

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

May June 2025 VOL26 No1

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

My first report must start with a tribute to my predecessor, Paul Evans. He has led us admirably for several years with his easy, pragmatic style and engaging smile. As an old time Bobby, he gets results with carrot rather than stick, encouraging a desire in others to support and follow him. Surprisingly, he seems to have kept his mental capacity despite his former years as a rugby forward. I have certainly enjoyed my tenure as Treasurer under him.

Thankfully, Paul has agreed to continue serving as Speaker Secretary. Every year, he seems to find high quality presenters. Yet, I do encourage any members who have any stories to impart, or know of anyone who could present to us, do let us know. We are always looking for new buds of knowledge.

My interest in the Great War started about 40 years ago when my son Edward enquired as to who won the Battle of the Somme. A trip on a Holts Tour, contact with the WFA and I was hooked. Only last week, I was on the Verdun Battlefield with two of my grandsons trying to quench my Great War thirst.

Finally, a mention to my great support team on the Committee, hopefully we can serve our branch members well. We simply ask you pilgrims to attend as often as you can, and we will continue to inform and entertain.

Kindest Regards,

Rob

FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20th June by post to Mrs J Berry, 8 Fairstead Rd, Norwich NR7 8XQ or by email jackie.berry3@btinternet.com, items can also be given at meetings.

MEETING REPORTS

Back in 1976 Bonnie Tyler released the song "Lost in France" - little did I think nearly 50 years later that song would come back into my head with an e-mail from our new Chair on Friday night apologising for not being in touch with his Chair comments for the Poppy because he had mislaid his phone in France..... So a brief mention on our March and April speakers/meetings from me..

March was another fast moving talk on the 12th Lancers with Phil Watson, on the battle of Moy de L'Aisne on August 28th in 1914. Training at Norwich's Nelson Barracks at the beginning of the war and heading to France soon after, they were part of the retreat of Mons period of the war. On the 28th August C Squadron with Lt Col Frank Wormold leading a successful charge at Moy against the Prussian Dragoons, supported by other companies including RHA and Scots Greys. An evening full of facts and with speed and very enjoyable.

Phil left that evening with some Swanton Morley table mats given to us by a branch member as they were dumped when the base closed, he was pleased to have them as he had been based there at some point.

Then in April we had a return visit from Daryl Long with a talk all about Wills & Probate of soldiers from Norfolk and Norwich in WW1. These local histories are interesting because we can relate to some of the men, those that died, and what happened to families who lost husbands and fathers. Some men had vast wealth for the time, others very little, but each had the option to make a will in their soldiers pay book. More than 15,000 died but just 200 wills were proven at the Norwich probate court. With each one comes research into the man and this is ongoing work.

One name came up that I recognised as he is buried near my Great Uncle in Bancourt.

It was good to see Brian Lawrence with us again, he still has a way to go but hopefully is heading in the right direction.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

6th May - Dr Peter Hodgkinson - The BEF Infantry CO's of August 1914.

3rd June - John Chester - German Atrocities in Belgium 1914.

IN THE NEWS

There seems to be a lot of reburials taking place of late in CWGC cemeteries, also more headstones being placed on graves of former soldiers either in unmarked graves or located somewhere in parish graveyards around the country. Over the coming months there are several reburials taking place, see the list on CWGC site.

SUFFOLK WFA

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

14th May - British windows of WW1 - Andrea Hetherington.

11th June - Tribunals Suffolk Archives.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

With VE Day coming up there will be plenty of events on to commemorate the end of fighting in WW2 in Europe this May. The official day is May 8th but events are planned over the week starting with the May Day Bank Holiday.

The village of Ditchingham will unveil a new war memorial sited in the village hall car park. There will be history events, parties and possible flypasts if you are in the right locations. Check EDP listings and

social media postings for information on times and dates.

ROSSIGNOL-OREE DE A FORET FRENCH MILITARY CEMETERY

Roger and myself had always know the name Rossingnol as a company that made skis, so I was surprised it was also a place in Belgium, near the French border and featured in WW1. Found in the Province of Luxembourg, near to Neufchateau, many of its war graves are in a cemetery that originally was in the layout of a church made from beech trees, but many of these have fallen in storms over the years. This is the Rossignol Oree de la foret. There is also a memorial to the French writer and poet Jules Cozier and also a memorial to the French Colonials which make up a lot of the burials here. With high numbers killed many were buried where they fell. This cemetery is made up of dead from the Battle of the Borders in 1914. Then there is also a French cemetery called Le Plateau from fighting in 1918. There were French and Germans buried in the area, and apparently 1 Russian according to some reports, in cemeteries begun by the German occupiers in May 1917. It is thought there may have been at least one more cemetery which was lost presumably in further fighting.

Despite having won the battle at Rossignol in 1914 the Germans were not happy. They were annoyed that they had had to fight a battle when all they wanted was to get to Paris, it seems. They took this annoyance out on the people of Rossingnol with most of the men taken prisoner.

Then on August 26, 1914, the men and other residents of local villages of Breuvanne and Saint Vincent, arrested a few days earlier, were executed by the Germans at Arlon station, where they had been taken, their bodies apparently thrown in a well in the local cemetery.

Many others in the surrounding areas including Tintigny were also executed by the Germans in August 1914 just because they could.... Numerous memorials can be found to victims, of all that went on back then around the area.

After the war the families of the 122 Rossingnol area victims campaigned to get their loved ones back to the villages they came from. In 1920, the victims were brought home accompanied by King Albert I of Belgium.

Perhaps luckily for them, 2000 plus French POW's including high ranks captured by the Germans after the battle, were rounded up in a field with these locals. These soldiers were transported to Germany from the station before the villagers were killed.

It seems that in 1920 the French had to allow French families to repatriate their loved ones from what was Belgian ground. Some 40% were moved.

In the 1930's the Germans remains were taken to what is now St Vincent German cemetery

Ernest Psichari, French author, religious thinker and soldier was killed here at Rossingnol fighting with the French Colonial soldiers he had joined in the earlier 1900's.

SAXLINGHAM NETHERGATE WW1

If you have not seen it, there is 80 pages of information on line about the men from the village of Saxlingham Nethergate in South Norfolk, in WW1, those who died and those that came home, as well as pictures from the time.

It seems a project started by a teacher at the local school and which ran on for many years with the help of some friends and continued after the death of the teacher has resulted in this very interesting booklet now available on the internet at saxlinghamwarmemorials.org.uk. Graves around the world were visited, as were memorials and much research done too.

HOW DID VICARS WHO LOST SONS IN WW1 DEAL WITH WAR?

Having recently read Michael Palin's book on his Great Uncle Harry Palin and a book on poet Noel Hodgeson it made me think about how their fathers as a men of the cloth balanced out peace and war in their heads. And for some the ultimate sacrifice of a son.

It is surprising just how many vicars, rectors, canons etc lost sons in the Great War's many battles. The idea of such people accepting their sons wanting to take part in fighting when the job of a vicar etc is to teach peace and love for fellow men, must have been hard to deal with. But we are talking about a time when duty and honour was a way of life.

Saying that many men of the cloth also chose to serve their country as Chaplains, being amongst the fighting and running the risk of death like the men they tried to support.

Here are just a few men who lost sons in the The Great War

The Beechy family who were well known as a family who lost 5 sons.

2nd Lt Michael Stapleton Frayling whose father was a Harwich vicar

The Rev Edward Carus Selwyn died in November 1918 having lost 3 sons

Michael Palin's Great Uncle Harry was the son of a vicar.

Private Ewart Owen was the son of a Market Harborough vicar

Canon T F Jerwood Little Bowden lost his son Major J Hugh Jerwood MC

Rev Richard Ussher lost 2 sons, he was at Westbury Northants

Even locally, the vicar at Wroxham lost his son Philip Hewetson

2nd Lt John McNair Lamb was the son of the Rev John Lamb of Midlothian in Scotland

Perhaps the best known child of a Rev to die in the war, was our own Norfolk nurse, Edith Cavell. I am sure there will be other nurses who died who had fathers in the church too.

BRANCH CONTACT DETAILS

Following on from the AGM meeting Rob Burkett has taken on the role of Chair and stays as Treasurer. Paul Evans is now Vice Chair and remains as Speaker Secretary. The rest of the Committee remains the same.

A reminder of Rob's contact details are robburkett@hotmail.co.uk ,
8 Woodland Drive, Thorpe End, Norwich NR13 5BH,
home phone 01603 433729.

And finally

Just after Christmas we had to help a neighbour who had fallen, and while there noticed a black and white photo on the wall, turned out this was the father of this man's wife, she told me it was taken when her father was serving in Russia with the Durham's up until 1919, as an 18 years old. The plan was we would talk about this more at a later time, sadly this never happened as both were taken ill and died within days of each other.

Later while talking with the couples nephew, and grandson of the 18 year old man who served in the often forgotten section of the war, we learned that he knew his grandad for some years and he did tell him some things about life back then. He is looking to make up display to honour his grandad's memory and find out more about him and his service.

He also mentioned that his grandad's son in law witnessed the aftermath of Mussolini's killing at the end of WW2. The former was from Ipswich and the later from Norwich.