

## THE POPPY



### THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

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#### CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS/MEETING REPORTS

As many of you (if not all) did, I sat in awe on the 6<sup>th</sup> June watching the television coverage of the D Day remembrance service in Normandy. During the day, tales of heroism left me without the words to truly explain my feelings of admiration stimulated by the pictures of the remaining veterans of that world changing day. Many of the veterans had made long journeys knowing that this was likely to be their last opportunity to pay homage to their fallen comrades who left ordinary roles, only to find themselves doing the most extraordinary things on behalf of 'those back home'. It seems like only yesterday that we lost the last of the WW1 veterans. Men like Harry Patch, who's eloquent biographical words mirrored many of the comments made by the D Day veterans.

Our May speaker, Dr Peter Hodgkinson with his challenging presentation 'Fear and courage in the trenches', tried to answer the question we all ask which is; how do ordinary men and women carry out the heroic acts like those of veterans of WW1 and D Day? If you did not get to see Peter's presentation, I highly recommend that you do. I would be typing for hours if I tried to give a full précis of the talk but many of the comments uncovered during the research indicated that officers were as terrified as the ranks but quickly realised that to show it would have a 'knock on' effect and undermine the moral of the regiment. Undoubtedly, modern methods for the treatment of PTSD ('Shell shock') are a vast improvement on WW1 methods that included the execution of sufferers as a deterrent to others. Without doubt, many of the men in the trenches were raised in homes where deprivation and hardship were the norm. It was a tougher world but everyone has their limits. For many the war pushed them to their limit and beyond. Sadly, it was a limit, both mentally and physically, that many were never able to return from. Peter presented a superbly researched, lively and extremely challenging presentation that had me thinking about it for days afterwards.

The June speakers, our very own Rob Burkett and Andrew England gave us a wonderful, humour filled tale of their many visits to the Western Front coupled with a re-visit of the challenging and poignant tale of Harold Page (Norfolk Regiment) who through a severe gunshot wound to the right side of his face received on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, became a pioneer patient of the world-renowned surgeon (Major) Sir Harold Delf Gillies OBE FRCS. Anyone who gets the chance to see Burkett and England in full flow are in for a treat. The 'Hinge and Bracket' like banter between the two is acidic enough to result in a piece of litmus paper grabbing a tin helmet and diving into the nearest trench! However, the liberal use of humour, does not detract from the serious nature of this presentation which is born out of a long history of carefully researching field visits to the battlefields. Despite the decades of visits, both are still moved by new site

visits and discoveries such as their visit to the weir and footbridge across the Marne at Chamigny. To their delight, the visit found the site largely as it was when on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1914, two battalions of the British 12th Brigade, 2nd Essex Regiment and 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, advanced up the river bank to the weir. They found the lock, barrage and weir defended by German infantry, but intact. The German infantry were driven off by small arms and machine gun fire, and the British crossed the weir footbridge in single file, almost without casualty. I am delighted to say that Rob and Andrew will be returning as speakers next year.

#### FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20<sup>th</sup> August 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.

#### FUTURE PROGRAMME

August 6<sup>th</sup> - Cambridgeshire Kitcheners - Jo Costin

September 9<sup>th</sup> - Artillery conquers, infantry occupies. British Artillery at the 3<sup>rd</sup> battle of Ypres.  
- Simon Shephard

#### IN THE NEWS

Three stories in the news regarding Edith Cavell featured in the EDP recently. Firstly Edith's childhood home has gone on the market for £875,000, the former rectory at Swardeston would probably be unrecognisable to her having been extended over the years. Set in over an acre of land it is now called Cavell House.

Secondly Colney Hall where Edith spent a year working as a governess for the Barclay family has also gone on the market for £5.5million. Built for the wealthy wool merchant and brewer family of Gurney-Barclay's, Edith worked here in 1889 before heading to Brussels to train as a nurse. And thirdly a special Evensong service was held at Norwich Cathedral on 15<sup>th</sup> May to mark her burial in Life's Green after her the body was returned to Norfolk in 1919. As at the original service the hymn Abide with me was sung.

A rare naval book found in an Oxfam shop in Bath has been bought by the National Museum for the Royal Navy in Portsmouth according to the I paper, recently. The World War 1 General Signals Book was in amongst a box of donations and was apparently lead-lined. I assume this was so if attacked or sinking this could be thrown over the side and would sink, so the enemy would not get hold of it.

In September a new national memorial sculpture to WW1 soldiers will be unveiled in the capital, Washington DC. 10 years in planning and the making, this 60 foot long frieze called A Soldier's Journey has been made together with a British foundry in Stroud. The frieze features five scenes and 38 figures from leaving to going to fight and the return.

It is part of a project to update a previous memorial site around the former Pershing Park.

## SUFFOLK WFA

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

10<sup>th</sup> July - WW1 told in surviving artefacts - Dave Empson

14<sup>th</sup> August The Norfolk Regiment on the Western Front

## NEWFOUNDLAND GETS IT OWN UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Newfoundland and Labrador are to get their own unknown soldier in time to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the National War Memorial in the city of St John's. We have to remember Newfoundlanders did not join Canada until 1949 and fought as their own country at that time.

On 25<sup>th</sup> May it was an emotional event for the people of St John's with the homecoming for the remains of a Newfoundlander brought from the Beaumont-Hamel battlefield following a ceremony under the Caribou Memorial in France. It was here many men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment met their deaths during the battle of the Somme.

On arrival in St John's the remains were taken past places with strong links to the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and will lay in state for people to file past with the re-interment taking place on July 1<sup>st</sup> at the refurbished Memorial which opening in 1924, is marking its centenary. People have complained that the ceremony did not have the correct flag on the coffin as at the time the locals considered themselves British and this Canadian flag did not exist.....

## IGHTHAM MOTE, NEAR SEVENOAKS, KENT - Capt Thomas Riversdale Colyer-Fergusson VC - (Richard Rayner)

Ightham Mote (pronounced Item Moat) is one of the oldest medieval manor houses to survive in England. The core of the house dates from the 1340s, although a complicated series of alterations and additions were made in the late 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries by various owners. A moat surrounds all four wings of the house, which in turn, is built around an open courtyard.

Ightham Mote bears few external signs of change in architectural style. This is partly due to the modest ambitions of its successive owners, who expanded the house to meet their needs, only doing so in a manner sympathetic to the medieval origins of the house. Also, its small size and remote location meant that it survived various conflicts intact.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Ightham Mote was owned by Sir Thomas Colyer-Fergusson who, despite a reputation for meanness, spent today's equivalent of over a million pounds on vital repairs to the house.

The devastation of two world wars had a profound effect on the Colyer-Fergusson family. Sir Thomas's eldest son, Max, was killed in a bombing raid on an army driving school in 1940. His second son, Billy, suffered from shell shock in the First World War and the youngest, Riversdale, was killed at Ypres, aged 21. Following Riversdale's death, Sir Thomas would not allow his gardeners to make any changes to the garden, asking them not to cut back any plants or remove dying trees.

On Sir Thomas's death in 1951, the estate was inherited by Max's son, James. He had no children and aware of the vast expense of maintaining the house he decided to sell the house and contents, leaving Ightham with an uncertain future.

Ightham Mote and its contents were put up for sale in October 1951. The two farms on the estate were quickly sold, but the dilapidated house was less of an enticing proposition to buyers and it was in danger of being demolished in order to sell the lead from its roofs. Three local businessmen came to the rescue buying the house for £5,500 and saving it from destruction. Knowing that they were just temporary guardians, they needed to find a long-term solution and an owner who would care for the property. It just so happened that there was another way the house could be protected. The Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947 created 'Salvage Lists' to protect bomb damaged buildings with special architectural or historical interest. Although Ightham Mote hadn't been damaged by bombs, on 1 August 1952 it was recognised as being of national importance and given Grade I Listed Building status. This offered the highest level of protection, meaning that it couldn't be demolished, extended or altered without special permission from the government.

The last private owner was an American businessman, Charles Henry Robinson who revived the fortunes of the house when he bought it in 1953. Robinson remembered seeing a print of Ightham in an art-dealer's shop in London and when, as a tourist, he visited the house a few years later he recognised it and "immediately fell under its spell". When later he saw an advertisement in *Country Life* offering the house for sale, he immediately came to England and put in an offer. However, the sale was nearly called off, as Robinson had second thoughts on his way home, writing a letter while crossing the Atlantic on board the *Queen Mary* to withdraw from the sale, but the liner's post office was closed and the letter was never sent.

Charles Henry Robinson died in 1985, aged 93 and his ashes were interred at Ightham outside the crypt. He had decided in 1965 to bequeath the house and contents to the National Trust, stating that 'a house like the Mote belongs to the ages. One does not possess it, rather the opposite: one acts as a temporary protector or guardian.'

So, what's any of this got to do with the WFA? Well, remember the "youngest son" who died at Ypres? 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant (acting Captain) Thomas Riversdale Colyer-Fergusson, 2nd Northamptonshire Regiment joined the Public Schools Battalion in 1914 and was subsequently commissioned in March 1915. He died at Bellewarde in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ypres campaign after a brilliant and successful attack in which he led his few men against great odds and personally captured two machine guns, for which he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. Not only is there a plaque in Ightham Mote's chapel in his memory, there is also displayed his original grave marker and his Victoria Cross, the latter on loan from the Northamptonshire's museum. The CWGC website records that he is buried in Menin Road South Military Cemetery II. E. 1.

An extract from "The London Gazette," No. 30272, dated 4th September 1917 records the following: "For most conspicuous bravery, skilful leading and determination in attack. The tactical situation having developed contrary to expectation, it was not possible for his company to adhere

to the original plan of deployments and owing to the difficulties of the ground and to enemy wire, Captain Colyer-Fergusson found himself with a Sergeant and five men only. He carried out the attack nevertheless and succeeded in capturing the enemy trench and disposing of the garrison. His party was then threatened by a heavy counter-attack from the left front, but this attack he successfully resisted. During this operation, assisted by his Orderly only, he attacked and captured an enemy machine gun and turned it on the assailants, many of whom were killed and a large number driven into the hands of an adjoining British unit. Later, assisted only by his Sergeant, he again attacked and captured a second enemy machine gun, by which time he had been joined by other portions of his company and was enabled to consolidate his position. The conduct of this officer throughout forms an amazing record of dash, gallantry and skill, for which no reward can be too great, having regard to the importance of the position won. This gallant officer was shortly afterwards killed by a sniper."



## DR HARVEY CUSHING

Major Harvey Cushing was an American brain surgeon serving in the US Army Medical Corp in France from 1917 to 1918. In just a three month period he is said to have operated on over 130 men with brain injuries, he is said to have used a form of magnet to remove embedded shrapnel from men's brains, which lead to a mention in dispatches by Haig in late 1917. By the end of the war he would be made a Colonel.

But it is for his work on an illness which now carry's his name - Cushing's Disease, that we know of him. Cushing's affects humans and dogs. In humans it is found in people with bodies that produce too much cortisol or who have used steroids for other health problems, with dogs it is often found when a dog wants to eat and drink all the time. Its to do with pituitary glands and tumours. Cushing, himself is thought to have had health issues after having a dose of Spanish Flu which affected him for the rest of his life, he died aged 70 in 1939.

His home town in Massachusetts was Hingham, and yes, its named after Hingham here in Norfolk where the Cushing side of his family were from, having been Puritans who headed to America.

Cushing was just one of many who served in the war and would become well known in medical fields in the years following the war often for things that they learned by necessity due to efforts to save lives of soldiers.

## HENDERSON PIPES

In June at a Northumberland Scottish Festival and Highland Games event in Ontario Canada, two sets of pipes that had played together during WW1 met once more. Two pipers from different bands were standing next to each other and got chatting, the two sets of pipes looked alike and one knew his has been in the war due to markings on the pipes and the soldier who had played them. The guy asked the female player if her pipes had any marks, to the surprise of both, they did. The guy had been trying to track all these Henderson pipes, he knew 18 sets should be somewhere out around the world, he now had found 4. The female had been ill and unable to play for several years but she had acquired these pipes found in an attic, and just felt she had to play at this particular event.....

The last known time these pipes would have been played together was on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918 as the men played them as they marched through Mons.

## And Finally

From a history magazine -

The war, on drugs - apparently during the First World War Harrods sold gift boxes for soldiers which contained morphine and cocaine, together with a syringe and needles. Such drugs were not illegal in those days. The drugs came in leather-bound boxes described as "A Welcome Present for Friends at the Front" on the lid. Later in the war concerns were raised about the use of drugs by soldiers, and this led to the sale of drugs becoming an offence.