OX & BUCKS BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2026

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COMMENT

Welcome to the belated October Branch Newsletter, I am sorry that I did not send it out before last week's meeting. It was good to see many of you at Peter Hart's talk and this will be written up in November's Newsletter which will hopefully be on time!

- David Adamson

Future Meetings 2026 - 2027

17th Oct.	**Peter Hart**	**"First World War officers who fought at Omdurman and the Boer war"**
21st Nov.	**Chares Fair**	**"Balkan Purgatory - the 60th (London) Division in Salonika - December 1916 - June 1917"**
12th Dec.	**Alan Leakey**	**"Anti-Tank Gun Hunters"**
16th Jan.	**Ross Beadle**	**"The rocky road to trench warfare: Why was the First World War fought the way it was?"**
20th Feb.	**Wendy Moore**	**"The Suffragette Surgeons of Endell Street"**

Serviceman Remembered:
Pte. Arthur Stewart, Datchet, 17th October 1917

Arthur Stewart was born in Strathdon, Aberdeenshire in 1888, the eldest of six children of John, a farmer, and Charlotte Stewart. He emigrated to Australia, possibly in 1913 and enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 8th June 1916 in Toowomba, Queensland, describing himself as a motor man. He left Brisbane on 21st October 1916 and arrived in Plymouth on 10th January 1917. Arthur was in the Training Pioneer Battalion and spent time at Larkhill and Fovant. He married Annie Florence Jones in

Feltham on 29th April 1917 and her address was later Elder Tree Cottage, Datchet, Buckinghamshire. Arthur arrived in Havre on 26th September 1917 and was transferred to the 4th Australian Pioneer Battalion, 4th Australian Division, on 7th October. Ten days later he was killed in action by an H.E. shell during Third Ypres and has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Menin Gate and Datchet War Memorial.

Report of Meeting of 19th September:
Ian Castle - "Gotha Terror"



It was a great pleasure to welcome Ian back to the branch to talk further about the bombing campaign against Britian in the Great War (also see the Branch Newsletter from June 2022). This talk (based on Ian's book "Gotha Terror – The Forgotten Blitz 1917-1918") started at the end of the airship attacks and the start of the attacks by aircraft. In the spring of 1917, the new G- type Gotha G.IV bomber became available. It could fly at 80m.p.h., reach a height of 17,000 feet and carry 300 to 400kg of bombs. For protection it had two or three machine guns, but its two Maybach engines were unreliable and landing was unstable without the bomb load. 50kg H.E. and 12kg incendiary bombs became standard, later in the war.

With the successful attacks on airships causing a big reduction in the bombing raids on Britain, the air defences were scaled back during 1916, enabling squadrons to reinforce the Western Front. There was also no public air raid system in place with the authorities concerned that such warnings would tempt people to watch the attacking aircraft. On 13th June 1917, 14 aircraft took off from Ghent to attack London. At 11:30 a.m. the first anti-aircraft gun, at Romford, opened fire, but the raiders reached London and dropped over 100 bombs in two minutes near Liverpool Street Station, leading to 162 deaths and 426 people injured; the most in a single raid during the war. One of those killed was PC Alfred Smith, who died stopping people leaving Debenhams in Central Street, thus saving their lives. The raid was witnessed both by Vera Brittain and Siegfried Sassoon; the latter commenting that he was used to explosions at the front, but not at home. Returning bombers dropped their remaining bombs on east London killing 18 children in North Street School in Poplar. Despite 94 sorties flown by the RFC & RNAS, all the Gothas got away.

There was public outrage at the brazen attack in daylight so the War Cabinet increased the strength of the RFC by withdrawing two squadrons from the Western Front, but these had to return after three weeks to take part in Third Ypres. On 7th July, 21 bombers attacked London with over 100 fighter sorties to try to intercept them but only one attacker shot down over the North Sea. In total there were 54 deaths on the ground with ten caused by falling anti-aircraft shells.

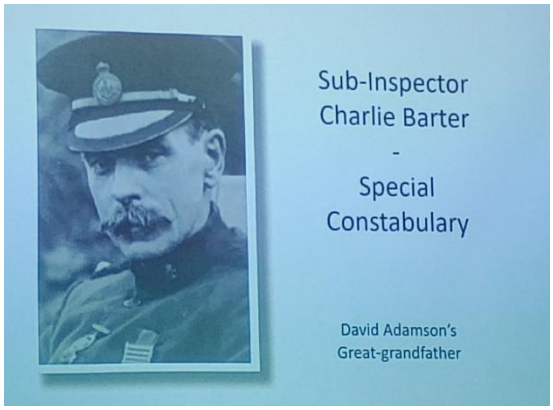
The raids helped spark anti-German riots in Hackney and elsewhere and four days later George V changed the name of the Royal family to Windsor from Saxe-Coburg Gotha. South African Lt Gen Jan Smuts was tasked by the War Cabinet to look into the arrangements for air defence and also the general organisation of air forces. He reported

back in eight days. The London Air Defence Area was reorganised under Brig Gen Edward Ashmore to control the RFC, anti-aircraft guns, searchlights and observers. Public air raid warnings were also introduced for the first time with police sounding whistles and carrying placards on bicycles. An outer gun line was instigated with zones for RFC aircraft to patrol.

At this time the Germans switched from daylight to nighttime bombing, with some attacks in Kent during late July and August. During the night of 4th / 5th September a raid dropped bombs at West Ham and Stratford and one damaged Cleopatra's Needle on the embankment, killing a tram driver. More people were sheltering in Underground stations than did so in the Second World War. Two days after this raid, Smuts issued a further report which led to the introduction of balloon aprons and curtain barrages.

The Germans now introduced their larger R Type "Giant" bombers which has a crew of 8. The 24th September saw the start of the intense "Harvest Moon Offensive". The proportion of incendiaries to HE bombs was increased but an attack on 31st October was disrupted by cross winds. An attack on 18th December with 6 Gothas and 1 Giant resulted in the first success for a British night-fighter with one bomber ditching in the sea. Two other raiders caught fire on landing and others were damaged.

January 1918 was foggy so there were no raids at the beginning of the month, so when a warning maroon went off at 8p.m. on 28th in Shoreditch it caused panic as people tried to get into the Underground. The resulting crush led to 14 deaths. Elsewhere that night, bombs fell between Kilburn and West Hampstead, one of them badly damaging the Princess of Wales pub on the corner of Belsize Road killing a 50 year old man. The chairman's great-grandfather, Charlie Barter, was on duty in the Special Constabulary that night. Based at Kilburn Police Station he was sent to check for survivors in the pub when a partition fell, hitting him on the head. Recovering in hospital he was criticised by a superior for not wearing his helmet, to which he replied "neither were you, sir!" (See also WFA Bulletin No. 118, p28-30).



A more devastating explosion was at Odham's printworks in Long Acre. As a substantial building with concrete floors, it was used as a shelter, but it provided no protection for the 38 people who were killed when a bomb dropped straight through all the floors. One returning bomber was found to have 88 bullet holes in it, but survived. The crew of the plane that bombed the Kilburn area was less fortunate as they were shot down and killed at Wickford in Essex.

On 7th March, three Giants, one carrying a 1,000kg bomb, killed 12 and injured 33 with an attack north of Paddington Station. The German Spring Offensive on the Western Front needed all aircraft to support it so there was a lull in the campaign against Britain. This ended on 19th May when the largest raid of the war took place: 38 Gothas and three Giants. The sky over Kent and Essex was a hornet's nest of aircraft but only 18 of the 41 bombers reached London, eight either shot down or crashed. That night 30,000 anti-aircraft shells were fired, compared with only 360 during the first Gotha raid of the war in June 1917. This proved to be the last raid of the war.

The aircraft raids of 1917 and 1918 caused £1,423,019 of damage, killed 837 and injured 1,991. However, they did not break the British morale but led to demands for reprisals. The raids did, however, divert valuable resources in aircraft, guns and personnel.

Committee

Chairman & Newsletter Editor - David Adamson (adtm@btinternet.com)
Deputy Chairman - Nigel Crompton, Treasurer – Lance Hale, Speaker Liaison – Bob Swayne, Simon Cains, Paul Bennett

Meetings: The Guide Centre, School Lane, **Chalfont St. Giles**. HP8 4JJ
Usually on the third Saturday of the month, starting at 2:30