

## 6THE POPPY



### THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

September October 2025 VOL No

#### CHAIRMAN REMARKS

About thirty years ago I was on a WFA tour to the Somme and whilst sitting in Avril Williams' bar at Auchonvillers, I was chatting to Professor Peter Simkins. The Prof had spent many years researching the Great War and over a few glasses of whisky I had one of the most fascinating fireside chats of my life. I relayed to Prof that an uninspiring history teacher had stunted my interest in history at school.

Peter then said " The more you know, the more you will see in your mind's eye and feel in your soul when you visit the fields". He then went on to tell me to look for "Circles". These would be the people and events that would link together to paint the fullest of pictures. The more one researches the more enjoyable and fuller the experience would become. Finally, he told me to look for "Branches" that would lead to the deepening of my interest and help grow that tree of knowledge. Yes, the whisky had been that good!

Next day, the tour group walked the tank line of attack to Flers from the edge of Delville Wood . We finished at the magnificent 41<sup>st</sup> Division memorial of the advancing British soldier in Flers in the village square. Peter told us that it was one of his favourite monuments as it was a noble structure and not a peace monument. A soldier in full battle dress, with fixed bayonet pointing back towards Pozieres village.

The 41<sup>st</sup> Divisional Commander had been "Swanky "Sir Sidney Lawford, a man always smartly dressed - often over dressed. He had married Lady May Lawford his third wife, who later wrote a spill beans book on her British upper class life and Hollywood stories entitled "Bitch."

Their son, born in 1923, Peter Lawford had become a Hollywood actor, part of the Rat Pack. Sidney insisted on wearing military medals at Hollywood parties. One anecdote was how Sir Sidney just happened to be cutting his lawn at 10pm at their Santa Monica mansion, wearing a suit when the actress Lana Turner arrived in a light blue Cadillac to collect Peter to go to a dinner party.

So whether it starts with a battle group, a character or place, look for those circles and branches and dig deep - you will see and feel more.

Kindest Regards, Rob

## FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20<sup>th</sup> October by post to Mrs J Berry, 8 Fairstead Rd, Norwich NR7 8XQ or by email [jackie.berry3@btinternet.com](mailto:jackie.berry3@btinternet.com), items can also be given at meetings.

## MEETING REPORTS

Two interesting, and in the case of Jonathan Dutton, lively talks in the past couple of months.

Local historian and publican Jonathan gave a talk on some of the art produced by various artists in and around the time of WW1 in his usual fast paced way. Love it or hate it, art is at the best of times loved by some and hated by others and war art can be from a very dark place in the artist's mind. Also it can come in many styles but all shows how war damages the landscape, death of humans and animals, etc. Dark colours bring the sense of horror, sharp shapes give the feel of a damaged landscape, right through to what most of us would call art. That art is scenes of "real" possibly recognisable people, some in action some with real faces expressing horror, pain and death, animals also in life and death and landscapes in various states of damage. A different way of looking at the war for sure.

The talk by Andy Stuart on where the guns did not stop on Armistice Day was well timed for us as a late elderly friend's father served in the North Russian intervention, sadly at Christmas she started to tell us about her father but died before we could get further information. Andy has kindly sent me some information to pass to a nephew who is trying to put together a display about his grandfather.

This whole intervention was a waste of time, the Red v White Russians. Men sent there were often young lads who came into service as the main war ended (our friend's father just 18 at the time of going to Archangel). Knowing the main war was over some men were not happy to still be fighting and there were instances of mutiny and bad behaviour and many died from illness and freezing conditions they found themselves in.....

Russia went on longer, around 2 years, but there were other places where the war did not end on the 11 hour of the 11 day of November 1918 either. Not totally surprising with fighting in remote locations, Africa for instance, where getting notice of an Armistice to such places, was certainly not like today when we can get information at the click of a button.. Men were still dying from fighting.

## FUTURE PROGRAMME

October 7<sup>th</sup> - Observation Balloons over the Western Front - an Overview - Vernon Creek.

November 4<sup>th</sup> - Imperial War Graves Commission - Revolution and Challenges in Commemoration - Nik Chapman CBE

## IN THE NEWS

In July it was reported that divers had located the wreck of HMS NOTTINGHAM around 60 miles off Scotland. The ship was sunk by a u-boat which had been mistaken by the ships crew as a fishing boat on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1916. 38 crew were killed after the ship was hit three times in the port side. Crockery and its name on the stern confirmed the find.

Historic England have added 8 NORFOLK WW1 PILLBOXES to Grade II listed status, all but one of the newly-listed pillboxes are in the North Walsham area. Pill boxes were first built by the Germans on the Western Front, but as war went on the threat of a sea invasion on the East coast increased and so these usually round building were built inland from the sea during 1916/1918. The 8 are as follows -

Two defending the Common Road and Bradfield Beck crossing point at Bradfield Common. A rare semi-circular pillbox at Bacton Wood, guarding a canal bridge. Two circular pillboxes at White Horse Common at the Edbridge Mill crossing. Two either side of Bacton Road, Little London, defending the canal bridge.

The final pillbox is another circular one at Wayford Bridge, near Stalham. The pillboxes were positioned along the River Ant and the Dilham Canal so that they could help with defending access to the Broads and beyond.

(Members of the public can add photos and drawings and stories of these and other graded buildings etc to the Missing Pieces Project - see the Historic England website for details.)

THE KITCHENER HOLIDAY CENTRE for veterans in Lowestoft is looking to raise funds to upgrade the building. A million pounds is needed to do the work. Named after Kitchener and originally for men to recoup after they returned from the horrors Great War, it has continued to support veterans of wars and military service over the years.

A WW2 VETERAN Donald Kitchener Rose has died aged 110. He was born on December 24th 1914 in Surrey, so he lived through the Great War as a small child, but did he ever think he would go on to live through a second world war? He did, and he did despite serving in WW2, he was with the Queens Royal Regiment (West Sussex). Did he think he would live to see the V E Day 80th anniversary - probably not due to his age? He featured in the TV coverage for that event.. Donald became the oldest WW2 veteran and one of the oldest people in the UK having known 4 monarchs or 5 if Edward VII is included

He died at his care home in Derbyshire on July 11th aged 110. His funeral featured soldiers, hundreds of bystanders and dozens of motor bikes and their riders.

#### SUFFOLK WFA

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

11<sup>th</sup> September - Facial surgery, Rob Burkett

8<sup>th</sup> October to be confirmed

#### VJ DAY AUGUST 15<sup>th</sup> 1945

As we know August 15<sup>th</sup> commemorated VJ day when 80 years ago WW2 finally ended. Days after nuclear bombs were dropped on Japan they surrendered. The men and women who fought during those times are now very elderly and reduce in numbers by the day. An assortment of events were held to mark this occasion. Many of the people trapped by Japan in the Far East were sadly to die in the coming days, weeks, months and years from the conditions they had endured in captivity, these were both military and civilians..

My father often spoke about the 2 Herwin brothers from his village of Thurton who died in the Far East, one is buried in Myanmar and the other in Thailand. You can only wonder what happened

to them in a land so far from home. While my mother's friend lost her brother, Alfred Newman, who was a POW and was drowned when American ships attacked a Japanese convoy moving POW's around, sinking all the ships. He along with the only other WW2 man listed on the Catfield memorial Arthur Toll are listed on the Singapore memorial..

#### TOC H YARD

We all know the story of the TOC H in Belgium, but did you know after the war ended branches opened in the UK and other parts of the world. In Chesterfield there is a Yard that goes by the name TOC H Yard. Apparently after the great war TOC H opened centres around the UK where ex servicemen could be supported along with their families and this took the form of fetes and the like, raising funds for their work.

The Yard in Chesterfield was either a venue or building or both I guess, it opened in 1928 and closed around the 1980's.

HORACE JOHN RYLANDS seems to have travelled around a bit prior to the 1st WW and at the beginning of the war was working as an engineer in Sheffield. He was by the time of his marriage in 1917 at Hathersage, Derbyshire, and he was serving as a Lt in the 16 Machine Gun Company serving in both France and Belgium. He was a keen sketcher of military life and his albums are now held in Derbyshire archives for the public to view. Having lost his first wife, he remarried also changing jobs, becoming a riding instructor. He lived his later years in Bakewell and died in the early 1960's.

#### STONEHENGE - GIANT WAR MEMORIAL??

In February 1915 Sir Edmund Antrobus died age 66, he was a Baronet (4<sup>th</sup>) his son and heir also Edmund was a Lt in the Grenadier Guards like his father before him. Sadly this younger Edmund would die early in WW1, on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1914. This probably had many well to do families in a similar situation, the difference here was that this family did not have a grand house but owned the site where Stonehenge is located. The estate past over to Sir Edmund's brother Cosmo, who put Stonehenge up for auction in 1915. In stepped a Mr Chubb who was worried it might be bought by an American and moved to the US ???, he bought the site for the at the time huge amount of £6600. In 1918 he handed the site to the country, perhaps in his mind as a memorial to those lost to the war.

#### RECENT RE-INTERMENTS OF CORPORAL ALFRED MORRANT ESSEX REGIMENT AND OTHERS

The last few months have seen quite a few re-burials of remains of men from all countries killed in WW1. As more people put DNA profiles on line and also down to other forms of detective work by individuals, more of the remains found when building projects take place on the old battlefields can be identified. Those others that can not be named at this time have DNA stored for the future just in case a link can be found and they can regain their life story.

Alfred Marrant was one of eight men recently buried in Loos British Cemetery Extension 108 years after they were killed in 1917. Their remains were found when a new hospital was being built near Lens. Of the eight, four were named, Alfred and fellow Essex Regiment man Private Henry Rycraft, and two men from the Bedfordshire Regiment - Privates Lewis Lambert and Arthur Grayson.

It does appear that DNA is giving names to remains more often and now much quicker as people take DNA tests.

Paul, our Vice chair and Speaker Secretary mentioned it would be good if dates for any reburial ceremonies were given in advance so if you were in the area you could attend, and lo and behold days later up on Facebook appeared MOD war detectives with dates for September they are follows

16<sup>th</sup> Sept at 14.00 hours an unknown South Africa soldier at Wytschaete Military Cemetery

17<sup>th</sup> Sept at 14.00 hours a burial for Sergeant Richard Rounsley, 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion Durham Light Infantry, KIA 5<sup>th</sup> October 1916 plus an unknown DLI and an unknown soldier of an unknown regiment at Warlencourt British Cemetery.

And finally on 25<sup>th</sup> Sept at 10.30 hours Lt James Grant Allen of 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders, Lance Corporal Gordon McPherson of 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Cameron Highlanders, plus two unknown Cameron Highlanders, one unknown Highland Light Infantry, one unknown Black Watch and two others from unknown Scottish Regiments. All were killed on 25<sup>th</sup> September this will be held at Loos British Cemetery Extension.

#### BEESTON REGIS GRAVE

In All Saints Churchyard at Beeston Regis stands a non military headstone to a Captain Bert James, who died on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1918, an Australian serving with the RAF. He may have been 21 or 22 at the time, CWGC and headstone disagree! It is stated he died of accidental injuries?? He was hit by another plane while instructing another pilot all three men died.

It is not known why he is buried where he is as this crash which killed him took place near RAF Joyce Green, Dartford! (Because of flooding issues at Joyce Green all operations from this base moved to Biggin Hill)

Born in South Australia, he had relatives called Reynolds in this area of Norfolk, so this might have been why he was brought here in death.

#### A HIDDEN CITY

Near Vignacourt in the Picardy area of France is Naours, beneath is a subterranean "city" tunnel system which has been used for centuries in time of danger for the residents of the city above. It is no surprise that soldiers fighting in the area found the tunnels as a place of safety at times, and as soldiers do many have left their mark on the walls. It is said that there are likely to be some 3000 plus names etched on the walls many, or even the majority by Australians. You can read more on this on the Australian War Memorials site [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au).

#### NEWFOUNDLAND CARIBOU MEMORIALS

On June 7<sup>th</sup> 100 years ago the first of the beautiful Caribou memorials was erected at Beaumont-Hamel, five caribou stand on the battlefields of Europe and now a new one stands in Gallipoli, installed in 2021. This caribou can be found at a location near Hill 10 Cemetery in the Sulva Bay area. The cemetery holds eight Newfoundlanders including Private Hugh McWhirter who is said to be the first of the Regiment to be killed in the fighting there.

Beaumont-Hamel along with Monchy-le-Preux, Masnieres, Guedecourt in France and Courtaai in Belgium and now Gallipoli make up the Trail of the Caribou.

## ILLNESSES THAT KILLED

Raymond Percy in Norton (Subcourse) churchyard died from Oedematous epiglottitis, just one of the things that killed back in the day. Some illnesses would have probably resulted from war conditions - would they be cured these days or do these illnesses still kill? The above condition would cause inflammation in the throat and could lead to difficulty breathing, in some cases causing death - now with antibiotics it would not be so dangerous to life

## WAS THERE TWO HORSES CALLED WARRIOR THAT RETURNED? YES!

We all know the story of Warrior the war horse of General Jack Seeley. Warrior was born on the Isle of Wight and went to France with Seeley and came back to live his life out on the Island dying at the age of 33. Warrior was a bay horse but there was also a white/grey horse called Warrior that came back it seems.

Strangely this horse lived not far from the Isle of Wight, in Southampton. This Warrior served in France in the early stages of the war and was injured by shrapnel at Mons and Aisne. On his return to Britain at the end of the war he became a police horse, because of the noise of battle, etc military horses made good police horses. This one was bought and donated to the police by a local lady Hilda Moore who made the request that Warrior visited her once a year to get a bag of sugar!

When Hilda Moore died in 1932 Warrior and his rider lead the funeral procession.

When Warrior died in 1935 he was given a civic burial and buried on the edge of a golf course in the city. The horse was considered the Pride and Pet of the Southampton Borough Police, and much loved by the public and the police.

His hooves were preserved and one was said to later be used as an inkwell by the chief constable.

## JAPANESE - CANADIAN SOLDIERS WW1

There were over two hundred Japanese - Canadians living in British Columbia that crossed into Alberta to join the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion in WW1. One man who did this was Private Tokutaro Iwamoto who died in action on September 2nd 1918. This man was born in Hiroshima of all places, before moving to Canada, little would have he believed back then how his place of birth would be remembered for one action in WW2.

Iwamoto won the military medal for the capture of 20 enemy including one carrying a codebook. Sadly he was killed, aged in his mid 30's, and is buried in Upton Wood Cemetery, Hendecourt-les-Cagnicourt, France.

## And Finally

A reminder of the dangers of picking items up in fields on the Western Front, when a farmer unearthed a 100 plus year old shell whilst ploughing. He picked up the shell to take to the field edge and held it against his body not realising the shell was leaking and contained mustard gas. Days later his skin blistered up and he has had to have medical care to deal with the burns.