



# The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter  
of The  
Branch of The  
Front**



**& Magazine  
Chesterfield  
Western  
Association**

***ISSUE 116 - October 2025***

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the Great War'.



## Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2025

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	7th	. AGM + <i>'Quintinshill 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1915 - Britain`s Worst Railway Disaster'</i> Grant Cullen. <b>Meeting Cancelled</b>
February	4th	<b>AGM + <i>Villages at War - Clowne and Barlborough in World War 1</i></b> by Paul Burkitt.
March	4th	Andrea Heatherington - <b><i>"Scamps in Khaki"</i></b> - <i>criminal deserters'</i> Deserters sometimes turned to crime to support themselves whilst on the run.
April	1 <sup>st</sup>	Grant Cullen Britain`s Worst Railway Disaster - Quintinshill - 22 <sup>nd</sup> May 1915
May	6th	<b><i>"Combat motivation and morale in British Empire armies in the two world wars"</i></b> by Prof. Gary Sheffield
June	3rd	<b>'The Forgotten Blitz and the Defeat of the Zeppelins'.</b> by Ian Castle
July	1st	<b><i>Jutland - Clash of Titans</i></b> by Scott Lindgren
August	5th	Roy Larkin - <b>Follow a Supply Column and others through mobilisation and the total chaos of the opening weeks of the Great War</b>
September	2nd	<b><i>'Motorcycle Despatch Riders In 1914'</i></b> by Nick Shelley. Nick describes the motorcyclists' contribution to the 1914 campaign, using their own words and their own previously unpublished photographs.
October	7th	<b>Peter Hart <i>I'm Out! Escape from German POW Camps, 1914-1918</i></b>
November	4th	<b><i>After Kut - What ?.</i></b> Tony Bolton
December	2nd	<b><i>An Historians Wrongful Assumption ?</i></b> - a short look at Sniping and how it developed in World War One. By Morris Charlton

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### **Chairman`s Notes....**Branch chair Jon-Paul Harding



I hope this finds everyone well, what a great talk last month by Nick Shelly on the motorcycle dispatch riders. It was a very interesting presentation, well researched and great information, just another aspect of WW1 to find out about. I am sure October`s talk will be just as interesting.

The year end is fast approaching, only 3 more meetings left where has this year gone, Remembrance Day and weekend is fast

approaching and I will be attending events in Chesterfield and London on behalf of the branch .Rob Nash will be parade marshal in London again and I am sure he will do a fantastic job in keeping everything running smoothly. Unfortunately, there will be no travel expenses for each branch this year, so if anyone is interested in attending the events in London this will have to be paid for by themselves.

Chesterfield will be holding its 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival of remembrance at the Winding wheel on the Thursday 6th of November tickets can be purchased from the box office for £6.

I will be attending the Chairs conference on the 5th of October and will cascade any information gained in the next newsletter it should be an interesting event to meet and gain knowledge from the other chairpersons from other branches.

Next year`s speakers list looks fantastic again so thank you Grant for all your hard work putting it together. As I have said before it`s your Branch so any ideas for outings for next year would be gratefully appreciated so hopefully, we can arrange some branch trips for anyone interested.

Jon-Paul Harding, Branch Chair

## October Meeting Speaker - Peter Hart

Our October meeting...in the month of Hallowe`en...sees Peter make his annual pilgrimage to the town of his youth and we welcome his return.

The title of Peter`s presentation this year is *“I’m Out! Escape from German POW Camps, 1914-1918* which I`m sure Peter will deliver in the manner in which only he does so well - entertaining yet educational...an excellent blend.



### ***Secretary`s Scribbles***

*Dear Members and Friends,*

Welcome to the October 2025 edition of our Branch Newsletter. I am delighted to inform our members that I have speakers lined up for all of next year....some topics still to be agreed but it is a relief to know that all the months of 2026

are booked...I almost left it too late last year. For 2026 we have a blend of old...and by that I mean those who present on a fairly regular basis ...and new...those visiting us for the first time...the right blend I think. Thanks to all who got in touch with suggestions for presentations. I think I have previously mentioned that, certainly compared with pre-covid, our attendance numbers, though still healthy are certainly down. We have lost a few regulars to health and the inexorable passage of time, but many organisations, local history groups, Probus, Rotary etc are struggling. I have been kept busy in September being out and about delivering presentations on WW1 topics to such groups and looking at the age demographics of attendees at such meetings I have to question whether they can be sustained in the coming years. You will see elsewhere in this Newsletter, Mark Macartney and his wife Jean have been on their travels again this time to the Scottish Area Conference in Dundee. Mark has sent in a report on his (and Jean`s) activities and this is included in this Newsletter .Next month we have our former Branch Chair - and current WFA National Chair, Tony Bolton making a welcome return to the Speakers` podium with a tal based on his speciality area of WW1 conflict...the Middle East with his presentation...”After Kut...What?”

As always happy to accept articles / correspondence for inclusion in this Newsletter / Magazine. Grant Cullen ...Branch Secretary....

[grantcullen@hotmail.com](mailto:grantcullen@hotmail.com) .....07824628638

## WFA Calendars 2026

The Western Front Association Calendar for 2026 will soon be available - 28 pages of photographs and calendar pages. Our branch will be having a supply...when they become available.....remember if you the buy through the Branch, the Branch gets 50% of the Branch selling price of £10, they will later also be available to purchase on line shortly.



### JANUARY- JUNE 2026



THE MALTZ HORN FARM CRUCIFIX JANUARY 2026

Photographer – Andrew Holmes



THE KIRKEE MEMORIAL FEBRUARY 2026

Photographer – Brian Harris for CWGC



SPRING AT LE TOURRET MARCH 2026

Photographer – Anonymous



ON THE GALLIPOLI SHORE-LINE APRIL 2026

Photographer – Brian Harris for CWGC



NURSE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN MAY 2026

Photographer Brian Harris for CWGC



THE BUTTERFLY AT MESSINES JUNE 2026

Photographer – Anonymous

## JULY – DECEMBER 2026



ÉTRICOURT OLD ENGLISH CEMETERY

JULY 2026

Photographer – John White



THE DORSETS ON THE SOMME, 1918

AUGUST 2026

Photographer – Stephen Kerr



THE LEICESTERS & LINC'S AT BRIDGE HOUSE

SEPTEMBER 2026

Photographer – David Tattersfield



CATERPILLAR VALLEY

OCTOBER 2026

Photographer – Martin Barry



THE FIVE CANADIANS IN TRACK X

NOVEMBER 2026

Photographer – Andrew Holme



SERRE ROAD NO. 2 CEMETERY

DECEMBER 2026

Photographer – Carl Liversage

## September Meeting - Nick Shelley

This talk was developed from the story of two brothers, Cecil and Alick Burney, who volunteered for the Army in August 1914 when war was declared. The Burneys were engineers who had been running a firm manufacturing motorcycles since 1912. Both of them joined up to serve as motorcycle despatch riders. Like many other motorcyclists they were recruited in great haste and they went straight to the front line with little or no military training. They were among at least three hundred motorcyclists whose urgent involvement in the war in 1914 was an unplanned afterthought. Indeed, like many other civilians recruited to the Signals service, they were even encouraged to ride their own motorcycles rather than being issued with a War Department machine.



CECIL AND ALICK 1914

My brother and co-researcher acquired not only the Burneys' campaign medals but also their photograph albums which recorded the names and faces of their fellow 5<sup>th</sup> Division despatch riders. The Burneys photographed aspects of the war freely, illustrating some of their exploits on the front line in France from the start of the war until Christmas, and their pictures were published for the first time in our book "Two Wheels to War".

They were part of a group of twelve motorcyclists assigned to 5<sup>th</sup> Division. The twelve quickly formed a tightly knit group who served with energy and with distinction, particularly for the first three hectic and critical months. Among their number was Corporal Willie Watson (later Major Watson of the Tanks Corps). He published extracts from his letters home, first in a national magazine and then in a hardback book. His writing formed the chief narrative thread of this story, taking him from recruiting office in London to 5<sup>th</sup> Division HQ in Ireland, and from there by sea to France. They were present at the Battle of Mons where the British and Germans first exchanged shots.



**WHL WATSON ON LEAVE 1914**

After the war, another motorcyclist, George Owen, wrote a vivid description of coming under fire for the first time. He described his exhausting and dangerous work carrying orders from the British HQ to the fighting units, and reporting back to the generals on the state of the units and the combatants. The British conducted a two hundred mile “retreat from Mons”, almost reaching Paris before the tables were turned. Owen’s account had never been published but his great-nephew shared his remarkable account with us.

Another member of the group was Stanley Polhill, nicknamed “Pollers”. His letters home, which described his feelings and fears, were published in his old school magazine. He later transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and was particularly observant of aerial conflict - one windy day he even recalled seeing an underpowered British spotter plane “flying backwards”! Though he was nominally in charge of the motorcyclists, his sense of humour let him be photographed posing on the wreck of a motorcycle which had been run over by British heavy artillery.



Late in November, the ferocity of the fighting eased. The Germans transferred some of their forces to the Eastern front to fight off the Russians. About the same time, winter arrived, unusually early for Flanders. 5<sup>th</sup> Division HQ moved back from Belgium to northern France, and the motorcyclists, as part of the Signals company, were reassigned to billets at St Jans Cappell. They were based there till the spring, in what the men called their worst quarters of the war.

Then each of the motorcyclists enjoyed a week's home leave. Some of them left descriptions of the neat and tidy state of England and the tragic state of the war zone, a contrast which was incomprehensible to families and friends at home. Back in France, the group celebrated Christmas with a formal dinner at an estaminet in the village. George Owen put all his energy and charm into scrounging delicious goodies for the feast. Alick Burney prepared commemorative menus, and Sergeant Polhill took the lead in organising these group photos.



**XMAS GROUP UNMOUNTED**

Finally the group began to break up. Early in 1915 some of the motorcyclists became officers in fighting units. The remainder were commissioned to Signals units in 1916. Of the original twelve motorcyclists, only one was lost, missing presumed dead, while serving as a motorcyclist. The remaining

eleven were all commissioned into other units, and only one of those didn't survive the war, being lost to a sniper in 1918.

All the pictures shown at the talk, and the full text of the book "Adventures of a Despatch Rider" published by WHL Watson in 1915, appear in "Two Wheels To War" by Martin and Nick Shelley available from the authors. Contact us at [twowheelstowar@gmail.com](mailto:twowheelstowar@gmail.com) to order a signed copy (£20 + postage).

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**Report by Mark Macartney WFA Trustee & Chesterfield Branch Publicity Administrator**

Branded Goods Stand



Discovery Centre



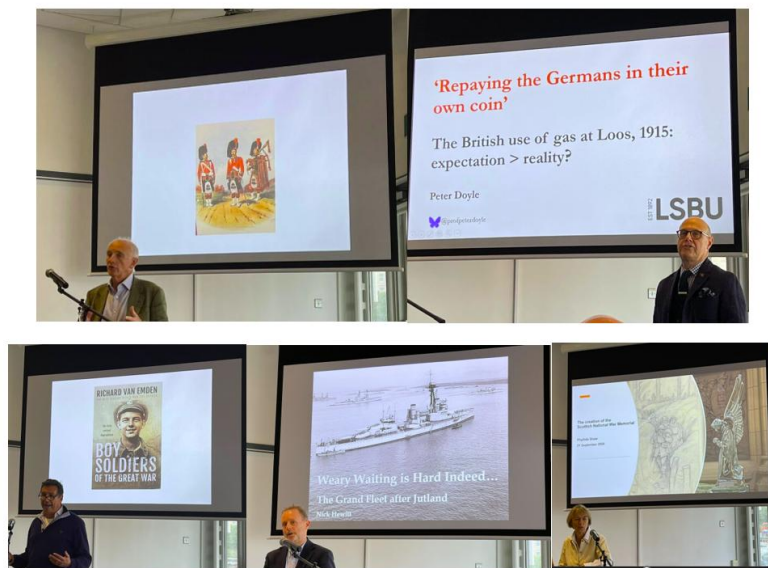
With Jean, I attended the stated Scottish National Conference. It was a fantastic conference, 90 attendees, plus quite a bit Branded Goods Sales items sold included lapel badges, ties, baseball cap, mousemats, fridge magnets + WFA 40 year Anniversary coaster, But the cream was meeting and positive chatting with all Scottish Branch Chairmen, Derek Bird (North) Ken Nisbet (South) and Mike Taylor (Tayside) also some attendees were keen to join the WFA, so I gave them some information leaflets,

But of course the success of this Conference was down to the organisers and the speakers:

Western Front Association Tayside Branch hosted the conference. Thanks to Mike, thanks to all concerned for their efforts in organising this fantastic event. The speakers were a real who's who of First World War history!

- (a) Prof Hew Strachan spoke about the Scottish soldier in the Great War,
- (b) Nick Hewitt talked about the Grand Fleet in the wake of the Battle of Jutland,
- (c) Prof Peter Doyle talked about the use of gas at the battle of Loos where Scottish soldiers featured heavily.
- (d) Richard van Emden presented his extensive research on underage soldiers in the Great War
- (e) Phyllida Shaw spoke about the design and development of the Scottish war memorial in Edinburgh Castle.

Images here of Speakers doing their talks



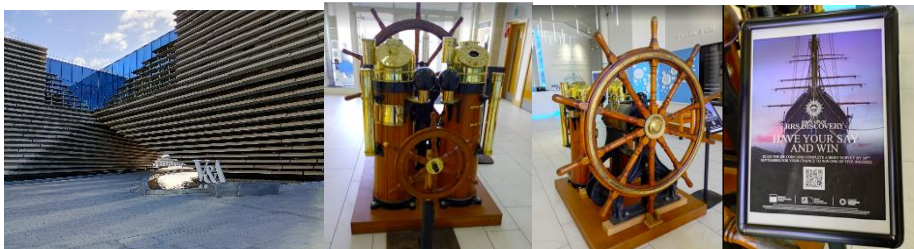
Discovery Point was a fantastic venue for this conference and lunch break was spent by some learning about the terrible diet of those on Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition - preserved dried sprouts and penguin anyone?

We spent an extra day in the area taking all sights in and looking into the history.

This photo was taken outside the venue, (replicating the penguins mentioned in the paragraph above)



Next we visited the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) (some images here) it was over 3 floors but could only see ground floor (for personal reasons) as there were no lifts in place, V&A Dundee is a design museum in Dundee, which opened on 15 September 2018. The V&A Dundee is the first design museum in Scotland and the first Victoria and Albert museum outside London. The V&A Dundee is also the first building in the United Kingdom designed by Kengo Kuma



Finalising our History of Dundee we visited RRS Discovery, (unfortunately we appeared not to be able to go on board during our visit as part of it was covered by tarpaulin)

The Royal Research Ship (RRS) Discovery, a historic vessel that carried [Captain Scott](#) to Antarctica, is moored at Discovery Point in Dundee. After returning to its home city in 1986, the ship is now a museum ship, serving as the centre piece of an award-winning visitor attraction that explores its voyages and legacy.

Location: Discovery Point, Discovery Quay, Dundee, Scotland

Status: The RRS Discovery is a museum ship, permanently docked.

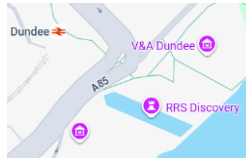
Attraction: It is the centerpiece of the Discovery Point attraction, which features audiovisual shows, interactive experiences, and displays related to the ship's history.

History: Built in Dundee in 1901, the ship was home to Scott's first Antarctic expedition. It returned to Dundee in 1986 and has been cared for by the Dundee Heritage Trust ever since

Note:

Discovery was taken into the service of the [British government](#) in 1923 to carry out scientific research in the [Southern Ocean](#), becoming the first [Royal Research Ship](#). The ship undertook a two-year expedition - the [Discovery Investigations](#) - recording valuable information on the oceans, marine life

and being the first scientific investigation into [whale](#) populations. From 1929 to 1931 *Discovery* served as the base for the [British Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition](#) (BANZARE) under [Douglas Mawson](#). This was a major scientific and territorial quest in what is now the [Australian Antarctic Territory](#).



*Mark Macartney*



## Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2026

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January	6th	. AGM + Tim Lynch - topic tba
February	3rd	Ross Beadle - Sarajevo 1914
March	3rd	Andy Rawson - Malta...Nurse of the Mediterranean
April	7th	Mick Byrne - Shot at Dawn
May	5th	Christina Holstein - Verdun
June	2nd	Scott Lindgren TBA
July	7th	John Wilson The action at Sheikh Sa'id November 1914, The opposed landing that nobody has ever heard about!
August	4th	Ian Castle - Gotha Raids
September	1st	Roy Larkin - tba
October	6th	Peter Hart - tba
November	3rd	John Horner 'In the care of St Dunstons : Private Richard Horners story'
December	1st	Neil Taylor...."Winston`s Little Army...Aspects of the Royal Naval Division"