

BETWEEN THE LINES

Newsletter of the East Kent Branch of The Western Front Association

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Founded by John Giles
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*War Memorials Online website

Articles, etc for *Between the Lines* should be sent to me in M/S Word with accompanying images attached as JPGs. The deadline for contributions (articles, letters, queries, etc) for the next issue of *Between the Lines* is Saturday, 28th February 2026. Please ensure that articles are submitted using Times New Roman typeface at 12 point font.

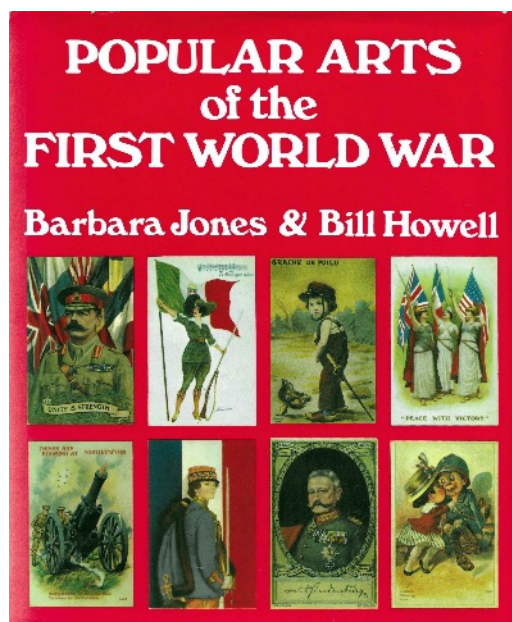
Contributions should be e-mailed to me at: [REDACTED]

James Brazier, WFA East Kent Branch Newsletter Editor



Welcome to another issue of *Between the Lines*. I do hope that you will find it an interesting read. I am pleased that an increasing number of contributions are coming in from Branch members but I would be even more pleased to receive more contributions for future issues of *Between the Lines*. Perhaps some of our other members might make a New Year Resolution to submit one or more contributions in 2026. I already have received one contribution for inclusion in the next issue of *Between the Lines*. On this point, I would particularly welcome feedback from members on articles in our Newsletter and feel that a correspondence column would be a popular addition. Your view on any of the articles would be most welcome. I feel sure that you must have a view on some of them so why not express it and share it with other members? Articles do not necessarily have to have a local interest as long as they relate, in some way, to the Great War.

In this issue you will find the concluding part of John Drouot's article on the explosion aboard Torpedo Boat No. 4 in Ramsgate Harbour in May 1917 with the tragic loss of 14 Royal Navy ratings. This is a long-forgotten incident which deserves a retelling after having been thoroughly researched by John. You will also find another article by Michael Lucas, this time on an officer who lived at Dover and was killed at the Battle of Loos on 15th September 1915 and was incorrectly commemorated on the CWGC Memorial to the Missing at Vis-en-Artois because the date of his death was recorded as 15th September 1918. Thanks to Michael's research, as told in his article, the CWGC have agreed that the officer's name should join those of the other men of his battalion on the Loos Memorial to the Missing. Well done Michael! You will also find three articles by John Websper: one on the new plaque in St John's Church, Margate, to the Rev'd David Railton who was Vicar of Margate when the Unknown Warrior was buried in Westminster Abbey and who is credited with that idea; one on the war memorial marking the role of the Royal Engineers at Port Richborough during the Great War; and one on the 2025 Armistice Day Steam Train Special run through Kent. Thank you John for these three interesting articles which, like the other contributions, are all of local interest.



Book published by Studio Vista, London (1972)

To fill the remaining pages, I have written a number of articles featuring artefacts dating from the Great War in my collection. I trust that readers will find them interesting. Some of the artefacts featured will be familiar to members: others, I suspect, will not.

I started collecting memorabilia from the Great War back in the 1960s. By the late 1960s, I had collected a small number of pieces of trench art and a smaller number of crested china models. I became friendly with a local second-hand dealer who invited me to his home to see his collection of WWI crested china models. What a treat that was: it certainly inspired me to add to my modest collection! In those days, I used to visit the local public library every Saturday to borrow books which caught my eye. On one such visit in 1972, I saw on the shelves a recently published book entitled *Popular Arts of the First World War*. I borrowed it for a fortnight and immediately ordered a copy of it from a local bookseller. That book was exactly what I had been looking for and it has taken me on a journey which continues to this day. The book was written by the distinguished architect William 'Bill' Howell and the artist Barbara Jones. Both authors had shared a common interest in collecting WWI memorabilia from junk shops and second-hand markets - exactly as I too had done but, in my case, on a much smaller scale. Nevertheless, that extremely well-illustrated book showed that I was not alone in my endeavours. Since 1972, the collecting market has seen major changes brought about by the internet and online auction houses such as eBay which, to a large extent, have led to the demise of junk shops and to the profieration of charity shops. But WWI mementoes can still be found - if you look hard enough! □

James Brazier
Newsletter Editor

The Explosion aboard HM Torpedo Boat No. 4 in Ramsgate Harbour, 26th May 1917- Part 2

In the previous article, I looked at the explosion of a torpedo on board His Majesty's Torpedo Boat Number 4 (TB4) in Ramsgate Harbour on May 26th 1917. In this article, I look at the court of inquiry into the explosion and at how Ramsgate forced the Admiralty to change its policies around compensation for civilian damage caused by one of its ships.

*Captain Tomlin
(The Dreadnought Project)*



*Vice-Admiral
Sir Reginald Bacon,
Dover Patrol
(Wikipedia)*



*A somewhat piratical
Donal McGrath
(The Dreadnought
Project)*



In a memorandum of 28th May 1917, Reginald Bacon, Vice-Admiral Dover Patrol (VADP), recorded that he had "directed a Court of Enquiry [sic] ... to assemble ... at Ramsgate ... on the 29th day of May 1917 ... to investigate the circumstances attending the explosion on board H. M. Torpedo Boat No. 4 on the 26th May 1917". The records of this court provide the information I have on the events of that day. The court comprised Engineer-Commander G. Pascoe, part of the Ramsgate Depot; Mr G. Smart, Foreman of the Yard at Dover; Captain G. Tomlin, who had been Senior Naval Officer (SNO) Ramsgate, at the time of the explosion but was now waiting to take command of the light cruiser HMS *Ceres*.

The first witness was the Captain of TB4, Lieutenant Donal McGrath. He confirmed that the explosion had been caused by the firing of the forward torpedo into the wireless room, directly beneath the bridge. He confirmed his standing orders around the safety systems that were intended to ensure that such a thing should not happen. He told the court that the men on watch on the 26th were employed cleaning paintwork, whilst those off watch were at breakfast; he identified the crew of the forward tube as Leading Seaman Welford and Able Seaman Beer, both of whom had been killed.



British 18-inch Torpedo (Wikipedia)

TB4 was equipped with 18-inch Mark III torpedoes which were stored in their tubes and, apart from when they were fired, were only removed for maintenance or for the replacement of the warhead with a practice one for training purposes. The torpedoes were launched from their tubes by compressed air held in a

cartridge, known as the impulse charge. It was triggered by a lever which was only able to be moved after the removal of a blocking-pin. Standing orders were that, when in harbour the charge should be detached from the tube and stored in a box nearby; similarly the blocking-pin should be protecting the firing lever.

The main charge in the Mark III torpedo was gun cotton, a sufficiently stable explosive that it required the less stable charge of mercury fulminate, in a percussion cap, to ignite it. This had to be struck using a device known as "the pistol". This was designed to explode the torpedo when it hit its target and to prevent explosions at all other times. The pistol was a screw mechanism that, as it turned, pushed one part out beyond the front of the warhead and pushed another close to the primer. When the torpedo impacted its target, the pistol would be driven into the primer, setting off the main charge. The screw was rotated by the "fan", a small propeller attached to the front of the torpedo. It was turned by the passage of the projectile through the water and, after it had travelled about 70 yards, both parts of the pistol would be fully extended, ready for impact. At all other times, the pistol was wound in. As a final safety mechanism, the pistol was prevented from unwinding by a pin, which had to be removed prior to launching.

To summarise: for the torpedo on TB4 to have been launched, a full impulse charge would have had to be attached to the tube; the safety pin on the launching trigger removed; the launching trigger would have had to be pulled. Even if these things had happened, the worst that should have occurred would have been an alarming crash, followed by serious disciplinary action against the men responsible. But, on 26th May the torpedo exploded and, for this to happen, the pistol mechanism would have had to be wound out. How these things had come about, and who was responsible, were the concerns of the court.

Following Lieutenant McGrath, the next witness was the Torpedo Gunner's Mate (TGM) PO Mulcahy. He told the court that on the day after the explosion he had examined the forward tube and found the remains of a loaded impulse charge. He could not explain how this had come about as he had, personally, removed the charge and inserted the pistol safety pin on entering Ramsgate harbour on the 25th. He conceded that his only witnesses were dead, but stated that he had reported that all tubes were safe to his superior, CPO Wilkins, TB4's Torpedo Gunner (TG). Mulcahy agreed that while it would have been possible for someone to have inserted a charge before leaving harbour to save time, he did not believe that anyone in his crews would have done so. With regard to the pistol, he said that he had last checked its operation two weeks previously, and that he had no reason to believe that it was not still wound in on the 26th.

The court asked about the safety-pin restraining the launch lever and the TGM, somewhat elusively, stated that this always remained in place, even at action stations, until its removal was ordered by the Captain. His final statements related to questions from the court about the tube crew's attitude. He stated that they were not given to "skylarking" and that they had not expressed any discontent or made threats.

The TG was called next. CPO Wilkins explained that he had joined TB4 on the 24th May on temporary loan. He told the court that he had inspected the three torpedoes on the 25th whilst the ship was at sea. He was then questioned on the ship's routine around torpedo safety and launching. He answered the questions but, because of his recent arrival, it is probable that his replies were straight out of the drill book and did not necessarily relate to practice aboard TB4. The court asked no questions about his posting on "loan".

The next three witnesses said little other than confirm what the court had already heard. The first was Sub-Lieutenant Robson, the 1st Lieutenant, who had been the senior officer aboard at the time. He confirmed that there was no evidence of discontent or insanity among the torpedo crews, stating that "all the men were quite sound". Robson was followed by Able Seaman Greensmith, the surviving Leading Torpedoman, who stated that he had been working at the stern tube at the time of the explosion. Some of his answers about procedure differed marginally from those of the TG's drill book, but the court did not challenge this. Chief Engine Room Artificer Keates, when called, confirmed the TGM's statement that the remains of an impulse charge were to be found in the forward tube.

With the evidence of the TGM and the ERA, there could be no doubt in the court's mind that an improperly loaded impulse charge had caused the launch. The final witness, Lieutenant Commander Ridley, the Torpedo Officer for the 6th Destroyer Flotilla, offered a suggestion for the cause of the explosion. He told the court that a particular maintenance procedure could leave the pistol unwound, not protruding from the warhead but able to strike the percussion cap. The torpedo would then explode if the warhead was hit hard enough. However, the TGM and AB Greensmith, on recall, stated that this particular procedure was never used in TB4. So the detonation remained a mystery.

The court's report, beyond confirming that a torpedo had been fired and exploded, concluded that there was insufficient evidence from the surviving crew to account for it. The VADP, reporting to the Admiralty, noted the court's findings stating that there was no possibility of any disciplinary action for lack of evidence. Reviewing the court transcripts on 22nd June, Rear Admiral Fitzherbert, the Admiralty's Director of Torpedoes and Mining, concluded that there

had been gross negligence aboard TB4 compounded by the fact that the state of the tube and the weapon could have been “easily noticed”; there the matter appears to have rested.

While the Navy was wondering what had happened aboard TB4, those people of Ramsgate whose property had been damaged in the blast, were wondering about compensation. A number wrote to the Secretary of the Admiralty who, on 17th June, had the letters forwarded to the SNO Ramsgate. The accompanying letter disingenuously referring to an “alleged explosion”. The SNO speedily passed these “hot potatoes” to

Councillor H. C. Child, Mayor of Ramsgate.



Cllr Henry Child, Mayor of Ramsgate

Child's response was twofold. The first was to instruct the solicitor and Conservative MP for Brentford, William Joynson-Hicks to pursue the matter. On 22nd June, Joynson-Hicks wrote to Sir Edward Carson, the First Lord of the Admiralty: “I think that you would agree with me that while people ought perhaps to insure against hostile aircraft,

there is no reason why they should insure against explosion on His Majesty's own ships.” He went on to rub it in: “I think that there is a case where I ought to apply to you as head of the Navy which, it is true accidentally but none the less really, caused the damage.” He attached a list of 65 people, whose property was damaged and the sums they wished to claim. Carson reviewed the papers from the court of inquiry on the 26th June; presumably he replied to Joynson-Hicks but there is no copy of any reply in the Admiralty file.

Councillor Child's second approach was on 14th July, when he joined a delegation to Prime Minister Lloyd George. The delegation was made up of the Mayors of towns which had suffered war damage, mainly due to enemy action. According to *The Times*, Child told the PM that his Government's response over compensation was “no use in his neighbourhood at the present time”. Ramsgate had suffered from a considerable number of German raids, but what was exercising his Worship was the Admiralty's evasiveness around compensating his citizens for the damage wrought by one of its warships. *The Times* emphasised Councillor Child's argument, but only reported the PM's assurances about damage caused by the enemy.

*William Joynson-Hicks MP
(Wikipedia)*



It is not clear which of Councillor Child's approaches was the trigger but, on 8th August, the Naval Expenditure Emergency Standing Committee of the Treasury, announced that a “grant of discretion to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to give consideration as an act of grace to applications for compensation from the Owners of private property damaged by an explosion on board H.M.T.B. 4 at Ramsgate.” This may not have been quite what the Mayor had wanted: the term “act of grace” implies that the householders and ship owners of Ramsgate were somehow at fault for not having made provision for damage caused by an explosion on one of HM ships. But it was a precedent nonetheless.

With regard to the sorry business of TB4, the court of inquiry could only reach its conclusion based on the facts as presented. Rear-Admiral Fitzherbert, without this constraint, concluded that the explosion could only have occurred as a result of “gross negligence”, suggesting obliquely that more than one man was involved. The torpedo's accidental launch can be imagined in terms of a one-off, unauthorised, time-saving exercise followed by an unfortunate stumble but the unsafe condition of the warhead suggests neglect over time. The evidence given to the court states that all the men were “sound” and all procedures were followed strictly; the outcome strongly suggests otherwise. Setting aside the possibilities of malice or madness, the only remaining explanation is morale: that some of the crew of TB4 had become tragically indifferent to their duty. In this respect, I am curious about CPO Wilkins, the loaned Torpedo Gunner. His recent career had been in drill-based training establishments and his presence may be indicative of a ship that needed pulling together. At present, I have no evidence to support this, so the questions about the explosion must remain open.

If you have any comments or questions about this article, I can be contacted at [REDACTED]

John Drouot

Missing at Loos

Just below Dover Castle is a terrace of houses, named Victoria Park. By 1914, the Elverson family had lived at No. 12 for some years. Ronald Whidborne Elverson, was the son of Hamilton James Elverson, an Army major, and his wife Annie Eliza. Ronald's War Office file (WO339/18138) is at the National Archives. Born in London in 1890, he was educated at Dover College, then Jesus College, Cambridge. He served in the OTC at both school and university and was appointed to a commission in the Territorial Army in 1911.

In summer 1914, whilst many thought the war would be over by Christmas, Lord Kitchener judged the war would last for years and required massive expansion of Britain's Army. There was an enthusiastic response to his call for volunteers. Elverson applied for a temporary commission on 16th August. He expressed a preference for The Buffs, but was posted to the East Surrey Regiment, joining its 9th Battalion in 24th Division's 72nd Brigade, comprised of battalions from each Kent and Surrey regiment. He was promoted Lieutenant in October. In late August 1915, the Division arrived in France. The men were trained and equipped, but perhaps only one 9th East Surrey officer - with Boer War service in the Cape Mounted Rifles - had any experience of modern warfare. The Division was kept well behind the Front.

Kitchener was forced to accept that it was essential to go on the offensive in France, even though much of the BEF was inexperienced and was seriously short of artillery and shells. The French wanted British assistance for their offensive by attacking at Loos. They hoped this would defeat the Germans, liberate French territory and take pressure off the Russians.

The BEF duly attacked at Loos on 25th September 1915: the British Army's largest battle to date. Whilst losses were heavy, it looked as though a breakthrough was possible then. However, in reserve were two inexperienced divisions, 21st and 24th, and late arriving as they had been held back. In the meantime, the Germans were able to bring up reinforcements and strengthen their defences.

Haig and Haking, commanding XI Corps, believed the Germans had been seriously defeated and that the reserves would not be meeting organised resistance. So, on the morning of 26th September, Brigadier-General Mitford, commanding 72nd Brigade, received verbal orders at 9.45am, to make a six battalion attack on the German rear line about 1,700 yards away at 11.00, in conjunction with flanking attacks by other British units. The 9th East Surrey was on the right of the front line of the advance, with 8th Royal West Kent on their left and 8th Buffs



Lt Ronald Whidborne Elverson, 9th Battalion, East Surrey Regt

behind. It was a bright morning and there was no cover from smoke or gas.

At first, the lie of the land sheltered the troops. However, as the advance continued, they came under heavy fire not only from the front, but also from the flanks, as the promised supporting attacks had failed, and artillery support had been ineffective. Snipers sought to pick off the officers. Losses steadily mounted. The 9th East Surrey veered to the right, in spite of the German fire, trying to keep contact with 21st Division. It was enfiladed from Chalk Pit Wood, then Bois Hugo.

In spite of terrible losses, Mitford's men reached the by now extensive barbed wire defences in front of their objective, only to find them intact and impenetrable. Dr Bertling, a German medic recorded: *'The Englishmen attacked in whole hosts and with real guts. Our men shot standing upright as rapidly as they could pull the triggers. No Englishman got through the wire.'* Unsupported and under continued heavy fire, eventually the troops were forced to retire, leaving their dead and many wounded behind. There were so many dead bodies, the Germans called it 'The Field of Corpses'. To their credit, they sent out medical orderlies to tend the wounded. They also allowed some who could walk to return to the British lines, as the numbers of wounded were overwhelming. Bertling, recorded *'Henceforward the wounded Englishmen were gradually brought in over the following nights. A few individuals lay like this for five days outside, but all were remarkably lively, especially when given a cigarette ... only the*

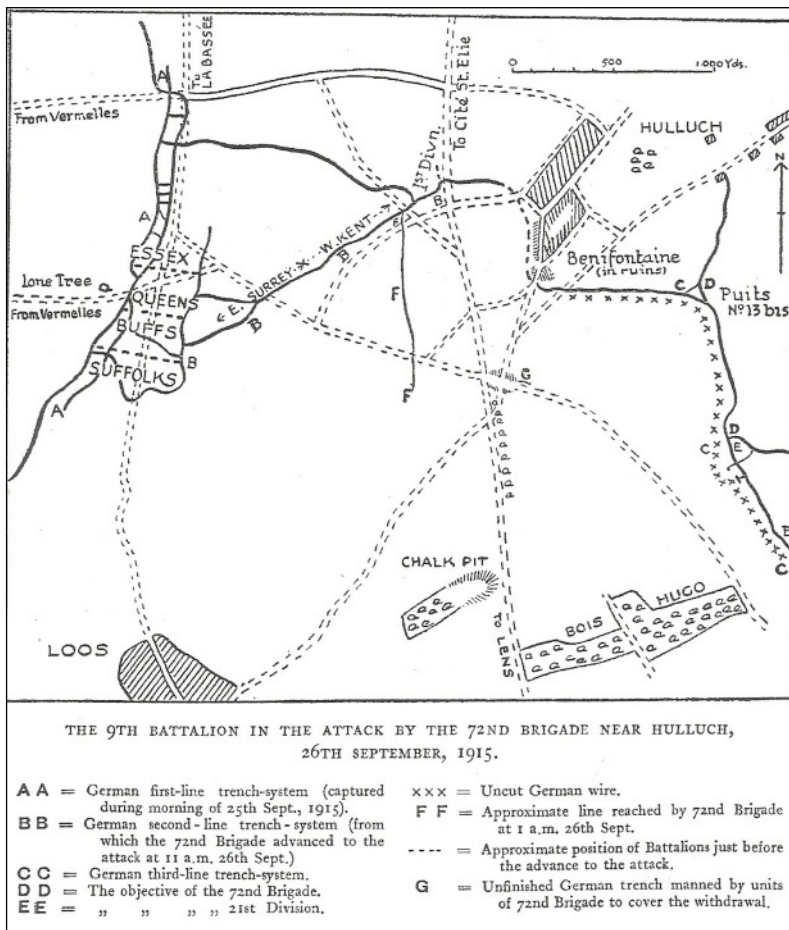
shortage of water discomforted us. We cleaned our bloody hands as best we could in the wet grass.'

The 9th East Surrey, alone, had lost 450 killed, wounded and missing in its first engagement - half its strength. Many men were missing and it was not known if they had survived as prisoners. Ronald Elverson was one, as poignant correspondence in his file reveals.

In common with many other families, including Rudyard Kipling's whose only son was with the Irish Guards, the Elversons only knew that their son was missing at Loos. Might he have survived as a prisoner-of-war? The Germans provided prisoner lists, but there were often delays and confusion over identities, and prisoners might have difficulty communicating with their families. Major Welch, 9th East Surrey's Second in Command, was captured, but died of wounds, aged 60, in a German hospital in early October. His name was misspelled by the Germans and a British prisoner reported seeing him alive in October. Death was only established, months later, after his photograph was sent to Germany.

With Elverson, the process was even more prolonged and painful. By May 1916, with no news from the Germans, the War Office presumed him dead. That August, however, his mother was still hoping he was alive - 'We cannot quite give up the hope that he may be a prisoner of war.' The family sent copies of statements from men of his battalion who had seen Elverson at Loos. There was a lengthy account from Lance-Corporal George Stanbury,

'We made an advance about 12 noon on 26th. We all advanced like heroes, and we got to the wires outside the German trenches. We were there firing for a time then an order was passed along the line to retire and, in the retirement, I came in contact with Lieut Elverson. It was a hell upon earth, what with our guns, and the German guns, and machine guns that enfiladed us, also the snipers' fire, and the rifle-fire from the German trenches, and as I afore stated, Lieut Elverson and I were retiring together. We then spotted our Major Welch of the East Surreys lying down badly wounded, close to the German wire entanglements. We goes over, and attends, dresses his wounds. He had, I think, two wounds in the head and one in the leg above the knee. Lieut Elverson dresses his head, and with my handkerchief we made a tourniquet, which we ties very tight around his leg above the wound to



stop the bleeding. We also asked him if we could assist him away - to which he refused.

In my opinion the Major would die very soon, but before we went, we shook hands with him, and wished him the best of luck, in hopes to see him some time again. After this period of time had elapsed we looked round. We could see our fellows retiring a very long way off, in fact we were the only two left in the vicinity unharmed, and the Germans still firing. We then kept on walking back together, and we came across a South Wales Borderer officer badly wounded. He had been hit in the right shoulder and leg. Lieut Elverson asked him if we should do anything for him. He wished to be assisted away into safety. Lieut Elverson and I then picked him up and helped him out of it. We had not gone very far when Lieut Elverson got hit in the side or leg, which I am not sure, but I think it was in the leg, and fell. I were left by myself with the wounded officer. I asked Lieut Elverson if I could do anything for him, but he told me he would manage himself, and for me to go on the best I can with the wounded Welsh officer, and that was the last I saw of Lieut Elverson - but I will not fear the worst not yet awhile, if I were you. In all probabilities he may have been taken as a prisoner of war.'

Another account was given by a wounded man, Private Wooley:

'I and another fellow helped to bandage Lieut Elverson up, close to the German wire. He was hit by a bullet right through the side of the chest, and was also lamed by shrapnel in the leg. He was calling out for the Captain. We started carrying him back, but he told us to put him down and soon after we got the order to retire. We left him and Major Welch together. He was breathing rather rough and could not bear to be moved. He was quite conscious and asked for a cigarette and gave me one myself. I never saw or heard of him after that.'

Wooley also gave a separate statement:

Lieut Elverson was his platoon commander and there could be no mistake about him. The bullet or piece of shrapnel entered the right side of the chest and came out under the left arm, where the wound was very large. There was a great deal of loss of blood. The wounds were bound up with three bandages which were available. Lieut Elverson smoked a cigarette and took some tablets he had with him. He was quite cheerful and said to Major Welch when the men had to retire "never mind, our chaps will soon be back", but when Wooley and others of the regiment got back hours later in the morning, all the wounded had disappeared. Lieut Elverson had only one wound Major Welch was wounded in two places.

Wooley also wrote to Elverson's sister:

I am sorry to say your brother Lieut Elverson was very badly wounded but he was quite cheerful and smiling. I think he fell into the German hands for they held the ground where he laid after they had driven our regiment back till the following morning and when we looked for him he was gone. I sincerely hope he is still alive. He was my platoon officer, and I am sure he was liked by all in our company. I am sorry to say the chap who helped me has since been killed. I will close now with best respects.

A Frank Gilbert wrote in April 1916 that Elverson had been his platoon officer and he had seen him hit in the leg from about seventy yards away. Private Morrissey, who had been repatriated from captivity after losing a foot, reported encountering Elverson on the battlefield, delirious and wounded in both thighs.

Discrepancies between these various accounts are only to be expected, in view of the trauma those concerned had passed through, and being written some time after the event. The War Office replied on 20th August to Elverson's mother that 'in deference to your wishes, no further action will be taken at present.' However, it pointed out that although some officers

officially reported killed had 'shortly afterwards' been found to be prisoners-of-war, the lapse of time meant that the Army 'could no longer hold out any hope of Lieutenant Elverson being alive.'

No more was ever heard of Elverson. In 1919, his unfortunate mother wrote 'I have no further hope that my poor son ... survived the battle of Loos.' The War Office now wrote to Mowll & Mowll, his solicitors about his will, to say that although a formal death certificate could not be issued, it was 'constrained to conclude' that he was dead, and monies owed for his military service were paid in 1920.

Ronald Elverson continues to have no known grave. He is commemorated on the family monument in Dover. In France he was listed on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial to the Missing of 1918, because his date of death was given incorrectly as 25th September 1918. The many other men of the battalion still 'missing' at Loos are commemorated on the Loos Memorial. Following an approach by me, the CWGC agreed that he should join them. □

Michael Lucas

Sources:

The National Archives - files in series WO339 for Elverson and Welch

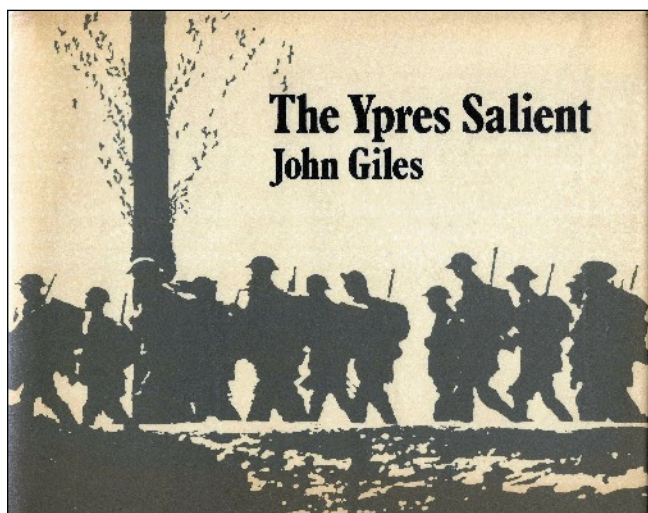
Von Vormann, W. *Infanterie Regiment Furst Leopold von Anhalt Dessau (1. Magdeburgisches) Nr. 26*, Oldenburg, 1925 (extracts kindly translated by Andrew Lucas)

Michael Lucas *The Journey's End Battalion The 9th East Surrey in the Great War*, Barnsley, 2012

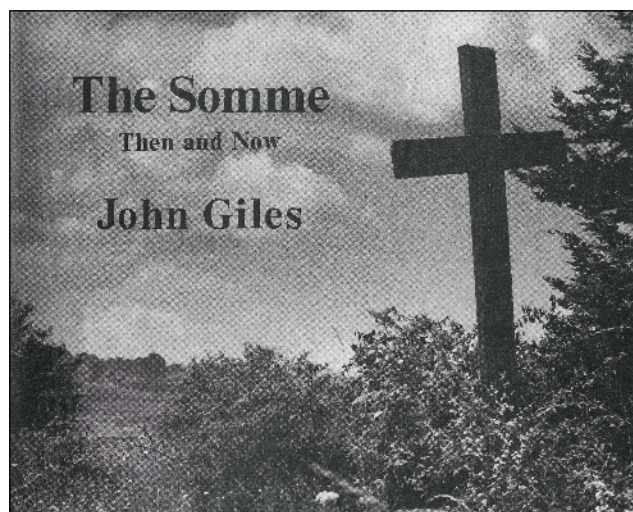


A hand-carved wall-plaque bearing the crest of the East Surrey Regiment - this was probably made by a military convalescent during the Great War

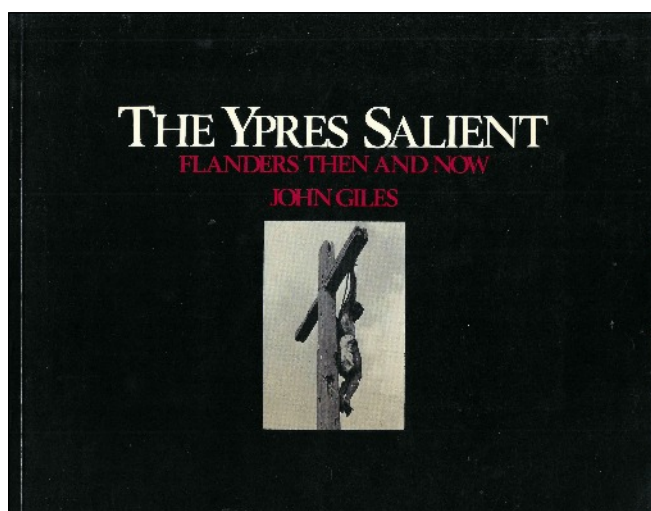
The John Giles Trilogy



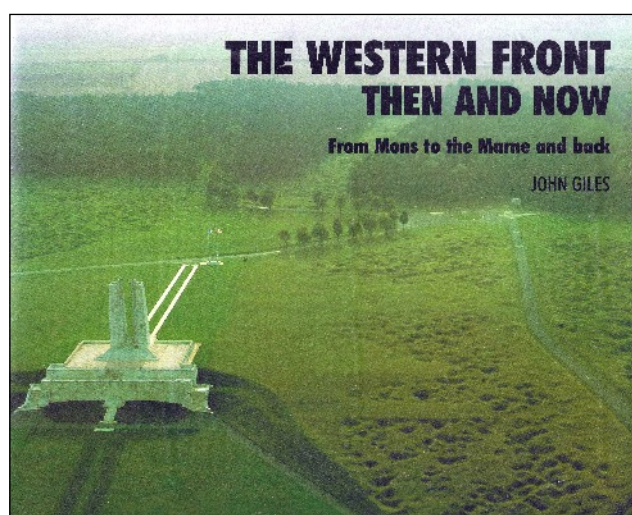
The front cover of the First Edition of John's first book *The Ypres Salient* published by Leo Cooper in 1970



The front cover of the First Edition of John's second book *The Somme: Then and Now* published by Bailey Brothers & Swinfen (Folkestone) in 1977. This book was subsequently reprinted by After the Battle (Battle of Britain Prints International Ltd) with a different front cover



The front cover of the softback reprint of *The Ypres Salient* (above) titled *The Ypres Salient: Flanders Then and Now* published by Picardy Publishing Ltd (Richard Dunning) in 1979



The front cover of the First Edition of John's third book *The Western Front: Then and Now from Mons to the Marne and back* (thus completing his trilogy) published by After the Battle (Battle of Britain Prints International Ltd) in 1992

I love bookfairs. When I was living in Guildford, I rarely missed the Naval and Military Bookfairs that were held at The Spa Hotel, Tunbridge Wells and at the Great Russell Hotel, now The Kimpton Fitzroy, Bloomsbury. Those bookfairs attracted the main dealers in military books from all over the country - and probably still do. Smaller bookfairs were held at Dorking, Guildford and Farnham and I rarely missed any of those. I became a bibliophile largely thanks to the legendary Lt-Col Bob Wyatt whose collection of military books was second to none. Sadly, Bob died in 2019. For many years, Bob was the WFA's Review Editor.

Sadly, I can't now get to military bookfairs - which is just as well as I have run out of space in my house!

I have supported our Branch book sales over many years and, this year, I donated over a dozen military books which I decided that I was most unlikely to ever

read again. Greg Bayne very kindly gave my wife, Sue, and me a lift to the meeting because I had particularly wanted to see what other books were on offer. I had no intention of taking any books home with me but I was spoilt for choice by the books on the booktable and I simply could not resist buying a copy of John Giles' *The Western Front: Then and Now from Mons to the Marne and back*. It was the *pièce de résistance* as it was John's third book and completed his longed-for trilogy. (I also purchased a copy of Mike O'Connor's book *Airfields & Airmen: Somme*.) Before Mike retired, he was British Airways' captain of their Concorde fleet and who I took around the major military graves in Brookwood Cemetery in the 1990s with a two other Concorde pilots who called themselves The Heathrow Pals due to their common interest in the Great War. Mike went on to write a number of books for Pen & Sword

on Airfields of the Great War and I couldn't resist adding his book to my collection. But I digress.

My special purchase at the Branch book-sale was John Giles' book *The Western Front: Then and Now from Mons to the Marne and back*. John had told me about his wanting to write the book to complete his trilogy but, for reasons that I will not go into, I never bought it when it was finally published in 1992. For many years, from the early-1970s to the early-1980s, I had regularly visited John at his home (Guilton Mill, Ash) and been part of the small group who established The Western Front Association. John had suffered ill-health for many years (he'd had a triple by-pass heart operation at St Thomas's Hospital in London in the late-1970s) and, apart from founding The Western Front Association in 1980, he devoted much of his final years to writing the third volume of his trilogy. According to a tribute in that book by his wife, Margery, John had completed reading the final proof of his third book only two days before he died, aged 70, in 1991. Thus, sadly, he never saw his third book in print. My collection of his first two books and the reprint of *The Ypres Salient* published by Richard Dunning are all signed by John and his *Somme* book contains a personal inscription from John to my family in it. On top of that, his *Somme* book contains a credit to me. Personally, I find it sad that John did not live long enough to see his third book published.

John's legacy is two fold: firstly, The Western Front Association would never had been founded without John's undoubted energy and drive to do something for the veterans of the Great War, and secondly, John left behind a trilogy of books on his beloved Western Front.

The cover of John's *Somme* book features the wooden cross that once stood at the top of the Butte de Warlencourt. John had always wanted the WFA to own the Butte de Warlencourt. John decided to sever his connections with the WFA in 1985 but, when the WFA, under the chairmanship of David Cohen, had the opportunity to purchase the Butte, John immediately responded to the appeal to members to contribute to a fund that the WFA had set up specifically to raise the requisite sum of money. I was WFA Treasurer at that time (1990) and all donations went through my hands. John made a generous donation as did a very senior member of the Royal Family (although, to my knowledge, that person was not a member of the WFA). I knew how much the Butte de Worlancourt had meant to John and how pleased he must have felt that his dream had finally come true. In my opinion, it was most regrettable that the WFA Committee decided to sell the Butte de Warlencourt about six years ago and I am informed that the person who bought it at that time has since

sold it on. So far as I know, the WFA no longer has any interest whatsoever in the Butte de Warlencourt.



John Giles presenting a signed copy of his reprinted Ypres Salient book, published by Richard Dunning in 1979, to the Burgomaster of Ypres in the Cloth Hall at Ypres on Armistice Day 1979

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to give a huge 'thank you' to the Branch member who donated the book to the Branch book-sale in October. I hadn't expected to take any books home with me from that meeting but I simply could not resist taking home both John's book and Mike O'Connor's book. Among the other books that I saw on the book table was a copy of *After the Battle's* reprint of John's *Somme* book which, like the third volume that I had purchased, was in superb condition, but I decided to let some other Branch member take it home with them, which I hope that they did and that they too were extremely pleased with their purchase(s). □ **JB**



WFA Treasurer, James Brazier, presenting his bronze statuette of a WWI Scottish Soldier to John Giles at the WFA meeting held at the National Army Museum on 4th August 1984 (the 70th anniversary of Britain's entry into the Great War). I had found the statuette dating from the Great War in a Ramsgate junk shop. It had lost its original plaque on its socle, so I cut a piece of brass from a WWI 37mm shellcase and got an artist friend of mine to inscribe on the replacement plaque

THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION - FOUNDED 1980 - BY JOHN GILES

Another photo from the archive

During the first decade of the WFA's existence, I was privileged to meet numerous veterans who became friends and many of them welcomed me into their homes. There was a tremendous camaraderie amongst the veterans, many who appreciated that after some seventy years or so after their endeavours and experiences during the Great War had not been forgotten. There is no doubt that John Giles, in setting up the WFA, brought so many veterans together and reinvigorated their desire to talk about their experiences after having 'bottled them up' in the early decades immediately following their war. I corresponded with a number of the veterans and still have many of their letters to me.

Amongst the letters and photos that I received from veterans in those early years of the WFA when I served as WFA Treasurer, are a number of photos and postcards from Tom Bromley who liked to be known as 'Uncle Tom'. He, like the other veterans, was extremely supportive of the WFA in all its activities. As can be seen by what he wrote on the back of this photo, he regarded himself as 'a privileged contributor to the purchase of this historic site' (namely, the Butte de Warlencourt).

The photo accompanying this short article is one of two that 'Uncle Tom' sent me showing him at the Butte de Warlencourt on 29th May 1990. The photo was taken by Jack Horsfall who had taken 'Uncle Tom' over to the battlefields in his car. Jack Horsfall would have been in his sixties at the time and was unforgettable character. He had written a book about the fighting at Serre during the Battle of the Somme and he gave talks to numerous branches of the WFA around the country on that same engagement in the 1980s and '90s. Jack also accompanied a number of Flanders Tours visits to the battlefields as a guest speaker and I had the great pleasure of being on one of those tours when Jack gave an unforgettable presentation at Serre. Jack was such an enthusiast and never used notes to assist him. He knew his subject by heart and it was a privilege to just be in his company when he spoke about his subject.

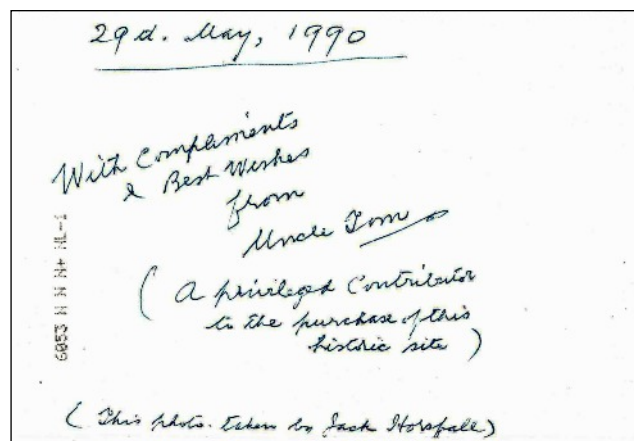
'Uncle Tom' was living at Dulas Court, a residential home at Hereford run by the Musicians' Benevolent Fund when he sent me this photo. Sadly, I never had the opportunity to visit him in his care home at Hereford but I shall never forget him and neither will I ever forget his enthusiasm for the WFA.

One can only imagine what 'Uncle Tom' would have thought about the subsequent sale by the WFA of the Butte de Warlencourt. □

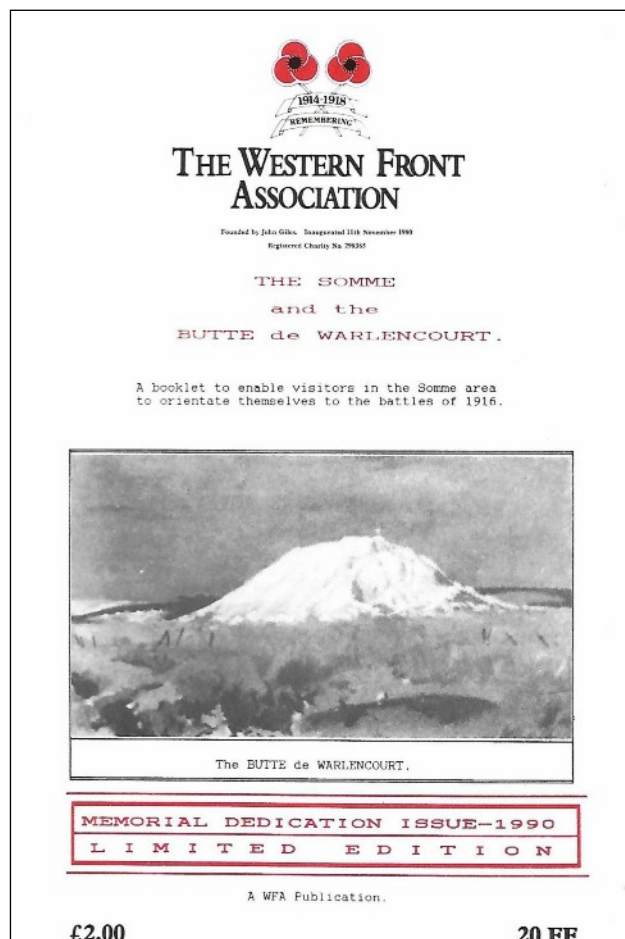
JB



'Uncle Tom' Bromley at the Butte de Warlencourt proudly wearing his WFA necktie and his WFA badge along with his medal ribbons



The message from 'Uncle Tom' written on the back of the photo



The front cover of the booklet to mark the dedication of the WFA memorial plaque in 1990 on the Butte de Warlencourt

Unveiling of the WFA Memorial at the Butte de Warlencourt in 1990



John Terraine, WFA President, unveiling the WFA memorial on the Butte de Warlencourt on 30th June 1990. Peering from behind the plaque can be seen Lt-Col Graham Parker (Retd). Graham Parker with his wife, Rona, and his daughter, Joanna, successfully ran Flanders Tours for many years. Sadly, John Terraine died in 2004 and Graham Parker died in 2022.

JB

(See also the article on 'Uncle Tom' Bromley on the previous page)

Royal Engineers War Memorial - Sandwich Discovery Park



Close-up of the text on the memorial

This memorial was unveiled in 2004 and commemorates members of the Royal Engineers who served at Port Richborough and Sandwich during the two World Wars. The site of the memorial is on the former Pfizer complex (River Road off the A256) just north of Sandwich, which is now part of Discovery Park. Security issues mean that access is limited so it is rarely seen by the general public. (War Memorials Online Ref: WMO/211205) □

John Websper



The memorial on the site of the former Pfizer complex

The Reverend David Railton MA, MC

The Reverend David Railton MA, MC was Vicar of the Parish Church of St John the Baptist at Margate from 1920 to 1925 having previously served as Curate of St Mary & St Eanswythe's Church at Folkestone. On 14th September 2025, during the course of the Choral Evensong service, a Memorial Plaque to David Railton was unveiled in St John's Church by his grandson, Mr David Railton KC. Among the guests were Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, Mr Clive Stevens DL; the Mayor of Margate, Cllr Katie Pope; the Lord Mayor of Canterbury, Cllr Keji Moses; and the Rt Hon Sir Roger Gale MP. The Address was given by the Rev (Major) Andrew White, a chaplain in the British Army. Congratulations are due to the Margate Civic Society for their work in organising a fitting ceremony.

You will all be aware that David Railton served as chaplain to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Artillery Company on the Western Front. In 1916, he was awarded the Military Cross for saving several men under heavy fire. In that same year, in a back garden at Erkingham near Armentières in France, he noticed a grave with a rough wooden cross on which were written the words: AN UNKNOWN BRITISH SOLDIER.

David Railton felt that those soldiers, who had no known grave, should be remembered on a permanent memorial in the UK. So he began to canvass people with similar views to his own. Following the end of hostilities in 1918, he continued his campaign for recognition of these unknown servicemen and eventually the Government became involved. The outcome was the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey on Armistice Day 1920.

The Union Flag, which Railton had used during the war to drape over his makeshift altars, was donated to Westminster Abbey and is today known as the Padre's Flag. It hangs in St George's Chapel close to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. □

John Websper

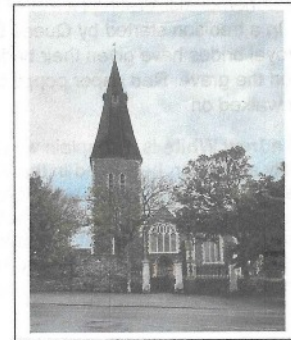
The Parish Church of St John the Baptist, Margate

with
Margate Civic Society

Sunday 14th September 2025 at 3.00 p.m.

**Choral Evensong with the unveiling of a
plaque to commemorate**

**the Rev David Railton M.C. by his
grandson, Mr David Railton K.C.**



Front page of the Order of Service

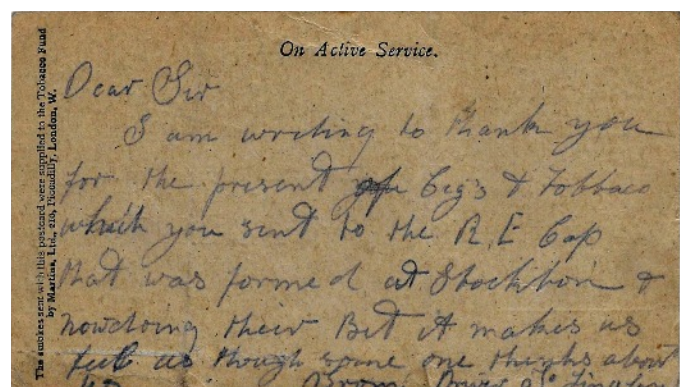
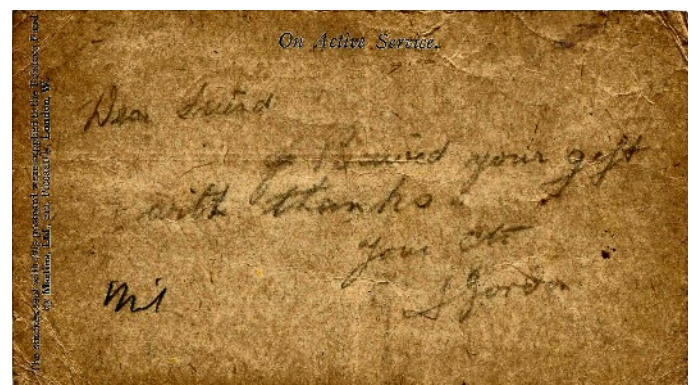
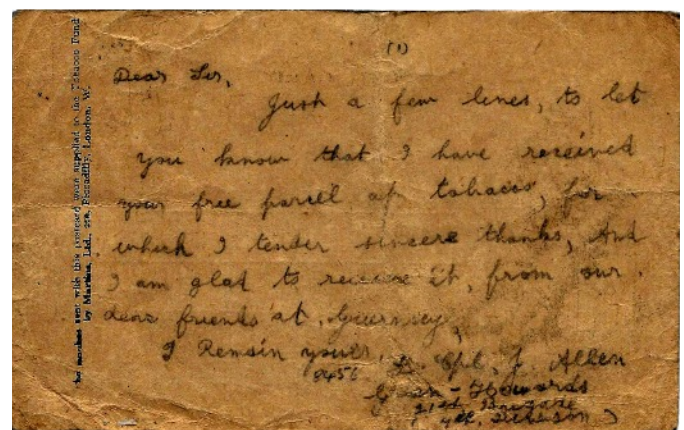
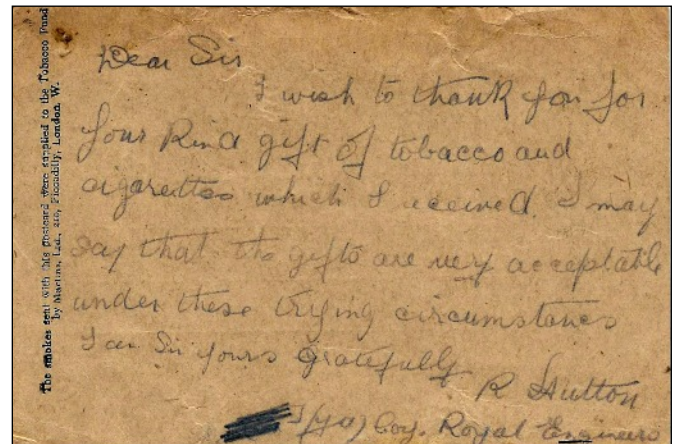


◀ *The Blue Plaque installed by Margate Civic Society in November 2020 on the front of 42 Gordon Road, Cliftonville where the Revd David Railton once lived*



Memorial Plaque to the Revd David Railton in St John the Baptist Church, Margate

A selection of postcards featuring drawings by Bert Thomas from recipients of cigarettes and tobacco sent by donors to the Weekly Dispatch Cigarette & Tobacco Fund



More artwork by Bert Thomas



◀ "A Tommy" - pencil drawing by Bert Thomas signed and dated 11.XI.22 on the back. Drawn on the reverse of a Savage Club Remembrance Day Dinner entrance-ticket numbered 87 issued to a Dr Marcus Paterson. This lightning sketch would almost certainly have been drawn by Bert Thomas at the dinner at the request of Dr Paterson.

Courtesy of David Cohen Fine Art



Specially drawn for "The Weekly Dispatch" Cigarette & Tobacco Fund by Bert Thomas



► Postcard - The Call to Mr Lipsey (?) at the Savage Club, London by Bert Thomas dated 1916. It is probable that Mr Lipsey was an official at the Savage Club

▲ The above illustration is Bert Thomas' most famous cartoon. It was produced in the early months of the First World War, when he drew – supposedly in ten minutes – a grinning Cockney Tommy lighting a pipe with the caption "‘Arf a Mo’, Kaiser!" This appeared in the Weekly Dispatch of 11th November 1914 as part of the paper's Cigarettes & Tobacco Fund which raised an estimated £250,000.

In 1916, Bert Thomas enlisted as a private in the Artists Rifles, but later served as an official war artist for the National Savings Campaign. In 1918, he drew Britain's largest poster - an appeal to invest in War Bonds which covered the face of the National Gallery. Bert Thomas produced similar posters at the Royal Exchange, and in Cardiff and Glasgow/. In June 1918, he was awarded an MBE for his contributions to the war effort.

(With thanks to the University of Kent: British Cartoon Archive for much of the above information)

In addition to the above drawing for the Weekly Dispatch Cigarette & Tobacco Fund, Bert Thomas also drew a number of other cigarette-related designs which were reproduced on the fronts of a range postcards that were given to donors to the Cigarette & Tobacco Fund to be enclosed with their gifts of cigarettes and tobacco when those gifts were despatched to servicemen. A selection of those postcards is reproduced on the previous page together with messages of grateful thanks from the recipients of those gifts.

A selection of 'smoking' postcards from the Great War



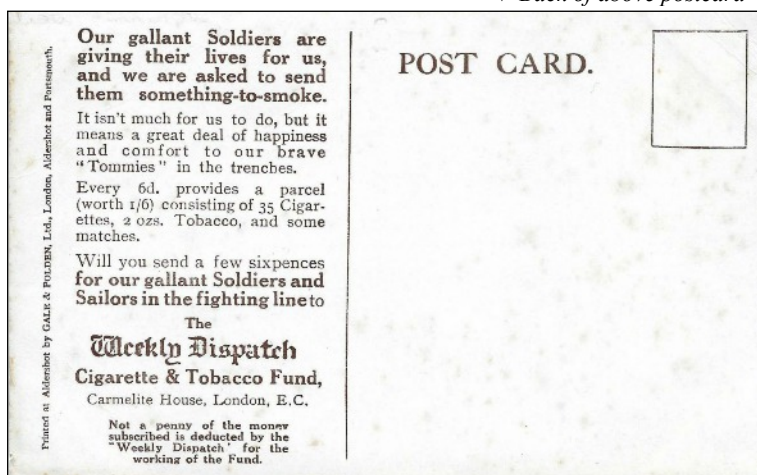
Specially drawn by Mr. BERT THOMAS for the "WEEKLY DISPATCH" TOBACCO FUND, Carmelite House, London, E.C. Every 6d. will gladden the heart of a hero.



▲ Front of another Bert Thomas postcard
▼ Back of above postcard



▲ This postcard shows a British infantryman smoking a pipe drawn by the French artist Emile Dupuis. It is signed and dated February 1915

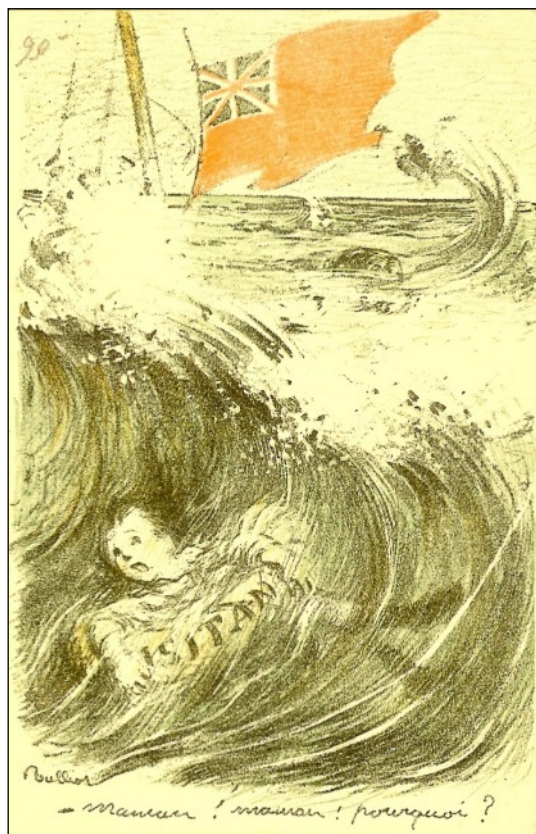


It seems that everyone smoked during the Great War as evidenced by this selection of artist-drawn postcards. The habit continued into the Second World War and it was only in the 1960s that smoking began to be regarded as dangerous for one's health. Today, relatively few people smoke although a number of former smokers and young people now 'vape' - which is now not only regarded as dangerous for one's health but also as unsociable as smoking tobacco. How times change! □

‘Remember the Lusitania’

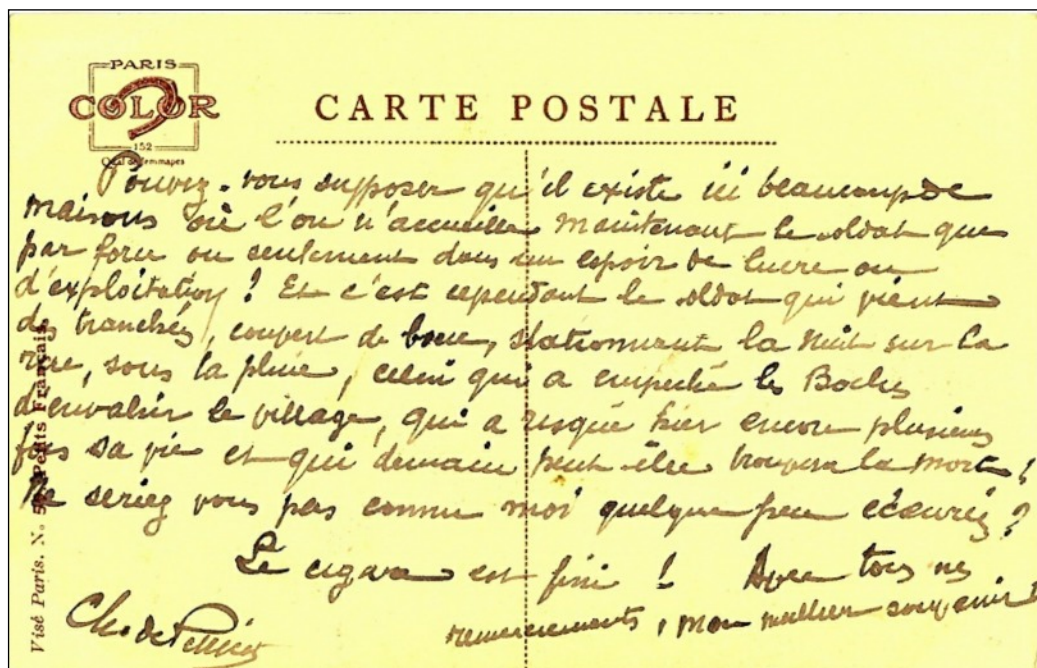
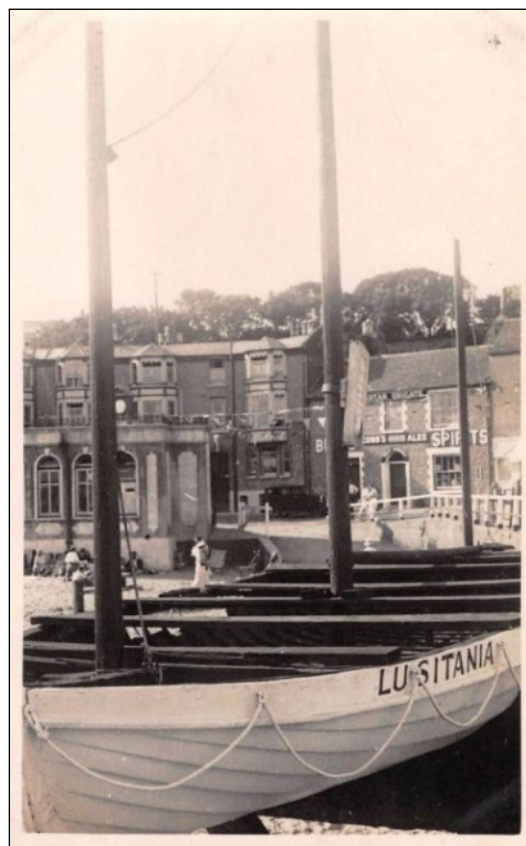


Crested China model of RMS Lusitania made by Carlton China - Reg No. 682104 (1921) bearing the coat-of-arms of Croydon. On the port side of the ship is the text: *The "Lusitania" was sunk by a German Submarine Nov 7th 1915. Lives lost 1,498.* On the starboard side is the slogan *'Remember the Lusitania'*



► This postcard shows the lifeboat from the Lusitania which stood on Broadstairs Jetty for many years. It is believed that it was given to Broadstairs in 1917. It is also believed that the lifeboat was scrapped some 30 years later after having fallen into disrepair

◄ I bought this heart wrenching artist-drawn postcard in a Paris flea-market in 1980. It shows a drowning child wearing a Lusitania lifebelt. The child is asking: Mother ... mother ... why?"



◄ Richard Young has kindly produced the following translation of the message on the back of the postcard:

"Can you believe that there are here lots of houses where they now welcome the soldier by force or only in the hope of financial gain or exploitation? And yet it is the soldier who comes from the trenches, covered in mud, on duty at night in the rain, the one who prevented the Germans from invading the village, the one who risked his life more than once and who maybe tomorrow will die? Wouldn't you be like me somewhat disgusted? The cigar is finished. With thanks, my best memory."

The message, in French, on the back of the above postcard. Unfortunately, the postcard was not postally used so cannot be dated



The leaflet that was contained, folded, in each of the Lusitania Medal presentation cases. The leaflet came in at least two versions: the original leaflet omitted the top two lines of text and also the bottom paragraph which made it clear that the British Lusitania Medal was a replica of the original German medal that was cast in bronze. The British replica of the medal was cast in iron and coated in a variety of finishes



Obverse

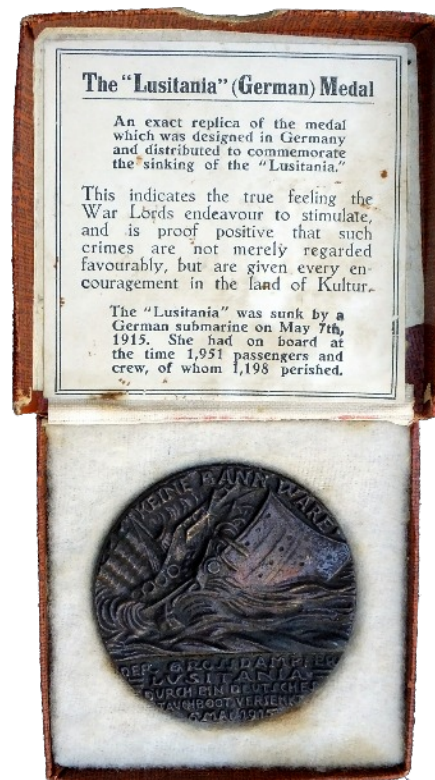
Diameter 55mm

Reverse

The illustrations immediately above show a British replica Lusitania Medal cast in iron but with a coating to give the appearance that it was cast in bronze



The front of the Lusitania Medal presentation case



The inside of the Lusitania Medal presentation case (missing its leaflet)

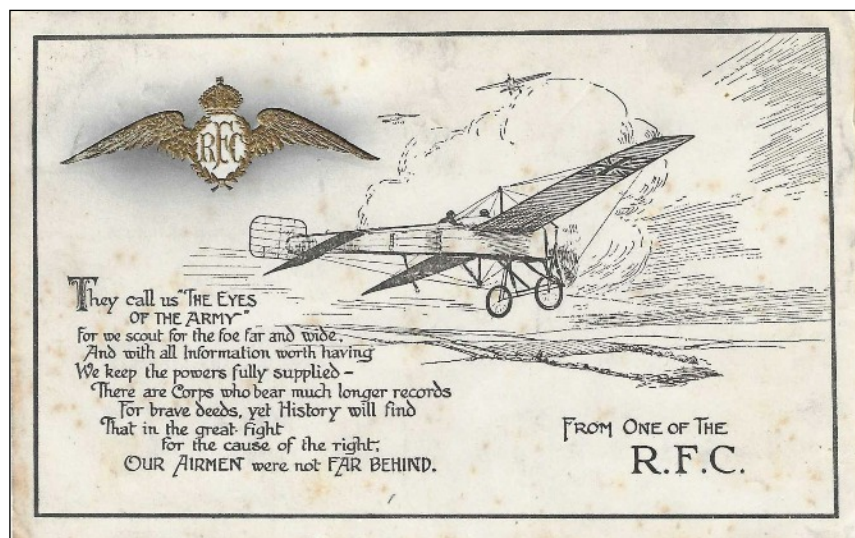
According to Peter Doyle in his book *The First World War in 100 Objects*, the British Lusitania Medal was a paid for by the American department-store owner, Gordon Selfridge. Some 300,000 of the medals were cast.

Fifty years or so ago, these Lusitania Medals were frequently found in junk shops and antique shops. Today, they are not so easily found and, when they are found, they are usually missing both their presentation case and their propaganda leaflet. □

Three super postcards dating from the Great War

- designed to be sent by airmen

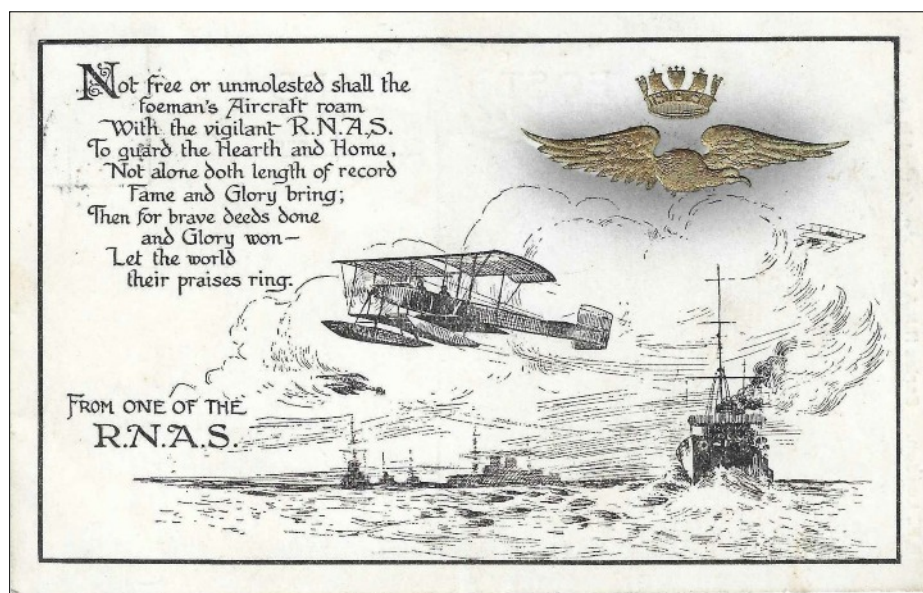
These are considered by many aviation-postcard collectors as the *crème de la crème*



Silver and tortoiseshell RFC sweetheart brooch - Hallmarked London 1915



Silver and tortoiseshell RNAS sweetheart brooch - Hallmarked London 1916



A selection of early RAF sweetheart brooches

Remembering the Royal Naval Air Service Armoured Cars



Carlton Ware Crested China model of Armoured Car with inscription on starboard side with 'Victory of Justice' inscription on its port side and RNAS marking on its starboard side



Carlton China Crested China Model of British Anti-Aircraft Motor with RNAS marking



◀ Gilt and white-faced enamel RNAS Armoured Car Squadron sweetheart brooch with pin fitting
Height 33mm

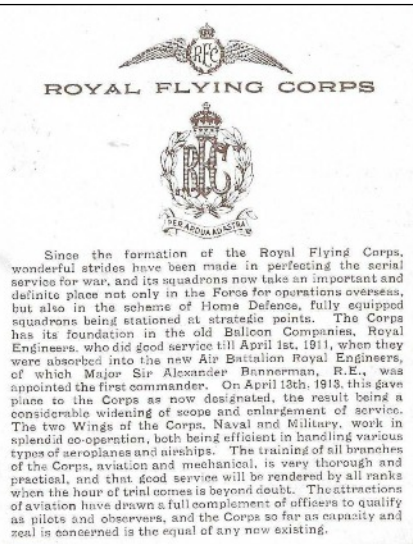


◀ Whilst this badge is not directly related to the RNAS, it is of WWI aviation interest. It is the Imperial Air Convention badge - circa 1916. The Imperial Air Convention was inaugurated by Noel Pemberton Billing MP who addressed some 8,000 members of the Convention at the Royal Albert Hall in April 1916. Earlier, he had founded the Supermarine aircraft factory in 1913. He believed that the nation which was supreme in the air would, in future, dictate to the world. This brass badge was designed to suspend from a watch-chain or lapel. This badge is numbered 300 on the reverse

Height 34mm

JB

More aviation mementoes from WWI



An early Royal Flying Corps postcard



▲ This crested china vase does not feature the Royal Air Force badge: it features the badge of the Royal Aircraft Factory that was established at Farnborough, Hampshire, before the First World War. The factory was re-named the Royal Aircraft Establishment after the formation of the Royal Air Force in April 1918. The latin motto PRO REGE AG FIDE translates to 'For Faith, Law and King'. The same crest can be seen on the crested china model of an aeroplane propeller below. ▼



Crested china thimble bearing RAF crest



Silver and enamel Royal Flying Corps sweetheart brooch



More RNAS and RFC sweetheart brooches all with pin fittings



Sadly, much of the enamel is missing from this silver brooch

This crested china piece features the crest of the RNAS Training Establishment at Cranwell which was officially opened on 1 April 1916,

The 2025 Armistice Day Steam Train Special



The unforgettable smell of coal and steam as Eddystone approaches Queenborough

This year's tour of Kent by a steam-hauled Armistice train had a particularly local aspect in that the locomotive, a Bulleid West Country Pacific 34028 *Eddystone*, had started its career in 1946 when it initially was allotted to the Ramsgate Depot. Here it was used to haul mainline commuter services to Cannon Street and Victoria Stations. Following nationalisation in 1948, she was transferred to Exmouth where she headed distinguished trains such as the Atlantic Coast Express and the Devon Belle.

Eddystone was among the first of this class to be rebuilt in 1958 when, among other refinements, the familiar streamlining was removed. Just six years later as the move to diesel and electric traction intensified, she was withdrawn from service after completing 850,000 miles. The loco was to languish in the infamous Woodham's Scrap yard at Barry Docks for some 22 years until rescued by a small group of restoration enthusiasts who, by sheer dedication, raised the £6,000 required to purchase it.



Bulleid Pacific 34028 (Eddystone) arrives at Sittingbourne on the first leg of her Armistice Day tour of Kent



A close-up view of the Eddystone name-plate

The rusting loco, minus many body parts and no tender, was moved to Sellindge near Folkestone for restoration work to begin. Thus the engine's second association with Kent. *Eddystone*, despite numerous hiccups both mechanical and financial, finally returned to service in 2003 on the Swanage Heritage Railway. Her most recent overhaul took place in 2024 and 2025 when the opportunity was taken to instal modern electronic signalling, compulsory if main-line running is to be undertaken. She emerged in September in the original green British Rail livery and with a new ten-year boiler certificate. Today's train started at Victoria carrying the appropriate Armistice Headboard *en route* to Sittingbourne and Sheerness. There then followed a whistle-stop tour through Faversham, Canterbury and Dover with a final stop to top-up with water at Folkestone before heading back to the capital. □

John Websper

11th November 2025



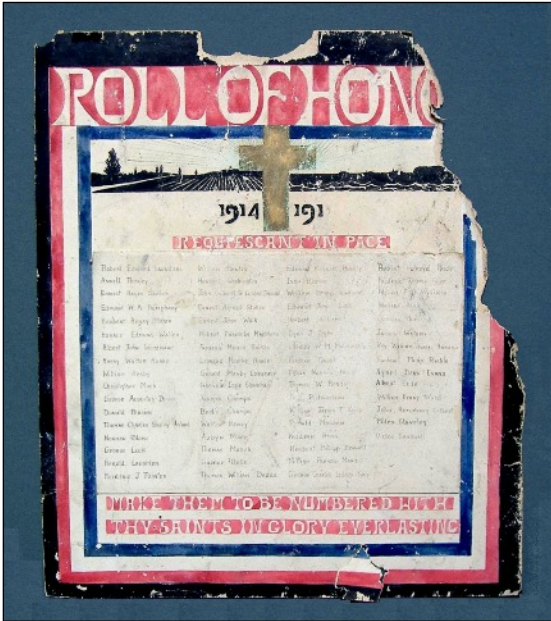
The 34070 Manston (another Kentish connection) at Swanage in the original design for this class of locomotive with stream-lining

Footnote:

Another local connection - *Manston* was withdrawn from service in 1964 and purchased by the Manston Preservation Society and, later, *Manston* was moved to Richborough Power Station. In 1995, with the forthcoming closure of the Power Station, it was moved, like *Eddystone*, to Sellindge where it was fully restored retaining its original stream-lined boiler. □

JW

Update on Westgate-on-Sea's War Shrine (WMO/126108)



◀ This photograph was taken in June 2007 shortly after the Roll of Honor (War Shrine) board had been found in St Saviour's Church, between the back of the church organ and the altar in the War Memorial Chapel, by a St Saviour's Churchwarden. The photograph was taken with the Roll of Honor board resting on a blue picture-frame mounting-board. It can be seen that mice had attacked the board but that, fortunately, all of the hand-written names on the board were still legible at that time



◀ This photograph was taken a few years later after the Roll of Honor had been professionally framed and been mounted on the north wall of the War Memorial Chapel inside the church. It is believed that the damage to the war Shrine was caused by mice inside the church during the period from 1920 to 2007

Issue Number 81 of *Between the Lines* contained an article on War Shrines and made reference to the digitally-repaired image of the seriously water-damaged original War Shrine in St Saviour's Church, Westgate-on-Sea. I reported at that time that I had produced a surrogate War Shrine by using Adobe Photoshop to 'repair' a photograph of the original War Shrine taken by me in 2007. The original War Shrine had been seriously damaged by dampness resulting in unsightly mold and was considered to be beyond repair.

I am pleased to now report that St Saviour's Church has now accepted my surrogate War Shrine and hung it on the church wall in the War Memorial Chapel in the same place as where the original War Shrine had hung from 2007 to 2020. The accompanying photos show the original War Shrine before it was further damaged by dampness and the surrogate War Shrine now hanging in the War Memorial Chapel within St Saviour's Church in the same position as where the original War Shrine had hung from 2007 to 2020.

The War Memorials Trust has been informed of this development and I am pleased to report that a photo of my surrogate War Shrine is now shown on their War Memorials Online site.

The surrogate War Shrine is slightly smaller than the original War Shrine.

Although I was shown the seriously damaged War Shrine in 2024, I did not photograph it. I now wish that I had but the circumstances for me to do so were considered by me to be inappropriate. Most of the names on the original War Shrine were illegible due to the black mould and fungus all over the front and back of it.

Fortunately, I had photographed the mice-eaten original War Shrine in 2007 and I was able to digitally repair that photograph to produce the surrogate War Shrine. □

JB



◀ This photograph was taken in November 2025. It shows the digitally-repaired photograph mounted in a contemporary oak picture-frame shortly after the church authorities had agreed to the surrogate Roll of Honor (War Shrine) being mounted on the north wall of the War Memorial, Chapel in the same position as the original had hung from 2007 to 2020. The original Roll of Honor had been removed from the wall during Covid after suffering water damage caused by the guttering above the north wall developing a leak at the same time that the heating system inside the church had broken down

Future meetings:

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at The Hall, St Andrews United Reformed Church, Watling Street, Canterbury CT1 2UA

7:30pm start (hall open from 7:00pm)

2026

6 January

Steve Roberts: 'When Woolwich went to war'

3 February

Mark Connelly: 'From Southern England to the Somme'

3 March

Sarah Nathaniel (CWGC): 'The Non-commemoration project'

7 April

John Gilder: 'James McCudden - Master Craftsman'

5 May

Luci Gosling: '*Goodbye old man* - the artist Fortunino Matania's vision of the Great War'

2 June

Christina Holstein: 'Emile Driant, first hero of Verdun'

7 July

Sofiya Anisimova: 'The Russian Expeditionary Force in France and Macedonia 1916-18'

August - No meeting

1 September

Juliette Pattinson: 'The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY)'

6 October

Peter Hodgkinson: 'A tale of two Quadrilaterals (6th Division's attacks in 1916 and 1918)'

3 November

Fraser Skirrow: 'Most of the credit, most of the blame, none of the credit - platoon commanders in the First World War'

1 December

Pip Gregory: 'Wartime cartooning - a legacy of laughter'

All are welcome

WFA branches are entirely self-supporting. A donation towards the expenses of the meeting is very much appreciated

For further details, please contact:

Hazel Basford

