

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

NOVEMBER DECEMBER 2024 VOL 25 No 4

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

As we approach Remembrance Sunday, as it has done for some years, my conservatory becomes the temporary storage depot for the boxes and items required to undertake the annual RBL Poppy Appeal in the villages of Clenchwarton and West Lynn. It gives me great pleasure to catch up with shopkeepers, publicans, schools and collectors, a few of whom, I have not seen since this time last year. With the help of my temperamental (very!!!!) but valuable coin counter, I have already begun the counting process for a few of the regular door to door routes undertaken by villagers, some of whom have diligently undertaken the task for many years. I am delighted to report that this collection snapshot indicates that as ever the public's generosity is on par with, if not greater than that of last year's campaign. I will bring pin badges and Poppy Appeal products to the next meeting. Should you require a wreath to lay at a service, I have a few C Type wreaths in stock. The suggested donation for these is £25.

There is another reason for mentioning the RBL Poppy Appeal and that is driven by a recent conversation I had with Lyn Hatch who is the RBL Community Fundraiser for Norfolk. Lyn mentioned the fact that locally they struggle for collectors. Many of those who have collected for many years are retiring at a rate quicker than recruitment fills. Sadly, there are villages in Norfolk who once collected but no longer do so. If you have some free time, I would urge you to support a cause that is dear to us all. Should you wish to discuss volunteering, Lyn is available at: lhatch@britishlegion.org.uk.

I have managed to put together a number of speakers for next year. I trust that they fit the bill. I hope to fill the latter part of 2025 in the next few weeks. I look forward to seeing you all on the 5th November:

14/1/25 Dale Wiseman: "Sister Monica and her time in Thorpe, 1914-1918"

04/2/25 Steve Smith: 'Private G/5203 Frank Smith (A jolly good chap!).
Rob Burkett and Andrew England: 'Dick Rayner; a Norfolk Man'

04/3/25 Major Phil Watson: 'The 12th Lancers - Moy 28th August 1914 'How to get it right first time!'

01/4/25 Daryl Long 'Probate and Soldiers from Norwich in WW1'

06/5/25 Dr Peter Hodgkinson: 'The BEF Infantry COs of August 1914'

03/6/25 TBC

01/07/25 Jonathan Dutton '1st World War Art'

FROM THE EDITORS

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

FUTURE PROGRAMME

November 5th - Franco-British co-operation in Practice - Bryn Hammond

December 3rd - The French at Gallipoli - Peter Hart

IN THE NEWS

A metal detectorist is looking to find the family of a man whose medal he found near Diss according to the EDP. The medal had the number 148797 which lead to the name Henry George Wells, a Pioneer, Royal Engineers. Originally he wondered if it might have been H G Wells, until he learned the author never received any medals. How the medal was lost in the field it was found in remains a mystery.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Many places will hold Armistice events but if you like to hear pipe music Wymondham parade will feature the Norwich pipe band on Sunday 10th November

The BBC featured the clock tower on a roundabout in Skegness on the 29th which has been draped in and around by nets with poppies made around the country and overseas. Organised by the local RBL the installation will be in place until November 12th.

These remembrance events are now becoming more popular with a lot of places around the UK now doing this sort of thing. If it gets people of all ages together making these displays and remembering (both humans and animals that served (the purple poppies) then surely it is a good thing. They are popping up all over the place from Snettisham here in Norfolk, Kilbride, Ballyclare in NI, Catshill (Bromsgrove), even the Tower of London is holding an event but this will have a cost £19.50 for adults and £12.50 for children but gives you after hours visits to parts of the tower and the light show. Not sure if this is fully booked though, it is on from the 8th to 16th November.

Locally, Old Catton Remembrance trail is running again this year from 28th October to 11th November. Information has been posted around the area at various locations, shops, memorials, homes etc. There is said to be a basic map but I have been unable to find a copy.

SUFFOLK WFA

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

November 13th - Cambrai - Ross Beadle

December 11th - Lawrence of Felixstowe - Kim & Trevor Smith

TV PROGRAM - DNA Journey.

A recent ITV1 program in the series of DNA Journeys featured the Irish actor James Nesbitt and his "granddaddy" William John Nesbitt who fought in WW1. Like many William never spoke much about his war service and like most of us James wanted to know about what happened to William.

The program took James to France to find out more about his grandfather. They went to the Thiépval war memorial area which includes the Ulster Memorial Tower, a monument to the men of the 36th Ulster Division who fought in the battle, which included William Nesbitt.

They met Rocky, a veteran of the Royal Irish Rangers and cemetery staff member, who tells them that William lied about his age to join the army at the age of 16. He qualified as a Lewis machine gunner. Which meant he would have had to advance across no man's land on foot while carrying a heavy gun, which made him vulnerable to enemy fire. William was shot in the shoulder and leg on the first day of battle and was sent back to Britain for hospital treatment.

James then learned what happened next to William, after he recovered from his injuries. William had returned to the Front and in March 1918 he was captured and taken to Stendal prison camp.

A Christmas card sent to William allowed him to make a small diary where he was able to write down his experience of the hardships in the camp, in which many men died. Unknown to James his late father had donated William's wartime papers to a library, and these were located by the DNA team. James's teacher father had written the notes out by hand which was moving for James too. May well be on catch up TV.

THE LADY OLIVE, Q SHIP.

A recent BBC4 TV program featured the Lady Olive, this Q ship was in the area of the Channel Islands when she was sunk back in February 1917 by German uboat UC18. The former Tees Trader was thought to be around 8 miles off Jersey after a battle which is said to have seen the two vessels sink each other.

After a woman from Cornwall shared her Great Uncle's diaries and letters, who was on board the Q ship at the time, divers were finally able to locate the U-boat which some thought had managed to get away. Apparently men on ships could claim a reward for u-boats sunk (some false claims were put in!) but the diaries of James Simpson proved this claim to be truthful when after much research into the details contained within, divers were able to locate the remains of the submarine in March. UC 18 was found around 50 miles off Jersey where it had gone down with its crew of 28. The crew of Lady Olive were all saved, but sadly James Simpson was killed in action in 1918.

You may well be able to find this program on I-player or catch up TV.

GEORGE WALTER WHITTLETON (1889-1918) - SMALLBURGH

Mike Lawson has sent a dedication he has done for this year's Armistice Day at Smallburgh. A local churchwarden has asked him to do this for a few years, featuring men who are listed on the local memorial. It has been written for an audience that may not have much knowledge of things we as WFA members and WW1 researchers are probably more aware of but may be of interest all the same.

It reads -

The dedication this Armistice Day is to Pte. George Walter Whittleton, 1st/6th Bn Durham Light Infantry, who died 106 years ago, on Wednesday, 14th August 1918, age 29.

George was born on 25th May 1889 at Smallburgh, the second son of William Whittleton, an agricultural labourer, and his wife Sarah Ann Whittleton (née Pratt) of 3 Low Street, Smallburgh. His parents married in 1882 and they had six children, namely George (b.1883), who sadly died, age 10 months, in 1884, Mary Ann (b. 1886), then George Walter, named after his brother, who had died five years previously, William (b. 1892), Alice (b. 1895) and finally, Sarah Elizabeth (b. 1900), who tragically died, one year later in 1901.

On leaving school around 1903, George worked as farm labourer, and by 1911, now age 22, he was still living at home in Low Street with his parents, William and Sarah, brother William, sister Alice, nephew Charlie Whittleton and his mother's widower brother, John Pratt.

On 4th August 1914, war was declared on Germany and Lord Kitchener immediately introduced his famous recruitment drive to form a volunteer army. Thousands of patriotic young men rushed to enlist and free themselves from the grinding poverty of everyday life, with the promise of opportunities to travel, regular pay, proper food and clothing, not to mention barrack accommodation, that would most probably have compared favourably with living conditions at home. Almost 2.5 million men volunteered during 1914 and 1915, before initial enthusiasm faded once the realities of war became known, that led to the introduction of conscription in January 1916.

George, now age 26, was certainly one of those who volunteered for enlistment during this period but little is known of his service with the Durham Light Infantry as 60% of the First World War records were destroyed, during a German incendiary bomb raid on London in September 1940.

Being a farm worker, it is probable that, following the annual harvest, he enlisted during the autumn of 1914 for training with the 1st/6th Battalion in the north-east, at Bishop Auckland, Gateshead and Newcastle before proceeding to France and landing at Boulogne on 17th April 1915.

After further training in France the battalion was sent to the Ypres Salient in Belgium on 8th June 1915, to hold the line, following the Second Battle of Ypres. Here the Durham's remained in Flanders until September 1916, when they were sent to the Somme, France to continue their rôle in holding the line, following the Battle of the Second Battle of the Somme. The battalion stayed on the Somme for about a year, until September 1917, when it returned to the Ypres Salient, until March 1918.

On 21st March 1918, the Germans carried out their major Spring Offensive in Picardy, on the Somme and Aisne areas, in an attempt to win the war. With the Allies in major retreat, most of the ground that had been gained over the previous three and a half years had been lost. The Durhams were immediately sent to the Aisne Region, 20 mile north-west of Reims to help support the French and with the Allies in disarray, they arrived at the small adjoining villages of Chaudardes and Concevreux on 23rd May 1918, to hold the line. Following a heavy bombardment and night attack by the Germans on these two villages on 27th May 1918, the 1st/6th Battalion suffered heavy losses, before withdrawing from the area four days later. The battalion War Diary states that losses for the month of May 1918, was 30 Officers and 499 Other Ranks killed, wounded or missing.

Records show that Pte. George Whittleton was not killed in action or died of wounds during the war, but simply died, whilst being a Prisoner of War.

It is not known when he was taken prisoner but assuming that he served with the battalion, relatively unscathed, throughout April 1915 to May 1918, it is most likely that he was one of those recorded in the War Diary as missing but taken captive on 27th May 1918.

George became an internee in a Prisoner of War camp at Trélon, 65 miles north of Reims, but by August 1918, with the Germans, now in full retreat, conditions in the camp deteriorated rapidly, as a result of inadequate food supplies, non-existent clothing and blankets, overcrowding, overwork, dysentery and flu, etc., including a breakdown in guard discipline.

During mid-August 1918, George Whittleton became seriously ill and was transferred to a German Lazaret (*Isolation Hospital*) in Trélon, where he sadly died, probably of Spanish Flu, on 14th/15 August 1918, age 29.

Pte. George Walter Whittleton, 1st/6th Bn. Durham Light Infantry, from Low Street, Smallburgh, Norfolk is buried near Trélon, in Glageon Communal Cemetery, grave A.4

Note: Glageon village was in German occupation during practically the whole of the War. The Communal Cemetery was used for the burial of German soldiers and Allied prisoners from September, 1914, to August, 1918; the Extension was then begun, and was used until the following October. The German, American and Italian and a number of French graves have now been removed from both burial grounds; but the British and Russian graves remain. There are now over 300, Great War casualties commemorated in this site. Of these, over 10 are unidentified.

NORFOLK MANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES

For those with military backgrounds and who like to collect items linked to the services a former Royal Anglian Regiment soldier opened a shop in Dereham at the end of 2023. Based in Aldiss Court on the High Street, the shop has military goods from WW1 to the present, as well as normal collectable items.

If nothing else it sounds like a place to go for those who like to talk about their military times or have items they might like to sell on.

HEYRICK ANTHONY GREATOREX

Best known for his post WW1 work in breeding snowdrops Greatorex who was born in Brixton, later moved to Sawbridgeworth (the family home later bought by the Beckham family) finally

moved to Witton, the one near Blofield, where his wife came from, in 1915. The couple lived in a shack on land owned by her family and held battles with planners over the land, which is now owned by the local council as a result, and run as a nature reserve, but they did not take this over until after the death of his wife a few years after Heyrick himself died.

According to someone we know who has written about him more from the snowdrop side of his life, he is said to have been in the Inns of Court and City Yeomanry Officers Training Corps, was he training to be a lawyer? But in September of 1916 it is said he was commissioned in the 8th Norfolk Regiment but served with the 9th, he was wounded at Lagnicourt and later discharged. By the time WW2 began he was part of the Home Guard and his role as a captain was to watch the river at Acle Bridge but it is rumoured he spent much of the time in the pub... Perhaps he would be considered rather an eccentric these days.

AND FINALLY

A couple of things this time,

Firstly a thank you from our friend who came with us to the October meeting. He enjoyed chatting with John Chester - apparently he and John were based on the same RAF base at the same time back in the 70's... he enjoyed John's talk, also thanks to Mark who he sat with and Paul for welcoming him.

Secondly our "local reporter" spotted this poster in the Bridewell Museum here in Norwich recently. It made us think about were bananas and oranges widely available back then. Perhaps we got confused by stories from the 2nd World War about children getting their first bananas and not knowing how to eat them. In fact the first bananas sold in Britain were in London around the first half of the 1600's.

It also made us realise that litter louts are nothing new.

Also a £5 fine back then was a lot of money! That's around £545 today.

