

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

March April 2025 VOL25 No6

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS - AGM REPORT - MEETING REPORTS

This report serves a dual purpose in that it covers the two roles I will be required to report on at the AGM. It will save time (reason explained below) if I provide my report now.

As Chair, I firmly believe that the past year has been a good one for WFA Norfolk branch. The attendance has been strong, but as ever, we could still do with a few more attendees. The venue (The White Horse), brilliantly managed by Pam, Andy and their staff, has as ever provided a wonderful service to our members. Without hesitation, I repeat my comment from last year's report, I have one constant prayer, it is that we are able to continue using the facility into the long-term.

The last years speakers program appears to have been well received. It remains a battle to find speakers prepared to travel. Thankfully a majority of those that do, are not only blessed with a depth of knowledge but also possess a generous nature which results in many just covering travel expenses at cost. This is a huge help at a time when fuel/travel costs remain high and are not likely to fall again.

Our Secretary, Bob Kerry, has once again proved invaluable to the branch. Every Club/Society needs a strong Secretary and we certainly have that in Bob. Thanks to Bobs endeavours our on-line presence has been hugely improved. The WFA website is now regularly updated with our speakers list. Bob also updates the events pages in local publications. Thank you Bob. As our Treasurer, Rob Burkett has once again done a sterling job in keeping the books/accounts in order and, perhaps more importantly, he continues to assure me that I am not being unrealistic in my desire to encourage quality speakers to attend branch meetings. Thank you Rob. Jackie and Roger Berry have between them, produced a very large number of the branch magazine 'The Poppy'. The quality of this publication is self-evident. I continue to forward it to friends, relatives and past work colleagues. Both assist with the collection of entry donations and raffle ticket sales at meetings. Roger recently created a branch Facebook page. I am no fan of social media but, I do recognise that in the right hands and for the right reasons, it is a useful tool not least in terms of possible recruitment of new members. Jackie and Roger, your efforts are valued and valuable to a lot of people. We are fortunate indeed to have you both in branch. Committee members Brian Lawrence and Mike Lawson, between them, possess an encyclopaedic knowledge of WW1 history. Many a speaker has originated from suggestions during our conversations. As many of you are aware, Brian is battling a recent health scare. It is my sincere hope that we will see Brian at meetings in the near future. With this in mind, it is my desire to retain Brian as a committee

member. That said it is a proposal that has to be agreed through an AGM vote

It has been an immense privilege to serve as your Chairman but, with all such things, there is a time when an obvious successor becomes available, that time has now arrived. Rob Burkett, our treasurer, retires this year and during one of our regular chats, has indicated an interest in taking over as Chairman. I can assure you that this is not a 'coup d'état' and would very much occur with my blessing. An indication of this fact is that at the AGM, I will personally propose Rob for the role which will be seconded by Jackie Berry. We are a group that acts on democratic principles and in that respect, I can assure you that this is not a 'fait accompli'. Should you wish to put yourself or any other WFA member forward as Chairman (or for any of the other roles), I will accept that proposal and ensure full debate occurs prior to a vote. If anyone would like to join the committee, please contact me or the Secretary ASAP. On the subject of the AGM and its timetable, I will endeavour to keep the business aspect of the AGM to a minimum. At present, we are unable to access the room until 7pm. This unfortunately means that during AGM evenings, we have just 15 minutes within which to set up the room and take entry donations and raffle ticket money. Out of respect for the speaker, I would like to complete the AGM by 7.30pm. Irrespective of this, I will not prevent the essential debate of AGM business should it be required. Should you have an urgent matter for discussion please let Bob Kerry (Hon' Secretary) or I know by e-mail prior to the meeting so it can be factored into the agenda. I look forward to seeing you all at the AGM and for the talk that follows which is: Major Phil Watson: *'The 12th Lancers - Moy 28th August 1914 'How to get it right first time!'*

On the subject of speakers, we were fortunate to open the year with a wonderful locally based talk by Dale Wiseman. Dale who was born in Norwich and studied history at the UEA between 2012 and 2017, presented "*Sister Monica and her time in Thorpe, 1914-1918*", which was based on the research of an archive gifted to the Thorpe history group by a family member of Sister Monica. The archive contained a package of over 100 postcards and items including an autograph book that belonged to Winchester born, Emma Tanner. Emma was known at 'Coonor Auxiliary Hospital' as Sister Monica. For 4 years in WW1, 'Coonor' was an auxiliary hospital on Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew. To this day, albeit as a residential property, the building still stands on Yarmouth Road. Until it closed as a hospital in the Autumn of 1918, Sister Monica stayed for the full four years that the hospital was open. The Commandant at 'Coonor' was Maud Supple, the wife of William Rathbourne Supple, the Rector of Thorpe St Andrew Parish Church. The house was originally provided to aid the war effort for the 4 years it was open by Mrs Emmilie Dods who moved to another family property in Devon. Mrs Dods was the mother of 2nd Lt William Dods of the 1st Battalion the Leicestershire Regiment who was killed on the 21st October 1914. Mrs Dods husband, Major William Dods (died 1911) served in India thus naming the house in honour of this fact. 'Coonor' was named after a hill station in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The area is known for the tea estates in the surrounding Nilgiri hills. This superbly delivered talk, primarily focussed on the Dods family and Sister Monica and the events that took place in the house/hospital. These events included a wedding, money raising events and an examination of the autograph book. Many of the autographs were from patients who endorsed them with testimony to the life changing efforts of Sister Monica and her staff. This talk was very well researched, at times deeply poignant and delivered by a man who clearly loves the subject material. Dale will be returning to the branch in January 2026.

February's presentation was a delightful double header with the opening talk of the evening presented by Steve Smith. *'Private G/5203 Frank Smith (A jolly good chap!)*', examined the service of Steve's Great Grandfather who served with the Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) in the Great War. He saw action at Loos and served around Plugstreet Wood before moving to the

Somme in July 1916 where he was wounded on 18 August 1916. Despite the severity of his injuries, he then served with the Labour Corps until being pronounced fit enough to go back to the infantry where he was killed in action on 21 March 1918. This gem of a talk was at times achingly poignant, not least when Steve expressed the impact that his Great Grandfather's life, and death, had had on both him and his family. I am delighted to report that Steve will be returning next year. After the break, Steve's talk was followed by Rob Burkett and Andrew England who presented 'Dick Raynor: A Norfolk Boy'. Longstanding branch member Dick Raynor, undertook many a visit to the Western Front with both Rob and Andrew. Cherished memories were shared and banter delivered at an Olympic standard by the two men better placed than many to do honour to Dick who sadly was unable to make the meeting. The memories shared developed into a wonderful interaction with the audience (including Steve Smith) who injected their own memories of the activities of a remarkable amateur historian whose life-long research into his beloved 8th Norfolk has resulted in a remarkable archive of materials that can only be described as world class. Since I have been attending the branch, I have been fortunate to have enjoyed some evenings as good as this one but, none have been better!

I look forward to seeing you all at the next talk and AGM.
All best wishes. Paul Evans

FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20th April 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

March 4th - AGM followed by The 12th Lancers - Moy 28th August 1914. "how to get it right first time" - Phil Watson.

April 1st - Wills and probate of Soldiers from Norwich in WW1 - Daryl Long.

IN THE NEWS

I know this is 2nd World war related but with the approach of the end of WW2 and 80th commemorations taking place, as happened in WW1 commemorations, missing names are being added to war memorials. 18 year old Lillian Grimmer of Cobholm, Gt Yarmouth was one of the ATS women killed in an air raid that shocked the country when German planes attacked their Gt Yarmouth HQ in May 43, for some reason her name was not put on the ATS memorial. She had swapped her duty that day..... The ATS memorial is in St Georges Park. Roger's mother was from Harlow but stationed near Yarmouth with an ATS unit, could so easily have been her.

Also on the WW2 front, so sad to see someone damaged the memorial for the men who served at RAF Docking. Volunteers at the Newton Bircham Heritage Centre found the memorial had been hit by something and no one has had the decency to reported it, making it look rather a suspicious act..

SUFFOLK WFA

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

March 12th With a Trowel in the Trenches - Archaeology and the Great War . Clive Harris

April 9th TBC Peter Hart????

CZECHOSLOVAKIAN LEGIONARIES

In Prague there is a cemetery known as Olsanske. It contains 3000 Czechoslovakian Legionaries killed in WW1, one plot specially for the men killed on the Italian Front 1915-18.

There are also 33 men executed by the Germans just days before WW2 ended on May 8th and another plot for 27 pilots killed flying for the RAF as well as a few killed in post war military actions.

But back to the WW1 period - life was complicated back then in that many Czechoslovakians were fighting in Austro-Hungarian uniform as they were part of the Empire at that time, so the numbers of 150,000 killed are misleading. Over 1 million fought and those in Austro-Hungarian uniforms are not always counted meaning it is likely many more were killed and "forgotten". Many graves have been lost completely.

Czech Legionaries fought against the Central powers in Russia, France and Italy and later with the White Russians against the Bolsheviks. By fighting on the side of the Allies they hoped and got Independence in 1918.

Since then many things happened to the country including being taken over by the USSR, but in 1993 Czechoslovakia split in half and became the Czech Republic and Slovakia, 30 years later it remains this way.

Yet another area we hear little about in relation to WW1.

BRITISH AND EUROPEAN ROYALS WHO DIED IN WW1

Just had a thought about members of European Royal families who died in the Great War, how many and where from, and how many were related to Queen Victoria with her extended family, some say it was rivalries between cousins that was on factor in starting the war.

We probably all know how the Great War destroyed most of the big European Royal families in one way or another - Russia had its Royal family executed in the Revolution - the Romanovs, the Austro-Hungarian - Habsburgs and the Germans - Hohenzollerns as a result of losing the war, and later still as a result of the war - the Ottomans. Smaller monarchies came and went during the war and others would fold in the following years as republics became popular.

As for the British there was just one Prince killed, (several others served or went to the front on visits) that was Prince Maurice of Battenberg, youngest of Victoria's grandchildren, and son of Princess Beatrice and her husband Prince Henry of Battenberg. Maurice served in the Kings Royal Rifles Corp as a Lt and was killed in action at Zonnebeke in October 1914. Maurice was killed outright just on top of the ridge when his battalion came under heavy shell and rifle fire according to reports. He was buried with his men at the request of his mother and his CWGC headstone is the same as any other soldier, in the Ypres Town War Cemetery, he was 23 years old. He still went by the German title at that point in time as it was not until 1917 the King changed the family name to Windsor and the Battenberg family became Mountbatten.

I looked at Belgium, but could not find any Princes who fought, and as for Luxembourg there seemed to be no Princes or Grand Dukes as they are called. France no longer had a Royal Family and the Netherlands was neutral. Russia had Prince Oleg Konstantinovich wounded and died of wounds in Vilnius fighting against the Germans in October 1914 at the age of 21

When it came to Germany (and the Austro-Hungarians too) there seemed to be different lines to follow, headed by Wilhelm II, King of Prussia and German Emperor (House of Hohenzollern) and oldest of Queen Victoria's grandchild.

Because of these Empires there are lots of smaller royal families which are part of the bigger picture, here are just some who died, and not to surprisingly many who died were from German families.

Prince Ernst Lippe-Biesterfeld died August 1914 at St Quentin died in an explosion and was buried where he fell, Later removed to Detmold

Prince Otto Schonburg-Waldenburg was killed at Rheims, he had been at the Eastern Front but transferred to France, 10 days later he was killed out in no man's land.

Prince Wilhelm Schonburg and Carolath was killed in action in Belgium.

Prince Wolrad of Waldeck and Pyrmont killed in action near Moorslede while on patrol, October 1914.

Prince Heinrich Reuss died at La Bassee. October 1914, two other Heinrich Reuss's died. One in Romania in November 1916, the other in Belgium in 1918. That is a good way to confuse people, give them all the same name and then a number.

Prince Maximilian of Hess-Kassel died near Bailleul France in October 1914.

Prince Friedrich of Lippe was killed in Liege in 1914. was 56 years old.

Prince Joseph Ferdinand von Lobkowitz killed in action in Galicia October 1914.

Prince Heinrich of Liechtenstein fought in the Austrian army and was killed in Warsaw in August 1915. Liechtenstein was a neutral country but a small group of men went off the fight.

Prince Umberto of Savoy aka Count of Salemi (Italy) died in 1918, recorded as killed in action but probably Spanish flu. Was buried at Crespano del Grappa, but later moved to Sacratio Militare del Monte Grappa.

Prince Konstantine Bagration from Georgia (Russia) killed in action in June 1915 in Galicia.

Prince Heinrich of Bavaria was killed in Romania in November 1916 while on a reconnaissance mission. His body was returned to Munich.

Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia who died in April 1917 in the Rouen area. He was shot down by the RFC while on an observation flight in March and died on his birthday from his wounds.

Hereditary Prince Emich Ernst of Leiningen was killed in action in March 1918, probably during the German spring offensive but that's all I can find, so no idea where and what happened to him.

Father and son Prince's Friedrich and Ernst died within days of each other. The former in Charleroi Belgium and the latter at Maubeuge France in August 1914.

Prince Albert of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach was killed in action Goueaucourt in September 1918.

I think I have found most of these men from across Europe but I am sure I must have missed some! Some I would like to look into more, when time allows.

We all think our families are complicated when trying to find our personal histories but the Royal families are something else altogether, with links to each other, but mainly to Queen Victoria it seems. Some close and others distant.

US PRESIDENTS WHO SERVED IN THE MILITARY IN THE GREAT WAR

Harry (Harrison) S Truman was the only President to serve in combat during WW1. He would become the 33rd President. The "S" in his name is just that an "S", it was a southern tradition to give a letter which honoured both sets of his parents father's, in this case both had a name with S. Harry was born in 1884 in Missouri.

Harry suffered from bad eye sight which could have hampered his war service but it is rumoured he managed to pass his sight tests by learning the eye charts off by heart.

His service began in 1917 with the National Guard, he would have been 30 plus by this time. He would go on to serve as a 1st Lt and then Captain in the 129th Field Artillery Regiment in France, in the Vosges Mountains and the Meuse - Argonne. He became a force not to argue with as a leader after he was involved in something called the "battle of who ran", when men of his battery panicked and ran when the Germans launched a surprise night attack. He apparently let fly with so much bad language that the men where so shocked they got back to behaving.

Saying that during the battle of the Meuse - Argonne in September 1918 he got in serious trouble with his commanding officer for disobeying an order, which actually saved lives in a neighbouring unit. He was threatened with court marshal but in the end he was never punished.

Its hard to believe, but it is said he never lost any men under his command. He is also said to have provided support to Patton's tank brigade and his men shot some of the last shots fired on the 11th November 1918.

Harry was involved in politics in the coming years, becoming Vice President and in 1945 took over as President on the death of Franklin D Roosevelt, he remained in power until 1953.

He died on Boxing Day 1972 aged 88.

The other man who would become President in future years was Dwight D Eisenhower, he graduated from West Point in 1915 but he served in the US, training recruits throughout the war and climbing through the military ranks. He would end up as a General having been involved in assorted military roles and actions in WW2 before becoming the 34th President in 1953.

And finally

a couple of strange items picked up from TV programs recently -

A) Germans used cow intestines in Zeppelins to hold gas. To do this they banned the making of sausages in all the areas they had under their control.

B) With in days of the war beginning the Government had asked people to hand in gold sovereigns to help the war effort, in early August paper notes for £1 and for 10 shillings were issued to people bringing in coins to Post Offices. For a long time it had been the plan to stop gold coinage and replace with paper, the war made this possible, with Chancellor Lloyd George saying people were selfish or greedy, overly cautious or cowardly if they did not hand coins in. As a consequence any that were not handed in for whatever reason have become valuable, selling for good sums at auction..