

OX & BUCKS BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026



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COMMENT

Welcome to the March branch Newsletter. It was good to see a good attendance for Peter Hart's talk on Jutland last month and hope that we can build on this going forwards. With the approaching AGM, next month, do not forget that it is never too late to think of joining us on the committee!

- David Adamson

Future Meetings 2026

21 st March	Jonathon Rodell	“David Lloyd George: The Man Who Won the War?”
18 th April	Wenlan Peng	“The Chinese Labour Corps” & <u>Branch AGM</u>
16 th May	Peter Caddick Adams	“The Italian Front 1915-1918”
20 th June	Dr Anne Samson	“The Indian Army in East Africa 1914”

Serviceman Remembered:

Dvr. Alfred Edwin Chilton, 110th Brigade Royal Field Artillery, Chalfont St Giles.

Alfred Edwin Chilton was born in 1893, the second of five children of James, an agricultural labourer, and Susan his wife of Hen Platt, Chalfont St. Giles. In 1911, Alfred was an assistant gardener, living with an aunt in the village. He enlisted in the Royal Field Artillery in Mill Hill and whilst at in CIII Brigade (23rd Division) at North Camp Aldershot, he married Elizabeth Rose on 12th September 1915. He went to France on 25th September 1915, seemingly transferred to the CX (Howitzer) Brigade RFA which was in the 25th Division. In February 1918 the Division was north west of Bethune and was caught in the German offensive on the 21st March. Alfred was a driver in C Battery at this time and was reported as wounded and missing. His body was never identified and he is commemorated on the Arras Memorial and on the Chalfont St Giles' memorial.



Report of Meeting of 21st February: Peter Hart “The Battle of Jutland 1916”

Peter’s talk was based on research that he did some years ago for his book about the battle. He explained that it was a controversial battle in respect of which side won, but also that he wished to convey some of the experiences of those who took part.

Before the battle, Admiral Jellicoe was in command of the Grand Fleet, stationed at Scapa Flow with Admiral Beatty and the Battle Cruiser Fleet based at Rosyth. Essentially, the Royal navy ceded control of the North Sea but was in control of the seas in the rest of the world. The German High Seas Fleet was staying in port. Thanks to the Russians, Room 40 at the Admiralty was able to decode German Naval wireless messages and then use trigonometry to locate the ships. On 24th January 1916, Vice Admiral Reinhard Scheer took over command of the High Seas Fleet and wanted to do something, but without coming into direct conflict with the Grand Fleet, which included tip-and-run raids on Sunderland, for example.

Thanks to the work in Room 40, Jellicoe and Beatty were able to put to sea 3½ hours before the Germans left port on 30th May 1916. Beatty, who was intelligent but made mistakes and had a lack of attention to detail, was at sea with two battle cruiser squadrons, 2 miles apart from each other. The 5th Battle Squadron was too far away at five miles, and did not receive a signal to change direction and ended up 10 miles away as the Germans tried to lure Beatty into the High Seas Fleet.

The Germans opened fire first and at 16:02, the Von der Tann shelled HMS Indefatigable, hitting X Turret and causing a flash down to the magazine and an explosion. 1,017 men were killed, but Signalman Sidney Farmer was at the top of the gunnery mast and was thrown clear and survived. He described seeing 12” guns tossed like matchsticks.

The Germans in Seydlitz and Derflinger attached and hit HMS Queen Mary. PO Edward Francis described the floor of his turret bulging and the aft 4” battery being smashed. With a list to port the turret was cleared and Francis got into the water before the ship exploded, with debris flying everywhere. He survived by grabbing a rolled-up hammock.

This was the time that prompted Beatty’s well-known comment that there was “something wrong with our ships”. The cruisers had been built with the philosophy that speed would be their armour, so they were not heavily armoured and were not compartmentalised. By contrast, the Germans had made improvements to their ships and working practices after there was a flash in a turret of the Seydlitz at the Battle of Dogger Bank in 1915. As an example of this, Seydlitz was hit by a torpedo at Jutland but did not sink.

Beatty saw the main German fleet and ordered a 180° change of course, but poor signalling led to the 5th Battle Squadron carrying on as before, straight at the German destroyers. One of the squadrons ships, HMS Malaya was hit at 17:30 but had her watertight doors closed and survived.

The Grand Fleet itself was in six columns abreast and saw a series of actions, made more complicated by Jellicoe receiving no information from Beatty. The engineer officer on HMS Warrior described when she was hit: there was a tremendous



explosion and most of the lights went out. There was a heavy roar of water. Despite getting a blast of steam in his face, he got the men out as fast as he could and then followed. They could not lift the armoured hatch to the deck, but climbed through a shell hole instead. HMS Invincible managed to fatally damage the Lützow, but was herself hit and sunk with the loss of 1,032 men, including Rear-Admiral Hood. Only six survived, including Commander Dannreuther who stepped from the top of a mast onto debris floating on the sea.

Admiral Scheer disengaged, turned to starboard and disappeared into the mist with Jellicoe trying to cut him off from home. However Scheer ran into the Grand Fleet again whilst trying to rescue the Wiesbaden. Jellicoe turned away when German destroyers attacked with torpedoes, so as to save his ships. Scheer then decided to take the quickest way back to port as he had ships that were sinking. There was some confused fighting as ships from both sides became mixed up and the Royal Navy suffered from lack of modern search lights – they took time to switch on fully whereas the Germans left theirs on and hid them behind screens.

In HMS Tiger's medical station AB Victor Heyward described the scene as looking like the picture of HMS Victory's cockpit at Trafalgar. The Rev Bradley described looking for survivors whilst ankle deep in water and parts of bodies.

The Battle of Jutland saw more deaths from military action than the whole of the Second Anglo-Boer War. The Germans claimed victory as more British ships were sunk than German ships. However, the British losses were quickly replaced. Also, the High Seas fleet was never a serious threat again and the Royal Navy continued to control the world's seaways.

Branch Facebook Account

Please remember the branch Facebook account where we are aiming at posting at least once every week, but more often coming up to a meeting. If you are on Facebook, please follow us at Ox & Bucks WFA.

Committee

Chairman & Newsletter Editor - David Adamson

Deputy Chairman - Nigel Crompton, Treasurer – Lance Hale, Speaker Liaison – Bob Swayne

Meetings: The Guide Centre, School Lane, **Chalfont St. Giles**. HP8 4JJ

Usually on the third Saturday of the month, starting at 2:30

