal Scots Fusiliers

Divisional Troops
A Squadron 15th Hussars
3rd Cyclist Company

Artillery
XXIII Brigade RFA: 107th, 108th and 109th Batteries
XL Brigade RFA: 6th, 23rd and 49th Batteries
XLII Brigade RFA: 29th, 41st and 45th Batteries
XXX (Howitzer) Brigade RFA: 128th, 129th and 130th (Howitzer) Batteries
48th Heavy Battery RGA

Engineers:
56th and 57th Field Companies RE
3rd Signal Company
ASC 3rd Divisional Train
RAMC: 7th, 8th and 9th Field Ambulances

5th Division:

GOC: Major-General Sir Charles Ferguson Bart, CB, MVO, DSO

13th Infantry Brigade
GOC Brigadier-General Cuthbert CB
2nd King’s Own Scottish Borderers
2nd Duke of Wellington’s (West Riding)
1st Queen’s Own Royal West Kent
2nd King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

14th Infantry Brigade
GOC Brigadier-General Rolt CB
2nd Suffolk
1st East Surreys
1st Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry
2nd Manchesters

15th Infantry Brigade
GOC Brigadier-General Count Gleichen KCVO, CB, CMG, DSO, Eq

1st Royal Norfolks
1st Bedfords
1st Cheshire
1st Dorsets

Divisional Troops:
A Squadron 19th Hussars
5th Cyclist Company

Artillery:
XV Brigade RFA: 11th, 52nd and 80th Batteries
XXVII Brigade RFA: 119th, 120th and 121st Batteries
XXVIII Brigade RFA: 122nd, 123rd and 124th Batteries
VIII (Howitzer) Brigade RFA: 37th, 61st and 65th Howitzer Batteries
108th Heavy Battery RGA

Engineers: 17th and 59th Field Companies RE
5th Signal Company
ASC: 5th Divisional Train
RAMC: 13th, 14th and 15th Field Ambulances.

The Cavalry Division:

GOC: Major-General Allenby CB

1st Cavalry Brigade:
GOC: Brigadier-General C.J. Briggs CB
2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen’s Bays)
5th (Princess Charlotte of Wales’s) Dragoon Guards
11th (Prince Albert’s Own) Hussars
1st Signal Troop

2nd Cavalry Brigade:
GOC: Brigadier-General H. deB. De Lisle CB, DSO
4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards
9th (Queen’s Royal) Lancers
18th (Queen Mary’s Own) Hussars
2nd Signal Troop

3rd Cavalry Brigade:
GOC: Brigadier-General Hubert de la P. Gough CB.
4th (Queen’s Own) Hussars
5th (Royal Irish) Lancers
16th (The Queen’s) Lancers
3rd Signal Troop

4th Cavalry Brigade:
GOC: Brigadier-General Hon C. E. Bingham CVO CB.
Composite Household Cavalry Regiment
6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers)
3rd (King’s Own) Hussars
4th Signal Troop.

Cavalry Divisional Troops:
III Brigade Royal Horse Artillery: D and E Batteries.
VII Brigade Royal Horse Artillery: I and L (replaced by H in September 1914 following Néry) Batteries.

5th Cavalry Brigade:
GOC: Brigadier-General Sir P.W. Chetwode Bart. DSO.
2nd Dragoons (Royal Scots Greys)
12th (Prince of Wales’s Royal) Lancers
20th Hussars
J Battery RHA.
5th Signal Troop

At 5.30am on the 23rd: Sir John French met with Haig (I Corps), Allenby (Cavalry Division) and Smith-Dorrien (II Corps) at his advanced HQ at a chateau in Sars-la-Bruyère, where he ordered the outpost line on the canal to be strengthened and the bridges prepared for demolition. Smith-Dorrien argued that a stronger line be made further back from the canal, which he felt was not a defensible position, French appeared to raise no objections to this, but of course, as Jonathan made the point he claimed differently in later days.

Despite evidence to the contrary from the cavalry patrols and observations by the RFC, French remained convinced that the BEF only faced 2 German divisions, plus a possible third, cavalry division. Jonathan said that from his researches he had developed a theory than it was not all down to Sir John French to underestimate the size of the German force bearing down on the BEF - someone close to him. Sir Henry Wilson, but, as Jonathan said exploring that idea was not for tonight’s meeting. The fact was the BEF was facing 3 Corps with a fourth closing in fast.

German cavalry patrols encountered British forces in area of Nimy and Pommereuil; British cavalry patrols also went out and met with opposition at Obourg with shots being exchanged. 5th Division pushes its mounted troops and two battalions across to north side of canal at Tertre (1st Royal West Kent and 2nd King’s Own Scottish Borderers of 13th Infantry Brigade); By 9am German guns are now shelling the canal bend line held by 8th and 9th Brigades; German infantry of IX Korps have advanced and are now closely engaged with 4th Middlesex at Obourg; attack against canal bend intensifies and Germans take heavy casualties. The attack is spreads westwards; German III Korps now also attacking canal line at Jemappes but also take heavy casualties; Germans also close on canal at Mariette and Tertre: 1st Royal West Kents at Tertre forced to withdraw across canal. By noon the: German attack frontage has now broadened to St Ghislain and Les Herbieres and now stretches some 7 miles from Mons; soon after noon the Germans cross the canal at Obourg and reach the line of the railway: the 4th Middlesex, now supported by 2nd Royal Irish Regiment, are now in a precarious position and under heavy attack. German artillery begins to come into action against British 3rd Infantry Brigade of 1st Division; German cavalry is seen moving towards St Symphorien; 4th Royal Fusiliers is ordered to withdraw from Nimy.

Obourg was defended by the 4th Battalion Middlesex Regiment on 23rd August 1914, part of 3rd Division. Two companies were along the Mons-Conde canal, with D Company in the railway station area and another company in reserve in some nearby woods. The Germans pressed hard
against these positions, inflicting heavy losses with artillery from the higher positions on the opposite side of the canal. One account recalls:

“To the right of the Nimy Bridge the 4th Middlesex were in the meanwhile putting up a no less stubborn defence, and against equally desperate odds. Major Davey, whose company was on the left, in touch with the right of the R. Fusiliers, had fallen wounded early in the day, and the position at that point finally became so serious that Major Abell’s company was rushed up from reserve to its support. During this advance Major Abell himself, Captain Knowles and 2nd Lieut Henstock were killed, and a third of the rank and file fell, but the balance succeeded in reaching the firing line trenches and – with this stiffening added - the position was successfully held for the time being.” (First Seven Divisions p.24)

However, later in the day the line faltered and the enemy began to outflank the battalion, which began a withdrawal through the Boisd’Havre, the wood south of Obourg. A rear-guard was fought at the railway station, with private firing from the station roof until finally he was hit and killed. Tragically the identity of this gallant soldier has never been established and, as Jonathan said he is ‘Known unto God’

Total casualties in the battalion this day were: 9 officers and 453 Other Ranks.

Obourg station was demolished in the 1980s, but a memorial to the 4th Middlesex can be found on a brick pillar located on one of the platforms.

The 4th Middlesex and the 4th Royal Fusiliers who occupied the positions on their right were, at full battalion strength, each numbering 1000 men. They faced six times that number.
26th Field Company, Royal Engineers, was tasked with destruction of the various bridges and locks on the canal and 2nd Lieutenant Herbert Wilfrid Holt became the first British officer to die in action in the war, being killed when attempting to secure explosive charges on one of the bridges. He lies today, like so many of those killed at or around Mons in 1914 and 1918 at the cemetery of St Symphorien, just south of the town.

Once the Germans had taken the bridge at Obourg, the pressure on the 4th Middlesex increased and there was a considerable risk of encirclement but those surviving managed to slip away to the cover and safety of a nearby wood.

The bridges at Nimy were defended by the 4th Royal Fusiliers, the forward company being under Captain Ashburner. The battalion’s section of two machine guns were under Lieutenant Maurice Dease. As the German attacks increased, all men of his section were killed or wounded and he took over a gun himself. He was wounded five times, and eventually taken to a medical dressing station where he succumbed.

Private Frank Sidney Godley took over a gun and kept it firing. He covered the withdrawal despite being wounded, and eventually dismantled and threw the gun into the canal just as he was taken prisoner. Both men were awarded the Victoria Cross. Godley died shortly after the Second War; Dease lies in St Symphorien cemetery outside Mons, along with many men and officers of his battalion.

Dease was born on 28 September 1889 in Gaultstown, County Westmeath, Ireland to Edmund Fitzlaurence and Katherine Murray Dease. He was educated at Stoneyhurst College and the Army Department of Wimbledon College before attending the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He was 24 years old.
Frank Sidney Godley was born on 14 August 1889 in East Grinstead, West Sussex, West Sussex, the son of Avis (née Newton) and Frank Godley. His mother died in 1896, and he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in Willesden, London. He was educated at Henry Street School, St. John’s Wood and, upon moving to Sidcup, at Sidcup National School. From the ages fourteen to twenty, he worked in an ironmonger’s store. On 13 December 1909, he joined The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) as a private with the service number 13814. Godley was 25 years old, Lieutenant Dease had been mortally wounded and killed, and the order to retreat was issued. Private Godley offered to defend the Nimy Railway Bridge while the rest of the section retreated. Godley held the bridge single-handed under very heavy fire and was wounded twice. A Wounded again in the back by shrapnel and in the head a bullet, he carried on the defense of the bridge while his comrades escaped. His citation read: "For coolness and gallantry in fighting his machine gun under a hot fire for two hours after he had been wounded at Mons on 23 August". Godley defended the bridge for two hours, until he ran out of ammunition. His final act was to dismantle the gun and throw the pieces into the canal. He attempted to crawl to safety, but advancing German soldiers caught him and took him to a prisoner of war camp. His wounds were treated, but he remained in camp until the Armistice. Originally it was thought that he had been killed, but sometime later it was found that he was a prisoner of war in a camp called Delotz at Dallgow-Doberitz. It was in the camp that he was informed that he had been awarded the Victoria Cross. Godley left the camp in 1918 after the guards fled their posts. He received the actual medal from King George V on 15 February 1919.


Jonathan had managed to find a short recorded interview with Frank Sidney Godley made in the early 1950s and he played this - surely the only recording of a Victoria Cross winner from 1914.

At the start of the talk Jonathan had made it clear that the 4th Middlesex was very close to his heart. Somewhere amongst the ranks of the 4th Middlesex on August 24th, 1914, was a thirty one year old private, only days away from his 32nd birthday. He had previously served with the 5th Battalion Middlesex Militia. From his record cards it appeared that he had on joining up, like so many others had bent the truth....just a little bit. When he signed up he perhaps never thought that he would have to go to war but the South African War put paid to that misconception, but, as Jonathan said, at least for him he was thankful that his service was guarding Boer prisoners on the island of St. Helena. On the outbreak of war in 1914 he was subsequently called back to the colours. Back in London his wife was expecting their second child - that private’s name was Alfred Evans Steer. Alfred would not see his wife again for five years as he was taken prisoner that day at Mons. Sadly, he never got to see his daughter as she died a year after her birth whilst he was in captivity. Jonathan said he never know his grandfather as he had passed away six years before he was born. As far as Jonathan could ascertain from talking to family members, Alfred, like so many others, never discussed his wartime experiences but Jonathan does have his medals and much of his original paperwork.
In tribute to his grandfather and to those who hold the line in Belgium still, Jonathan then took time to recall some of those who lost their lives holding the line. In addition to those mentioned previously, he spoke of Captain Kenneth James Roy who is interred at St Symphorien Cemetery. The son of James and Mary Roy of Appleton Vicarage, Appleton Roebuck, Yorkshire. According to the records he was commissioned in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, the Yorkshire Regiment in 1890, but given his age was 37 when he died that would have made him thirteen years old when commissioned! In 1898 he was attached to the depot of the Manchester Regiment and a year later he was seconded to the Gold Coast Regiment of the West African Frontier Force and took part in the Ashanti Campaign of 1900 joining the Middlesex Regiment as a Second Lieutenant a year later. Captain Roy was on the right of the line at Obourg Bridge. He was initially posted as missing, believed killed but according to one officer who himself was taken prisoner, Roy was killed in close combat with some German soldiers on the Mons road close by Obourg station.

Major William Henry Abell, who also lies in St Symphorien Cemetery, was son of the late Martin Abell of Norton Hall, Worcester and husband of Gertrude Lilian Abell, of 3, Oswald Rd., Leamington Spa, Warwickshire. A career soldier in 1896 he transferred from the militia to the Middlesex Regiment. For Jonathan, the one fact which about this guy which really interests him is the fact that in 1902 he was on St. Helena guarding Boer pows.....at the same time as Jonathan`s grandfather!

He commanded `A` Company at Mons which moved up in support of `B` company when he was killed, aged 40, one of a third of that company who were to fall in that supporting advance. In September 1914 his wife was informed that he had been seriously but, due to the `fog of war` at that time it was a further month before it was confirmed that actually, he had been killed. In addition to his widow, he left behind two children.

Private John Henry Parr (19 July 1897 - 21 August 1914) He is believed to be the first soldier of the British Empire to be killed by enemy action in the First World War. Parr was born in Lichfield Grove, Finchley, London. His father was a milkman. He lived most of his life at 52 Lodge Lane, North Finchley, the youngest of eleven children of Edward and Alice Parr. Many of his siblings died before their fourth birthday.

Upon leaving school, he took a job working as a butcher's boy, and then as a caddie at North Middlesex Golf Club. Then, like many other young men at the time, he was attracted to the army as a potentially better way of life, and one where he would at least get two meals a day and a chance to see the world. The 5′3" tall Parr joined the 4th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment in 1912, aged fifteen, but claimed to be eighteen years and one month old to meet the minimum age requirement. Private Parr specialised in becoming a reconnaissance cyclist, riding ahead to uncover information then returning with all possible speed to update the commanding officer. At the start of the war in August 1914 Parr’s battalion was shipped from Southampton to Boulogne - sur - Mer. With the German army marching into Belgium, Parr's unit took up positions near a village called Bettignies, beside the canal running through the town of Mons approximately 8 miles (13 km) away. On 21 August, Parr and another cyclist were sent to the village of Obourg, just north east of Mons, and slightly over the border in Belgium, with a mission to locate the enemy. It is believed that they encountered a German cavalry patrol, and that Parr remained to hold off the enemy whilst his companion returned to report. He was killed in the ensuing rifle fire. As the front line was approximately ten miles away at that time it has been speculated that he was in fact killed by friendly fire in a sad case of mistaken identity. If that is the case then the source of this `friendly` fire may have been a section of French soldiers.
Like the others, Parr is buried in the St Symphorien Cemetery, and his age is given on the gravestone as twenty, the army not knowing his true age of seventeen. Coincidentally, his grave faces that of George Edwin Ellison, the last British soldier killed during the Great War. As this part of Belgium was in German hands for the next four years it took some time for his death to be acknowledged.

Jonathan said that all, officers and men of the BEF can considered the events of August 23rd 1914, a job extremely well done. The BEF had held positions, not of their choosing and had given a supposedly invincible enemy a bloody nose, earning their respect in the process. In no way therefore, could Jonathan agree with that made by the BBC that ‘Mons was a humiliation for the BBC, indeed it is symptomatic of much from the BBC on the history of the British army over the last 100 years.

Rather than being ‘humiliated’, so respectful and reverent were the Germans that when they buried the fallen men of the Middlesex Regiment at St. Symphorien Cemetery after the battle, they assumed that, because of the way they had fought, they must be a guards regiment and affixed the word ‘Royal’ to the memorial in the Cemetery.

There are those who consider Mons to be a German ‘victory’ but in fact the BEF had delayed the German advance and, more importantly had earned the grudging respect of the Germans who quickly realised that the BEF would be no push over, indeed this made the Germans very wary of the BEF and what it was capable of during the remainder of The Retreat. Sir John French had promised the French general, Lanrezac, that the BEF would hold the line on the left of the French army for 24 hours - this it accomplished - what it set out to do.

For those interested in statistics, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records that there are 229 Commonwealth soldiers reposing here plus 284 graves of German soldiers.

Moving on, Jonathan looked briefly at Mons during the German occupation. At the outset of the war, the people of Belgium had believed that Germany would respect their neutrality and it came as a terrible shock to them when Germany invaded and quickly overcame the forts at Namur and Liege. With the arrival of the BEF and reports of German Uhlans in the area, the citizens of Mons realised that war was upon them. While the people of Mons complied with the dictates of the German occupiers, the Belgian resistance also
had a part to play. This resistance ranged from minor breaches of the occupier’s law, like singing the French or British national anthems, at least a dozen Mons citizens were executed by firing squad for more serious actions of resistance. Throughout the war Mons became increasingly important to the German occupiers as many units passed through the town going to and from the Front presenting Belgian spies with the opportunity to gather information on such troop movements and feed the information back to the Allies. It was also the Headquarters of Northern Army Group under the command of Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria.

From August 1918, following the Battle of Amiens, the Germans were progressively pushed back. Following a two day battle at Valenciennes, Mons was relieved by the Canadian Corps and by November 9th 1918 things were almost back to where they had been four years previously. Mons has been a principal centre for Belgian coal mining and during the occupation these resources had been exploited by the Germans to support their war effort. The recapture of Mons at the end of the war was of huge symbolic importance to the Allies. General Sir Arthur Currie, commander of the Canadian Corps was therefore ordered to take the town.

Sir Arthur William Currie, had the unique distinction of starting his military career on the very bottom rung as a pre-war militia gunner before rising through the ranks to become the first Canadian commander of the Canadian Corps. Currie’s success was based on his ability to rapidly adapt brigade tactics to the exigencies of trench warfare, using set piece operations and bite-and-hold tactics. Currie began his military career in 1897 as a part-time soldier in the Canadian militia while making his living as a teacher and later as an insurance salesman and real estate speculator. Currie rose quickly through the ranks: commissioned as an officer in 1900, promoted to captain in 1901, then major in 1906 and became an artillery regimental commander in 1909. In 1913, Currie accepted the command of the newly created 50th Regiment Gordon Highlanders of Canada. Finding himself in debt following a real estate crash in Victoria, Currie embezzled ten thousand dollars earmarked for regimental uniforms into his personal accounts to pay off his debts. When the First World War broke out Canadian Minister of Militia Sam Hughes appointed Currie as commander of the 2nd Canadian Brigade. Following the Second Battle of Ypres Currie was promoted to Major General and commander of the 1st Canadian Division. Following the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Canadian Corps commander Julian Byng was promoted to General and Currie, the 1st Canadian Division commander, was promoted to Lieutenant-General and assumed command of the Canadian Corps. Upon returning to Canada, Currie was promoted to General and was made Inspector General of the Canadian Army. Although he only held a high school diploma, Currie became the principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University in 1920, holding this post until his death in 1933.

In June 1927, the city of Mons erected a plaque commemorating its liberation by the Canadian Corps nine years earlier; when this event was reported in Canadian newspapers, Currie’s enemies took the opportunity to again question the necessity of the final day of fighting. A front-page editorial published on 13 June 1927 by the Hughes-friendly Port Hope Evening Gazette argued that Currie was either negligent or deliberate in wasting the lives of soldiers under his command in taking Mons on the final day of the war. The newspaper only had a small
local circulation and Currie's friends advised him against pursuing the matter. However, Currie was unwilling to let the matter go, and sued the newspaper for libel, seeking $50,000 in damages. The trial in April 1928 was front-page news across Canada. On the stand, Currie testified that he had been under orders from Allied Supreme Commander Ferdinand Foch to pursue German forces; to do otherwise would have been treason. Many of Currie's senior officers testified that Currie urged them to advance with caution, avoiding unnecessary casualties. At the end of the trial, the jury returned a verdict after four hours, finding the newspaper guilty of libel but only awarding Currie $500 in damages, plus costs. Although Currie was only awarded a small portion of the value sought, newspapers across Canada referred to the result as a victory for him. The trial helped to restore Currie's reputation; however the stress took a toll on his health.

The goal was to capture Mons without destroying it, not an easy task given the previous experiences in the war of urban warfare. Rumours also abounded of a possible peace treaty but until there was an official armistice, fighting would continue. Currie planned an encircling manœuvre after which the Canadians entered the town encountering stiff German resistance. Enemy prisoners informed the Canadians that the Germans were planning a retreat but German machine gun fire remained constant. The Canadians pressed on and by the morning of November 11th had subdued most of the town without having to resort to heavy shelling and the town`s inhabitants welcomed the Canadians as liberators. At 6.30 that morning, Currie`s HQ received word that hostilities would cease that day at 11am and news of this quickly spread amongst the troops.

Compared with other period in the war, casualties in the retaking of the town were `slight` with 280 men being reported as killed, wounded or missing during the last few days of operations.

Jonathan then looked in detail at three men who fell in that last battle.

George Edwin Ellison was the last British soldier to be killed in action during the War. He died at 09:30 am (90 minutes before the armistice came into effect) while on a patrol on the outskirts of Mons. Ellison came from Leeds. Early in his life, he joined the army as a regular soldier but had left by 1912 when he was married to Hannah Maria Burgan and had become a coal miner. Sometime just before the outbreak of war he was recalled to the army, joining the 5th Royal Irish Lancers, serving in the army at the start of the war. He fought at the Battle of Mons in 1914, and several other battles including the Ypres, Armentierres, La Bassee, Lens, Loos, Cambrai on the Western Front.

Ellison, stated to be aged 40, is buried in the St. Symphorien Cemetery. Coincidentally, and in large part due to Mons being lost in the very opening stages of the war and regained at the very end (from the British perspective), his grave faces that of John Parr, the first British soldier killed during the Great War. He was survived by Hannah and a son, James Cornelius, just five days short of his fifth birthday when his father was killed.
Private George Lawrence Price was a Canadian and is traditionally recognized as the last soldier of the British Empire to be killed during the Great War. He was born in Falmouth, Nova Scotia, on December 15, 1892, and raised on Church Street, in what is now Port Williams, Nova Scotia. He moved to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan as a young man, where he was conscripted on October 15, 1917. He served with "A" Company of the 28th Battalion, (Saskatchewan North West Regiment), Canadian Expeditionary Force.

The 28th Battalion had orders for November 11 to advance from Frameries (South of Mons) and continue to the village of Havre, securing all the bridges on the Canal du Centre. The battalion advanced rapidly starting at 4:00 a.m., pushing back light German resistance and they reached their position along the canal facing Ville-sur-Haine by 9:00 a.m. where the battalion received a message that all hostilities would cease at 11:00 a.m. Price and fellow soldier Art Goodworthy were worried that the battalion's position on the open canal bank was exposed to German positions on the opposite side of the canal where they could see bricks had been knocked out from house dormers to create firing positions. According to Goodworthy, they decided on their own initiative to take a patrol of five men across the bridge to search the houses. Reaching the houses and checking them one by one, they discovered German soldiers mounting machine guns along a brick wall overlooking the canal. The Germans opened fire on the patrol with heavy machine gun fire but the Canadians were protected by the brick walls of one of the houses. Aware that they had been discovered and outflanked, the Germans began to retreat. A Belgian family in one of the houses warned the Canadians to be careful as they followed the retreating Germans.

George Price was fatally shot in the chest by a German sniper as he stepped out of the house into the street. He was pulled into one of the houses and treated by a young Belgian nurse who ran across the street to help, but died a minute later at 10:58 a.m., November 11, 1918. His death was just two minutes before the armistice came into effect at 11 am.

He is buried in St. Symphorien Cemetery

For Jonathan, Mons is now very much part of his own family history, something which came across in the presentation, and which at times was emotional for him, something which Branch Chair, Tony Bolton remarked upon in his vote of thanks.
THEIR WAR AND OURS -- THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT WAR ON SOCIETY SPECIAL INTEREST EVENT THURSDAY 12TH APRIL – SUNDAY 15TH APRIL 2018 Christ Church OXFORD

This Special Event “Their War and Ours” Organised by Christchurch College ‘The House’ (University of Oxford) supported by the Western Front Association, was attended by numerous WFA Members and nobility, including WFA Patron Professor Sir Hew Strachan, WFA Chairman Colin Wagstaff and WFA Trustee and Chesterfield Branch Vice Chair Mark Macartney, Event details are under, Also a Bookshop provided by Blackwell’s Oxford was provided which proved to be very much appreciated and busy.

One hundred years after the Armistice on the Western Front, the First World War remains defined in popular imagination by the muddy trenches of Belgium and northern France. Life on the Home Front is portrayed as comparatively more sheltered than during the Second World War. However, to understand the war’s essential role in shaping the twentieth century, it is necessary to examine how the war affected not only the soldiers who fought it, but also the millions of civilians across the globe. The totalizing logic of the war meant that ordinary civilians participated in the conflict at various levels. Many in the combat zones became a direct target. Some had to flee their homes or live under foreign occupation. For others, the long food queues created by increasing shortages and inflation symbolised the hardship suffered during these years. Those whose loved ones had died in battle had to come to terms with this loss. Even civilians living far removed from the battlefields were constantly expected to join in the common patriotic cause. Despite the growing sacrifices required from societies, most countries continued to fight for four years. How were European states able to mobilise their population to sustain the war effort for so long?

Was propaganda an important tool? Could we speak of a self-mobilisation of belligerent societies?

How were societies transformed by the war? How did the conflict disrupt the existing social order? The end of the First World War saw the birth of revolution and the collapse of the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires, while everywhere citizens placed new demands on their government as a reward for their sacrifice. It is this variety of experiences that was explored during this Event. The conference gathered a group of specialists on different countries and aspects of societies in wartime to give a fuller view of this global conflict.
The Legacies of the Home Fronts in Post-War Europe

Professor John Horne

The Front (Home) The Front (later people focused against each other), at home what should we be doing? Not all Countries referred to Home Front, Must not refer Home Front to occasional query, we spend more time on memorials than Civilians and the Front. What did Home Front consist of? (Civilians and partial rebuild) Home front is not just relating to Civilian Society. Capital Cities at War, Ethnic problems at War, Different forms of Conflict after the War, (feelings/ethnic/gender/desire to go home) Go back to pre-war (Edwardian time) Russian Civil War ended in chaos, December 1917-Russia out of War, War not to defeat enemy but to create a better society, General Strike 1926 (miners)

‘I alone am left to tell the tale’: Nursing Memoirs of the Great War

Dr Jane Potter

Numerous historians mentioned, Lyn MacDonald, is a British military historian best known for a series of books on the First World War that draw on first-hand accounts of surviving veterans. She lives near Cambridge, England. She was a BBC Radio presenter until 1973’ Books covered, Sam Briggs by Richard Marsh, VAD are not just Nurses (canteen staff etc.) Eighteen months in a War Zone (1916) etc. by Kate John Finze), Hospital Heroes by Elizabeth Walker Black. A Diary Without Dates by Enid Bagnold, also Vera Brittain was talked about in detail, also books A Green Tent in Flanders by Maud Mortimer and The Backlash of War by Ellen N La Motte

Unarmed and Under Fire: Civilians at the Western Front, 1914-1918

Dr Alex Dowdall

Different picture (Dr Dowdall stated) from previous talks, during this presentation. Front Line Towns, The Front-Militarisation of their identities, (only talking about civilians on Allied Front) Militarisation of Urban Space, (streets covered with barbed wire entanglement) ARRAS population (Evacuated themselves /Authorities+mobilisation,) ARRAS POPULATION . 1911=26080, Nov 1914=3654, Feb 1915 = 3572, April 1918=0 Population of ruins 1911=15718, Feb 1915=35525, Feb 1918= 17248, Apr 1918=0 (all Evacuated) Encouraging resistance under fire 1917 Crisis and remobilisation, 1917 Russia exit from the War, (mutinies +many starved,) 1917 suffering and morale, dwindling food supplies hit the civilian morale at the front (food vs bombs)

Mobilising European Societies for War

Dr Pierre Purseigle

Transfiguration of Europe (Nationalization, Democratization, Industrialization, Bureaucratization & Globalization) Military 30% of overall military population??, Social (cultures + ideologies) defensive war extremists conflict. Wealth-means of industrial warfare, French shell production in 1914=10-12,000 (1916=200,000). Impact on uneven Economic Development, paying for the war, Globalisation and coalition warfare. Power-Mobilisation as a challenge to Liberalism Intervention reformation, conscription, Authorisation turn, Exploitation, Colonial Empires occupation and Forces, , resistances, legitimacy, Sovereignty, revolution Russia 1917, defeat & Russia culture (Ottoman, German, Habsburg Empires) Women & Gender Roles, (War, Patriarchy and Conventional Gender Roles,) War and Patriarchy, home front feminized space, War and the definition of Gender Roles.

The Great War and Modern Religion

Dr Adrian Gregory

Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, As War progressed the Pope became more pushing for peace, Pope John 23rd was not impressed by Fatima. Islam-now Turkey proclaimed the Holy
War. Ottoman Collapse/ISIS, Anti Communist, Anti William Jennings Bryan, God the Father-
Ordination of Women, Sermons by A Maud Royden (Agnes Maude Royden, (23 November 1876 -
30 July 1956), later known as Maude Royden-Shaw, was a preacher and suffragist. In conclusion
Christ triumphant Oct 20th 1923, God didn’t die on the Somme, you could say he was
transformed, Final note Salvation Army and YMCA were highly involved during the War.

Hunger in War and Peace: The Nutritional Deprivation of Women and Children in Germany,
1914-1924
Dr Mary Cox
Germany did not Starve-War lost because of Military. Germany intended to be World Power but
other Countries were World Powers. Germany vulnerability to British blockade, Food imports
from a massive 25%, heavily recline on fertilizer, poorly conceived German Politics, Hunger in
Germany was a myth, and Children missed Sunday Schools.

Holy Ground, The First World War and Ypres, Transforming a Belgium city into extension of the
British Empire, 1919-1939
Professor Mark Connelly
Ypres 1919 - Devastated (various images shown) (Wild West Atmosphere) Graves Registration
Unit established, sacred (Holy) Ground-nothing must be removed (excursion tours) Ypres-
Demilitarised Zone until 1921. British Government had plans to buy Ypres (as a Ruined Site),
Fairground Attractions, create Market, unseemly activity at Hill 60 (more dug up than put in) St
George’s Memorial Church, (Saint George’s Memorial Church, Ypres, Belgium, was built to
commemorate over 500,000 British and Commonwealth troops, who had died in the three
battles fought for the Ypres Salient, during World War I. It was completed in 1929)

A Few Crock and a Number of Women: Christ Church and the First World War Judith Curthoys
(Optional talk)
Notes: Oxford Men responded in large numbers to the outbreak of War, leaving the University
depleted of not just students, but tutors too. But new faces arrived to fill the rooms and the
quadangles, and the character of the colleges was changed, both during hostilities and after
their end.

Christ Church and the Silvertown Explosion: Civilian Heroism in World War I
Dr Martin Grossel (Optional talk)
Notes: Just before 7pm on 19th January 1917 there was a huge explosion of a TNT factory in
Silvertown, East London. The sound of it was heard in Southampton and Kings Lynn, 73 people
were killed and 400 injured and more than 60,000 properties were damaged. Among the dead
was a Christ Church Chemistry Tutor who had been working at the Factory. He received national
recognition for his heroism. This event was one of a number of such catastrophes which affected
the British civilian population during World War 1. The talk explored the origins and impact of
this disaster which is still remembered by the local community to this day.
Afternote: This was not the first, last, largest, or the most deadly explosion at a munitions
facility in Britain during the war: an explosion at Faversham involving 200 long tons (200 tonnes)
of TNT killed 105 in 1916, and the National Shell Filling Factory, Chilwell exploded in 1918,
killing 137

War and Revolution in the Austro-Hungarian Empire
Dr Claire Morelon
The Sarajevo assassination 28th June 1914. Badges for Commitment in Sarajevo/Prague, (Widows
& Orphans + Red Cross) showing details of a refugee in in stricken Prague in 1915. Expedition for
potatoes in 1917, Czech Badge 1918, 28th October 1918 day of national Independence in Prague,
July 1918-call for demonstrations to give Republic Status from Germany Jews and German
Austrians. Austria-Hungary, From one Empire to many Nations.
The Empire Comes ‘Home’? The Experiences and Encounters of Colonial Troops in Britain during the First World War,
Dr Anna Maguire

Realms of troops (New Zealand, Australia, India, West Indies etc., some went straight home after getting frostbite, photos shown of Australia and New Zealand Division on a troop ship in 1915. Thousands of soldiers from all over the Empire visited London while on leave, they visited the Tower, the Abbey, Westminster Hall, and St Paul’s, appealing to the imagination of individuals of the Dominions. (from the Colonies to London) A lot of stories of New Zealanders stated they were known to hear – oh heck you're white, (must have implied them all to be Maori’s), after a Jamaican spoke English was asked if all Jamaicans spoke English, An ANZAC falls in love with a Maori (his nurse) Maoris known to marry English Women, The presentation covered in length the sinking of the SS Mendi,

SS Mendi was a British 4,230 GRT passenger steamship that was built in 1905 and, as a troopship, sank after collision with great loss of life in 1917, the sinking of the SS Mendi was caused by the reckless action of the captain of the SS Darro. It remains the greatest wartime maritime disaster ever suffered in South Africa. During the First World War there was a shortage of labourers, which despite the draft, caused delays in moving supplies from the rear to the front lines. In September of 1916, General Louis Botha, the current Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa at that time, informed Parliament that Britain had requested that the South provide 10 000 men to work behind the front lines in France.

Note: During the First World War, the SS Mendi ship sank off the Isle of Wight, killing more than 600 South African passengers. The sinking of the SS Mendi is one of the worst maritime disasters in UK waters of the 20th century.

The First World War’s Effect on the Understanding of Strategy in the Twentieth Century
Professor Sir Hew Strachan

Post War Everything had been focused on Battles, 2nd World War got in the way. Problem, after First World War how people thought, Other than Britain WW2 was more Catastrophic that WW1, WW2 was the Bad War, with WW1 being the good War .First World War being more formative than WW2 and the Cold War. Strategy in 1914 was more ‘the job for the Generals’, (not the Politicians) In argument that Germany did not lose the War in the field. But the field War was too important to be left to the Politicians. Wireless command was very important, Attrition-Using War for purposes of strategy, or annihilation Battle annihilation would end with if you attack you mark a hole in Enemy Line, but that Enemy counter attacks, Attrition being used to attempt fate. During Cuban Crisis /Iraq/ Afghanistan strategy was measuring man capability.
Now War is too important to be left to the Generals. Strategy will always be about coordination between different Theatres.

Is Grand Strategy the same as Policy? Not one element won the War.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Claire Morelon is the Academic Director for this programme. She is a Junior Research Fellow at The Queen’s College, Oxford. Her social research focuses on daily life in Prague during the First World War and in its immediate aftermath, exploring the urban experience of war on the Home Front.

Dr Mary Cox is a William Golding Junior Research Fellow in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at Brasenose College, Oxford and Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. Her book on hunger in Germany during the First World War is published by Oxford University Press.

Dr Alex Dowdall is a Lecturer in the Cultural History of Modern War and Simon Research Fellow at the University of Manchester. His research is concerned with the impact of military violence on civilians. He is currently preparing his first monograph, entitled Communities under Fire: Urban Life at the Western Front, 1914-1918, for publication by Oxford University Press.

Dr Adrian Gregory is an Associate Professor of Modern History and Tutorial Fellow at Pembroke College, Oxford. He is the Director of the “Globalising and Localising the Great War” network at the University of Oxford. His books include The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War and A War of Peoples 1914-1919.

Professor John Horne is Leverhulme Visiting Professor at Oxford University and Emeritus Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin. He is a member of the International Research Centre of the Historial de la Grande Guerre Péronne. He is the author and editor of a number of books and ninety chapters and articles, many relating to the history of World War One.

Dr Heather Jones is an Associate Professor in International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is the author of Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1920 (CUP, 2011), has co-edited two books, and published over 27 scholarly articles and chapters on the First World War. (Dr Heather Jones did not present talk)

Dr Alice Kelly is the Harmsworth Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the History of the United States and World War One at the Rothermere American Institute, Oxford University. She has published a critical edition of Edith Wharton’s war reportage, Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort, and articles on First World War writing. She also writes for the Times Literary Supplement. (Dr Alice Kelly did not present talk)

Dr Jane Potter is Reader in Arts at Oxford Brookes University. Her publications include Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women’s Literary Responses to the Great War 19141918, Wilfred Owen: An Illustrated Life, and with Carol Acton, Working in a World of Hurt: Trauma and Resilience in the Narratives of Medical Personnel in Warzones.

Dr Pierre Purseigle is Associate Professor of History at the University of Warwick and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. His research focuses on the comparative history of the First World War and especially on the experience of the French, British, and - to a lesser extent - Belgian populations.
Professor Sir Hew Strachan is Professor of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews and Emeritus Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. He has published several books and essays on the First World War, including To Arms, and The First World War: A New Illustrated History. He serves on national advisory committees for the centenary of the conflict.

Professor Mark Connelly, one of the UK’s leading experts on WWI, is head of Kent’s new Engagement Centre, known as ‘Gateways to the First World War’. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the engagement centres connect academic and public histories of WWI as part of the commemoration of the war’s centenary in 2014. Professor of Modern British History, Mark Connelly is also a contributor to the BBC’s World War One at Home project, academic adviser to the Institute of Education-led battlefields tours for schools projects, adviser on the First World War to the Joint Services Command Staff College, Shrivenham, and a member of the academic steering committee of the Imperial War Museum’s Lives of the First World War and Operation War Diary projects. At local level, he is helping develop an app for a self-guided tour of WWI sites in Folkestone and leading a project in which Simon Langton students are curating an exhibition about Canterbury in WWI for the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge.

Dr Anna Maguire, Kings College London, Historian of Modern Britain, who specialises in WW1.

On the Saturday Evening all attendees attended a Gala Banquet in the Main Hall and after the Event on the Sunday a small group attended the nearby Memorial Garden, (see photos under) Group photo under shows (L-R) Richard Olsen, Jon Palmer, Mark Macartney, Colin Wagstaff and Alan Maddox
Book Review

Britain Goes to War - How The First World War began to reshape the Nation

Edited by Peter Liddle
Published by Pen & Sword Military
ISBN 978 1 47382 820 9
Hardback. Cover price £25 (can be obtained for £18 via Amazon post free)
320 pages

The First World War had a profound impact on British society and on British relations with continental Europe, the Dominions, the USA and the emerging Soviet Union. In this book a group of distinguished historians - including many well known to WFA members - Gary Sheffield, John Bourne, Spencer Jones, Peter Simkins and Chris Baker - look back with the clarity of modern perspective, at issues that were critical to Britain’s war effort as the nation embarked on the most intense and damaging struggle in its history.

There are 20 chapters, each concluding with copious reference notes but more importantly if the reader wants to follow up in more detail, a list of publications recommended for further reading is included.

The book is a good introduction to topics which rarely grab the `headlines` - Chapter 10, for example, by Peter Liddle is entitled `Britons in Berlin: Ruhleben - the Interment of British Civilians` which tells the story of those folks who were trapped in Germany upon the outbreak of war and were held behind barbed wire for its duration. This is followed by a chapter by Matthew Richardson entitled `The Torment of Captivity: Germans, Austrians and Turks Interned on the Isle of Man`. These were two topics about which I had little or no knowledge. Other interesting but perhaps known in less detail topics are, `From Cricket Whites to Khaki - Sport and the Great War` by Clive Harris; `Silent Soldiers - Animals in the Great War` by Paul Skelton -Stroud; The Mobilization and Experience of Nurses in The First World War` by Alison S. Fell

Part Three, which encompasses the last three chapters deals with archival materials, Remembrance at Lawnswood Cemetery in Leeds and an excellent piece by Chris Baker `Tracing Your Family`s History in the Great War.`

Highly Recommended

Grant Cullen
Plaque unveiled at former home of Albert Ball, Nottingham's greatest First World War hero

A bus was also named after him on the same day

relative of Albert Ball VC unveil a plaque alongside the Lord Mayor of Nottingham, Cllr Mike Edwards, during a ceremony outside the Ball family home in The Park Estate

Captain Albert Ball, Nottingham’s most celebrated hero of the First World War, has been given a double honour - more than a century after he was killed in action. A plaque was unveiled today, Monday, at Sedgley House, the home in The Park where Albert was raised with his sister Lois and brother Cyril before going off to war. And further recognition came when a brand new double-decker Nottingham City Transport bus arrived bearing the name of the young pilot who won a host of bravery medals, including the Victoria Cross, before making the supreme sacrifice at the age of 20.

A parade took place during the event
A host of VIPs turned out to honour Ball, the youngest ever recipient of the Freedom of Nottingham, including Lord Mayor Coun Mike Edwards, Deputy Lord Lieutenant Tom Huggon, the Rev Andy Morris, representatives of the Mercian Regiment, including their ram mascot Private Derby, and the RAF. A guard of honour was formed by members of 138 (1st Nottingham) ATC.

Members of the Ball family were there to witness the proud moment and a message was read out from College Albert Ball, the school located in the French town of Annouellin where he is buried. Mrs Vanda Day, Ball’s great niece and his closest living relative, said: “It is always humbling to see how people here in Nottingham, and also in France, work together to keep Albert’s memory alive.

“It is a proud moment for the family, but also an emotional one.”

The Lord Mayor of Nottingham Cllr Mike Edwards speaks during the plaque unveiling

In a moving ceremony organised by the Robin Hood Rifles - Ball’s first enlistment after the declaration of war in 1914 - and Nottingham Civic Society, Coun Edwards was joined by Mrs Day and other close relatives, to unveil the plaque outside 43 Lenton Road.

Home owner Mrs Billie Ragosta said she moved into the house, with her husband Dan, 12 years ago with no knowledge that it had belonged to the Ball family.

“One day I noticed all these people gathered outside. I asked if I could help and they said they were looking for Albert Ball’s house and when they said it was number 43, I was stunned.

“But it is not a surprise,” said the interior designer. “This house has an atmosphere, you can feel his presence in the fabric. This is where he and his brother and sister had fun.”

Chair of Nottingham Civic Society, Hilary Silvester, said: “We are honoured to be associated with the installation of this plaque; Albert Ball was a citizen of Nottingham of whom we can all be proud.”

Ball, the elder son of wealthy property developer and local politician Sir Albert Ball, was still three months short of his 21st birthday when he crashed during a dogfight over German lines on May 7, 1917, dying in the arms of a local girl who ran to his aid.
Dozens attend the plaque unveiling at the Ball family home in Lenton Road

With more than 40 victories in the air to his credit, he was already the holder of the Distinguished Service Order with two bars, the Military Cross and a bravery award from the Russians. Given a funeral by the Germans with full military honours and recognised by their leading pilot the Red Baron, Manfred von Richthofen, as “the best of English fliers”, a grateful nation recognised Ball’s sacrifice with the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Closer to home, thousands of people lined the streets of Nottingham for a memorial service held in St Mary’s Church just a few weeks after his death. Albert Ball Snr bought the plot of land on which his son had died, erecting a marker on the spot. The area is still tended by residents of Annoeullin. After the double unveiling, the annual ceremony of remembrance was held at the Albert Ball Memorial in the grounds of Nottingham Castle. An exhibition of Ball’s medals and memorabilia is permanently on display in the Museum of the Mercian Regiment housed inside the Castle.

(from the BBC)

The Munitions Crisis - part 12

The Conference met from the 17th to the 19th March 1915, proceedings being opened by the Minister for Munitions, Mr. David Lloyd George, who said that those present were being invited to consider the need for larger output of munitions and the steps which the government proposed to take to organise industry to that end. Every belligerent country had found the expenditure of war materials had exceeded all anticipations. The Minister referred to the very drastic powers which the government had now assumed to control or take over any works in the country which were either turning out munitions of war or were capable of doing so and this was the matter upon which the consultation was to take place. The `taking over` of these works would not mean that their present owners and managers would be turned out to be replaced by some admiral or general. The works would be run as formerly, except that they would be entirely turned over to munition production, and, of course, under such control there would have to be a limitation of private profits.

However, if the Board of Trade was going in this manner to interfere with the rights and interests of capital, the owners and management of these concerns would think it only just that that they should similarly ask the workers to consent to such limitations as might be found
vitaly necessary in the national interest of their ordinary privileges. In particular, the Minister wanted to ensure that certain trade union regulations which might be more than justified in peace-time should be modified in such a way as to avoid hampering the nations munitions supplies in the existing emergency, and particularly that if any disputes arose, either about such relaxation of normal trade union rules, about hours or rates of pay, the matter should be settled by peaceful arbitration, and pending a settlement, the workers should carry on with the job. The Government did not say that workmen ought never to complain, or to ask for an increase in wages but, as the Minister stated,

“Our point is that during the time the questions at issue are being adjudicated upon, the work shall go on...we want to get some kind of understanding with you about that before we undertake control of these works.”

The Minister then laid a series of propositions before the representatives of the Trade Unions which had the object of providing that there should be no stoppage of work for Government purposes by strike or lockout, pending a settlement of any disputes that might arise between employers and workpeople, but that all such disputes be referred to arbitration; and that, for the duration of the war, all Trade Union restrictions tending to limit output or the employment of semi-skilled or female labour, should be suspended. The workers’ representatives were then left together to prepare their won draft of the undertaking they were prepared to give on these points. This draft was discussed and amended, and finally on the 19th March, a memorandum was presented by Arthur Henderson (left) which had been accepted with only two dissensions. It was accordingly signed on behalf of the government by David Lloyd George and Walter Runciman. The Trade Union signatories were Henderson and William Mosses, General Secretary of the Federation of shipbuilding and Engineering Trades.

This document was known as the `Treasury Document` and was backed by the `Munitions of War Act 1915.` It occupied an important place throughout the war in the negotiations with labour, because it set out clearly, in terms which the Trade Union leaders recognised to be fair and just, the conditions under which munition labour was thereafter progressively organised. It stipulated for the admission of unskilled and semi-skilled to dilute the existing body of skilled labour, provided that they were paid the same wages as had customarily been paid for the work; it furnished a scheme of arbitration to take the place of strikes and it laid down that the private profits of manufacturers were to be subject to limitation. In the following week an agreement on similar lines was specially negotiated with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, whose representatives, though present at the previous conference, had attended without the authority to sign on behalf of their members.

These two agreements, though important because of the solutions they reached, failed to become immediately operative. The Trade Unions, quite naturally declined to confirm the proposals limiting their own freedom until the government implemented its undertaking to restrict private profit.
Walter Runciman (left) was at the time engaged in negotiation with the heads of the armament firms in an effort to arrive at an agreed basis of limitation of profits, but in the end these negotiations came to nothing and the ruling had to be imposed by the Munitions of War Act 1915, which provided that the establishments engaged in munitions work could be brought under the control of the Ministry, that their profits should be limited and that in such controlled establishments trade union rules restricting output should be suspended.

This question of controlling private profits was vital to the whole issue of labour supply. It was useless to ask the workers on the plea of a grave national emergency to put their whole effort into manufacturing and to stop striking or agitating for higher wages or to accept the modification of rules and restrictions designed for their protection, which they had wrung from employers through years of struggle, when they saw those same employers amassing colossal fortunes out of the same emergency.
Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith who was an important figure, during The Great War, had been primarily responsible for the economic preparations for war, having devised the valuable system of war-risk insurance and had become a valued colleague of David Lloyd George at the new Ministry of Munitions. On June 9th 1915 he issued a `Memorandum on Labour for Armaments`

“The difficulty, as it has been expressed, both by the Trade Union representatives at the two Treasury Conferences and by the employers themselves and by the employers themselves is that the workmen, though engaged on armament work, still feel themselves to be working essentially for private employers with whom they only have a `cash nexus` and that in the present circumstances a `cash nexus` is quite inadequate to secure control..... So long as contractors profits are not brought under control, the workmen feel that any sacrifice they make of their rules and restrictions will directly increase the profits of private persons, and their unwillingness to make the sacrifice is made almost insuperable by this suspicion “

To be Continued

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9th Annual Great War Forum Conference, Tally Ho Conference Centre, Birmingham - Saturday April 14th 2018. Other speaker reports will appear in future editions of the Branch Magazine

Alan Curragh welcomed over 100 Great War enthusiasts to this Conference, which amazingly is in its ninth year.

First up was the well known Taff Gillingham. Taff is a professional military historical advisor for film, television and theatre work, advising on many productions including the TV series ‘Downton Abbey’, and the 2012 film ‘Private Peaceful’. He has a vast knowledge of the uniforms and equipment of the British and Commonwealth soldiers of the first half of the twentieth century. He runs The Association for Military Remembrance, which researches military history 1899 - 1960, is a former trustee of The Suffolk Regiment Museum and is Chairman of the Suffolk Branch of The Western Front Association.

Drawing on his extensive experience as a military historical advisor, the title of Taff`s presentation was `The Great War on Television`

In his opening comments he said he would be comparing Real history with simplified or Duff history! His message would be that it is necessary to get the balance right.

The late John Terraine pioneered Great War history on TV in the 1960s with the groundbreaking series first aired in 1964 on BBC - `The Great
War. In more recent times the likes of Gary Sheffield have contributed to TV coverage of the conflict, particularly in these years on 100th Anniversaries but selective editing has often meant that the point that the contributor is making becomes totally lost and the narrative suits what the producer wants to put across.

Taff then put up a timeline of terrestrial TV

1936 - BBC1
1955 - ITV
1964 - BBC2
1982 - Channel Four
1997 - Channel Five

.....and of course by the 1980s came the blessing and curse of choice which by today means over 500 channels being available. And of course we are in the age of the `low budget` documentary.

He then went on to show a list of documentaries and films which were either exclusively, or and significant content about The Great War.

Heading the list was the BBC series on The Great War first broadcast in 1964, but it too should be put in context as there was a significant amount of `fake footage` included, much of which was actually filmed after the conflict. That should not however detract from the overall quality of the production.

Other `notable` productions followed including,

1968 `Christmas Day passed quietly`
1976 `Battle of the Somme - 60th Anniversary Programme` - which was awash with sentimentality and very much followed the `lions led by donkeys` theme.
1981 `Peace in No-Man`s Land`
1989 `Blackadder` good entertainment but which led to a serious backward step in serious study and which even today is often used by teachers in schools as `fact`
1999 `All the King`s Men` starring David Jason, which as Taff said was a Sunday night drama - NOT a documentary - but a programme which the BBC promoted as `fact`

Taff went on to describe his own involvement with the 2002 programme `The Trench` including his arguments with the producers over what should go in and how omitting the section on training of the Pals battalion left viewers with the impression that the recruits signed up, were put in uniform, given a rifle and sent to the front. What should have been `reality` became `contrived`.

2003 The `Timewatch` series on Sir Douglas Haig - `The Unknown Soldier`
2003 Hew Strachan`s series on `The Great World War`
2003 `The Last of the Tommies` - an excellent series produced by Richard Van Emden an primarily featured the last fighting `tommy` - Harry Patch
2006 `Somme - Defeat into Victory`
2011 Downton Abbey which in Series 2, featured battle scenes from the Great War. Taff had been the military advisor to this series and gave some interesting stories about his conflicts with the producers and how to circumvented some ‘instruction’ much to the betterment of the scenes.

2013 ‘The Wipers Times’ on which Taff cooperated with Ian Hislop - this of course drawing upon the humour of the story.

Taff then related an anecdote which totally demonstrated how one sentence in a sub title can totally alter the public’s perception on a programme.

Moving on to the Centenaries Commemorations, Taff said in his opinion, overall, these were disappointing and used a two minute trailer of what the BBC had put out as an example.

He then discussed his involvement in the production of Jeremy Paxman’s series shown in 2014 ‘Britain’s Great War’ and how that when he first read the script he had found it quite frankly ‘appalling’ - something which Paxman came to agree with after discussions with Taff.

Taff then related an anecdote which will remain with me for a long time. Jeremy Paxman had, like so many others, this misconception of the British Generals being many miles from the front, living in luxurious chateaux, quaffing champagne while sending men to the slaughter. Taff told Paxman to imagine he was standing just in front for a ten foot high brick wall which stretched 20 miles in either direction. He then asked Paxman - how much can you see ? Paxman, of course said he could see ‘nothing’. Taff then told him to imagine he was twenty miles back from the same wall - what can you see ?. For Paxman that was , as Taff described it, the ‘lightbulb’ moment when Paxman realised that to command on the Western Front you had to operate some considerable way back from the front line so that you could see and understand the `bigger picture`. Taff recalled that some time later he saw Paxman being interviewed on TV and when the interviewer made his point about commanders being so far from the front, Paxman used the `brick wall` story to counter that argument.

Taff then went on to list some really `dismal` offerings, including,

37 Days

Teenage Tommies

Crimson Field

Our World War

Passing Bells....which he described as `utter crap`

Moving on there was in 2006 The Somme - from Defeat to Victory - the BBC ‘blurb` was.....`a drama-documentary which offers a new perspective on one of the most important battles of the First World War and will reveal that a British army had learned how to fight a modern war.....`.

This challenged the misconceptions, like `- `Lions led by Donkeys` as peddled by Alan Clark. Has it been shown again in the 100th Anniversary year of the Somme - no - as Taff said `extraordinary` This was a documentary which showed the British Army in a positive light.

ITV - full marks for calling their 2014 series `The Great War - the Peoples` Story.....not `World War One` - took actors voicing over original letters and dialogue.

Interestingly, Taff said, the most accurate piece of recent TV history was not a documentary but the short advert film made for Sainsbury’s in 2014 - The Christmas Truce. Taff was an advisor to this but right at the start the Producer wanted it based around the football match `legend` - a
‘match’ for which there has never been any proof or corroboration of it actually taking place. Then in 2016 there was Peter Barton’s ‘Both sides of the wire’ which appealed to the commissioning editor initially but lost its way - the commissioning editor having lost his nerve.

Taff now wound up by saying that it future it may all change as the way in which programmes are delivered given that fewer people watch programmes on TV sets, more on computers, phones, tablets etc. This will mean that instead of these programmes being made by TV people - they will be made by historians. TV people, producers, directors, commissioning editors etc believe absolutely what they learned about the Great War at school and for us historians, Taff concluded by saying, it is such a battle to shift those ongoing misconceptions.

The Scottish Island that buried America's dead

Islanders digging the graves at the Otranto Cemetery

It is the whisky-making Scottish island, world famous for its peaty single malts and warm hospitality. But the isle of Islay, in the Inner Hebrides, is now being recognised for an almost forgotten example of huge courage and humanity. A hundred years ago, Islay was on the frontline in the battle at sea during World War One. The island coped with mass casualties from two major troopship disasters just eight months apart.

The story featured on the front page of the American newspapers
Between them, the sinkings of the SS Tuscania in February and HMS Otranto in October, claimed the lives of about 700 men in the last year of the war.

Both were officially commemorated on Islay on May 4th.

A century ago, the island was enduring considerable pain. It had already lost about 150 sons mainly on the Western front, from a population of just 6,000.

The American monument on Islay’s bleak Mull of Oa

Every household grieved for someone killed in a far away field. And then the carnage of war came to them.

The Tuscania had almost completed its transatlantic voyage, carrying US troops, among a convoy of ships. As it turned into the north channel between Scotland and Ireland on 5 February 1918, danger lurked beneath the waves.

The SS Tuscania was carrying more than 2,000 US troops when it was torpedoed off Islay.

A German U-boat stalked the convoy, got the Tuscania in its sights and fired two torpedoes - one of which ripped a huge gash in its side. It was a fatal blow. The former luxury liner, converted for the war effort, would soon be on the seabed. The Tuscania was carrying almost
2,500 US soldiers and British crew. Incredibly, most were rescued by the Royal Navy. But some of those who made it into lifeboats were not so lucky.

They were swept towards the cliffs and rocks of Islay's Oa peninsula and shipwrecked for a second time.

The troops were shipwrecked off the island's Oa peninsula

Private Arthur Siplon was thrown into the sea when his lifeboat capsized. "He thought he was going to die," his youngest son Bob told me. "But at last he grabbed hold of a rock and when the sea receded he managed to hang on and climbed to the shore."

Arthur Siplon was rescued from the sea by two Islay farmers

Private Siplon was rescued by one of two Islay farmers who risked their own lives pulling men to safety. Robert Morrison and Duncan Campbell gave food and shelter to dozens of survivors and were later awarded the OBE. I have reason to feel particularly proud of Duncan Campbell because, while researching this story, I discovered that he was my great, great uncle.
Duncan Campbell was Glenn’s great, great uncle

Bob Siplon knows that he and his family would not exist if his father had not found help on Islay.

"It’s like the actions of those people 100 years ago ripples through time to affect me 100 years later. It tells me that what we do makes a difference" he said.

This was a massive disaster for a small island to manage. In 1918, Islay had no electricity, no air service and few motor vehicles.

The funeral on Islay of 199 American soldiers who were victims of the Otranto disaster

The civil authority on this almost crime-free island was a police sergeant on a bicycle, called Malcolm MacNeill. Sgt MacNeill and his three constables had to recover, identify and bury the remains of almost 200.
Sergeant Malcolm MacNeill was the police sergeant on the almost crime-free island

His grandson - former Nato secretary general, Lord Robertson - considers their task on a scale comparable with recent terrorist attacks. "This is like Lockerbie (air disaster) or 7/7 or even 9/11 occurring in a small community. A huge event taking place with deaths, bodies, survivors - the calamity that was involved".

The funeral of the American soldier victims of the Otranto disaster was attended by all the locals

Despite their trauma, the islanders worked tirelessly to bury the dead with dignity. They did not have an American flag for the funerals, so a small group of locals hand-stitched one from the materials they had - working late into the night.

That flag has been preserved by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, which is sending it home on loan to Islay for the centenary.
The US flag made by Islay locals is in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC.

The Smithsonian’s Jennifer Jones is impressed by the care the islanders showed for the American soldiers washed up on their shores. “It was very heartfelt, that people went out of their way to respect those who had recently lost their lives” she said.

Islanders pulled together to respond to the Tuscania sinking. What they could not know is that this was only a preparation for a much bigger disaster to come.

Like the Tuscania, HMS Otranto was carrying US troops across the Atlantic in a convoy when disaster struck. But it wasn’t an act of war that sank the Otranto on 6 October 1918, within weeks of the armistice. It was a navigational error in a storm.

As the convoy approached the west coast of Scotland in near hurricane conditions, there was confusion over their exact position. The Otranto was rammed by another ship in the convoy - HMS Kashmir - which ripped its steel hull wide open. The Kashmir and the rest of the convoy sailed on, under orders not to give assistance for fear of U-boat attack.
HMS Kashmir rammed into the Otranto and ripped its hull wide open

Despite the ferocious weather, the Royal Navy destroyer, HMS Mounsey came to the rescue under the command of Lieutenant Francis Craven. “In my viewpoint, Captain Craven was a real hero. Perhaps the real hero of the event” said Chuck Freedman, whose grandfather, Sam Levy, was on the Otranto. Lieutenant Levy was among almost 600 soldiers who successfully jumped for their lives on to the deck of the Mounsey.

Funeral of the victims of the Otranto at Kilchoman on Islay

Many others tried and failed and were crushed to death between the two ships. By the time the Mounsey left the scene there were still hundreds of men aboard the sinking Otranto. Their best hope was to be swept towards one of the beaches on Islay’s Atlantic coast. But that wasn’t to be.
Searching in the wreckage for bodies of victims of the US troopship Otranto

The Otranto was lifted by a huge wave and dumped down onto a reef that broke its back and tore the ship to pieces. Only 21 men made it ashore alive. Some were pulled from the sea by members of Donald-James McPhee’s family.

They were shepherds and used their crooks to reach survivors - the length of their staffs, the distance between life and death. But this was largely a recovery operation with bodies piling up along the coast.

American soldiers laid out for burial in the churchyard at Kilchoman

“It must have been so sad for them to see that” said Mr McPhee.
“Waking up in the morning to a normal day’s work and hundreds of dead bodies by the evening. It must have been horrendous.”

Sergeant MacNeill painstakingly recorded the details of every body washed ashore, in a notebook which now has pride of place in the Museum of Ilay life. Many of the victims were from the US state of Georgia, which is planning its own commemorations later this year.

Sergeant MacNeill painstakingly recorded the details of every body washed ashore

Some of the 700 victims of the Otranto and Tuscania disasters were never found. The majority were buried on Ilay. After the war, the remains of the American soldiers were exhumed and returned home.

Only one US serviceman is buried on Ilay
A monument was erected the year after the disaster

Only one American - Private Roy Muncaster - is still on the island. At the request of his family, he was left to rest where the people of Islay buried him.

In 1918, the Tuscania disaster represented the biggest single loss of US military lives since the American civil war. The sinking of the Otranto accounted for some of America's heaviest losses at sea during the 1914-18 war.

Yet the stories of these ships are not well known - lost perhaps in a century of Islay mist.

There is a large lighthouse-shaped memorial on Islay's bleak Mull of Oa.

But when I was growing up on the island, the troopships were rarely talked about.

That's changing. Today, every child at my old school - Bowmore primary - is learning about them.

On Friday 4 May, Princess Anne led commemorations on Islay to mark the centenary of these twin tragedies. These events will honour those who lost their lives and honour what the people of Islay did for those in peril on their shores a hundred years ago.

Glenn Campbell

BBC Scotland (still available to view on BBC iPlayer)