



# The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter  
of The  
Branch of The  
Front**



**& Magazine  
Chesterfield  
Western  
Association**

***ISSUE 103 - September 2024***

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the  
Great War'.



## Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2024

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	9th	. AGM + `Finding My Roots` Jon-Paul Harding. ..tracing his Great Grandfathers in The Great War
February	6th	<b><i>Nobody Of Any Importance: A Foot Soldier's Memoir Of World War 1</i></b> by Phil Sutcliffe -“How his dad, Sam Sutcliffe, survived his frontline WW1 - in his own Memoir’s words”.
March	5th	<b><i>Murphy's Law on the Somme</i></b> by Andy Rawson. The talk covers the details of the learning process during the campaign and how what could go wrong, did go wrong. We look at the problems encountered and the solutions which were used to try and solve them.
April	2nd	'From Gaza to Jerusalem: the southern Palestine campaigns of 1917" by Stuart Haddaway
May	7th	"Audregnies Flank Guard Action 1914 " by Phil Watson
June	4th	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Wiltshire Regiment in WW1</b> by Edwin Astill
July	2nd	<b>Legend of the Pilgrimages - Wilfred Pointon, Sherwood Foresters</b> By Bill Bryan
August	6th	Roy Larkin - <b>The Invisible Corps</b> takes a brief look at the Army Service Corps during WW1 through the use of mechanical transport. A story of growth, evolution, inter-service rivalry and meddling civilians.
September	3rd	<b>Kevin Jepson 'Project Fast Dog' - from Mark IV to Whippet'</b>
October	1st	<b>Ross Beadle. 'William Robertson: Architect of a Winning Strategy or merely Haig's "Man of Business in London"?</b>
November	5th	<b>Peter Hart</b> topic to be advised
December	3rd	Hedley Malloch <b>Left Behind</b> - the fate of British soldiers trapped behind German lines in Belgium and France after the Retreat of 191

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### **September Meeting - Project `Fast Dog` by Kevin Jepson**



Kevin comes from a town near Chesterfield (i.e. Sheffield), worked for Civil Service, Local Authorities, local FE college and private training providers, mainly connected with assuring the quality of delivery of training for young adults.

The route into Great War history is an oft heard story - via Victor comics, Commando books, Airfix kits, a fascination with history thanks to an amazing history teacher, war gaming, doing battle field tours and exploring family history connections.

He became self employed and worked on a project to establish a Great War commemorative living history centre in Belgium. During this time obtained a replica Great War vehicle and attended many events displaying the vehicle and telling the story of the development and use of armoured vehicles 1916 onwards.

Also worked as 'historical vehicle advisor/supplier' to a number of film and TV productions - Our World War, Wonder Woman, Transformers 5 - The Last Knight (no kidding !).

Now involved in something called 'Project Fast Dog' - a self funded project to build a Great War armoured vehicle. The aim being to display the vehicle and as before tell the story of her crew, their families and of the people who developed and manufactured the vehicle.

The vehicle is a Medium Mark A 'Whippet' - scratch built by a small team of enthusiasts. It is the world`s only working replica Whippet.....



Dear Members and Friends,

Really looking forward to our meeting on Tuesday evening when our guest speaker will be Kevin Jepson who will tell us about the amazing story behind the re-creation of a Whippet tank...in full running order...not just a static display. As they say living history. The branch will be running a trip to view the tank - hopefully see it in action - on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October. Jane will provide more details at Tuesday`s meeting and I will follow up

with e mails to all our members and friends. It will be an all day outing as the tank is based in Cambridgeshire.

Now that we are into the second half of 2024 my attention now turns to putting a programme of talks / presentations in place for next year. Whilst I have a few ideas in mind, I want to know what topics / speakers you - members - who come along and support the branch faithfully want to see and hear. Please let me know your suggestions and I`ll see what I can do to get the topics YOU want...it`s YOUR branch...Jon-Paul, Jane and I all want to do the best for the Branch and will always try to accommodate the wishes of all of you. So let me know your thoughts - contact me by e mail...or give me a call - my number is below.

Next month we have a first time speaker **Ross Beadle**. *'William Robertson: Architect of a Winning Strategy or merely Haig's "Man of Business in London"?*

Ross comes highly recommended so let`s have a good attendance to support him.

See you next Tuesday.

Best wishes, Grant

Grant Cullen WFA Chesterfield Branch Secretary 07824628638

*Any opinions expressed in this Newsletter / Magazine are not necessarily those of the Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch, in particular, or the Western Front Association in general.*

## Trip to see The Whippet,

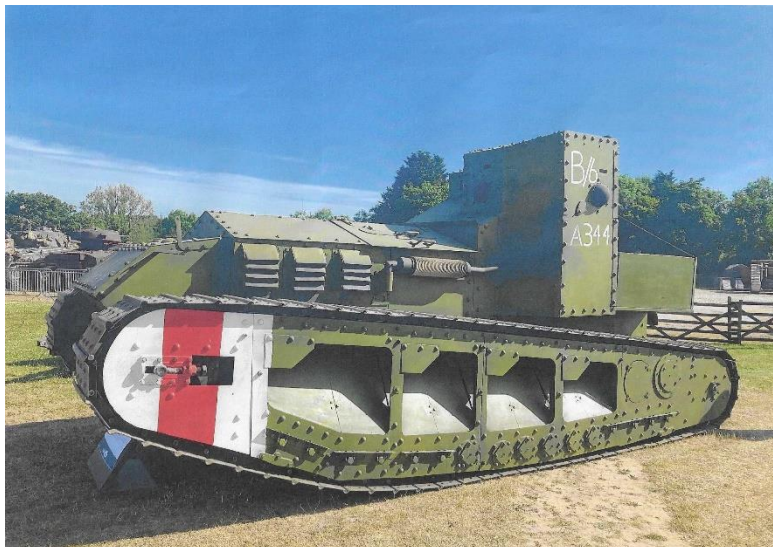
As mentioned in a recent e mail circulated to everyone, one of our members - Kevin Jepson - called in to speak to Jon-Paul, Jane and I before the July meeting. Kevin couldn't stay for the meeting but we will be seeing him again on Tuesday when he comes along to deliver his talk 'Project Fast Dog'.....the planning and construction of a full size working replica of a First World War tank...The Whippet` (see attached picture)

The Whippet is almost 100% complete and made its public `debut` recently at Tankfest at the Tank Museum at Bovington. It is now back at its `home` near Cambridge.

Kevin has suggested - and your committee agrees - that members would enjoy a trip out to Cambridge to view the Whippet - see it working...and who knows maybe even a short trip around the field in the tanks `citadel`...

We think from the original response we have enough support for your Committee organise an outing to view the tanking this visit, - again like the trip to Cannock, the Branch would arrange a minibus. This would be a full day out.

We would appreciate if members would register interest if they wish to go on the trip. Kevin has subsequently confirmed that the most suitable date for the trip will be Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October. We know that some members would like to make their own way to the location – that's not a problem...let me know and nearer the time I'll send you the address and postcode.



Branch Chair, Jon Paul Harding, recently received this letter....

Dear Jon-Paul,

Because of the kind contribution of many members of the Western Front Association, Ralph Lomas, the Bulletin editor, has suggested I contact the various WFA branch chairmen to pass on details about my new book and associated nationwide theatre tour. Full details are below, but if you are interested, I'd like to send you a complimentary signed copy of the book which you might want to use in a raffle or the like? If so, do let me have the best address.

And if you would consider distributing this book/tour information around your branch, I'd certainly be most grateful!

**THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR - A Personal Journey of Discovery and Remembrance** is published on the 26th September and accompanied by John's nationwide theatre show (from the 4th October) where the story will be brought to life with haunting visuals and an arousing sound scape. Full details and theatre venue/tickets available at: [www.JohnNicholLive.com](http://www.JohnNicholLive.com)

In an emotional quest, the RAF veteran and Gulf War prisoner-of-war's new book explores the Unknown Warrior's journey from the First World War battlefields to his final resting place in Westminster Abbey. Shining light on the 100-year-old story, John interviews relatives of those involved, and seeks out modern experts in battlefield trauma, recovery of the dead, and the complexities of organising grand ceremonial occasions. And exploring the ongoing concept of loss and remembrance, he speaks to those who lost loved ones in more modern conflicts, where the bodies were never located.

**Prof Peter Doyle** wrote: *"The Unknown Warrior's shrine has been a focal point for those who have lost loved ones in conflict for over a century - as relevant today as it was in the aftermath of the Great War. John Nichol's wonderful and eminently readable book is the story behind this remarkable tomb, told by one who has seen war at first hand"*

And historian **Dr Robert Lyman** says: *"I was very moved by John Nichol's THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR; it is a beautiful, compassionate, emotional book. Utterly fabulous; an astonishing achievement"*.

Many thanks for your time,  
John Nichol  
Twitter @JohnNicholRAF  
[www.johnnichol.com](http://www.johnnichol.com)





**Jon has live shows at the following venues.....**

**Fri 4 Oct** Stourbridge Town Hall, Stourbridge  
**Sat 5 Oct** Elgiva, Chesham  
**Sun 6 Oct** Worthing Pavilion, Worthing  
**Mon 7 Oct** City Varieties Music Hall, Leeds  
**Wed 9 Oct** The Atkinson, Southport  
**Thu 10 Oct** Royal Spa Centre, Leamington Spa  
**Fri 11 Oct** The Redgrave Theatre, Bristol  
**Sun 13 Oct** New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth  
**Mon 14 Oct** Exeter Northcott Theatre, Exeter  
**Tue 15 Oct** Epsom Playhouse, Epsom  
**Wed 16 Oct** The Alban Arena, St Albans  
**Thu 17 Oct** Courtyard Theatre, Hereford  
**Tue 22 Oct** Westlands, Yeovil  
**Wed 23 Oct** Swan Theatre, Worcester  
**Thu 24 Oct** Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne  
**Fri 25 Oct** Theatre Royal Winchester, Winchester  
**Sat 26 Oct** The Riverfront, Newport  
**Sun 27 Oct** Grove Theatre, Dunstable  
**Mon 28 Oct** Buxton Opera House, Buxton  
**Tue 29 Oct** The Hawth, Crawley  
**Wed 30 Oct** New Theatre, Peterborough  
**Sat 2 Nov** Lighthouse, Poole  
**Sun 3 Nov** Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury  
**Mon 4 Nov** Royal & Derngate, Northampton  
**Tue 5 Nov** Sunderland Fire Station, Sunderland  
**Thu 7 Nov** Storyhouse, Chester

## From a Nurse`s Scrapbook

Scottie came from Scotland,  
Scottie went to "Guy's",  
Scottie came to Sussex Lodge,  
An angel in disguise.

Scottie had a maiden aunt,  
(or so she would pretend)  
Scottie used to stay with her  
Every week-end.

Scottie was a humorist,  
(Two to Camden Town)  
Scottie had bright eyes,  
She soon forgot to frown.

Alfred R. Garrod Lieut.

Leicestershire Regt.

The `Scottie` referred to is Nurse Mary Etchells. Originally from Coatbridge she moved to London pre-war where she trained to be a nurse at Guy`s Hospital. Her album of writings, sketches etc done by soldiers she nursed is one of Branch Secretary Grant Cullen`s most prized possessions.



## August Meeting. – Roy Larkin



Roy has a lifelong interest in road transport history with particular emphasis on the WW1 period. Author of two books - *Destination Western Front - London's Omnibuses Go to War* and *We Can Do It! - Fred Cooper Remembers Edward Box & Ernest Holmes* (the story of heavy haulage in the Great War) - on which the some of his talks are based following talks are based. He has his own website (worth a visit - [www.historicroadways.co.uk](http://www.historicroadways.co.uk))

Roy`s talk was on `The Invisible Corps` ....

The man in the trench cared not how his tin of Bully arrived any more than the gunner only cared his 6” gun received 6” shells and not 4” shells. They only cared that they got them. GHQ cared no more for the supply line than the Board of Directors of Tesco care for how the

shelves get filled, only that they get filled!

The story of the ASC Mechanical Transport told through the reorganisation following the Battle of the Somme, the difficulties of working within an invisible environment and the intense inter-service rivalries, and not forgetting the never failing ability of an army man to pass the buck. Despite being invisible, there are a surprising number of blank images to fully illustrate the waffle.

## The Invisible Corps

The Army Service Corps grew from 5,993 men and 498 officers in August 1914 to 325,888 men and 10,049 temporary officers in November 1918 with 82,638 men transferred to the infantry. Owners of just 200 motor vehicles of all sizes in August 1914, by the Armistice some 121,700 were owned. Despite that massive expansion, the Corps remained ‘invisible’.

The man in the trench cared no more for how his food arrived than today’s shopper considers how their purchases got onto the shelves. Gunners were only concerned that the shells they received were the correct size for their gun and the officers of GHQ and Army HQs only took an interest when the supply line failed.

For a couple of years, expansion was in a piecemeal fashion with new companies only formed when enough vehicles had been built and men recruited and trained. Once built, the company was given its role by the War Office. It was the Battle of the Somme that changed the mindset and organisation.

One man, David Lloyd George noticed the way that the supply line was struggling almost to breaking point to supply the battle. The current Secretary of State for War, he had previously been the Minister of Munitions, charged with resolving the shell shortage scandal that had been in the press the previous year. As such, he was aware of the massive increase in production that was in the pipeline and must have been less than impressed with how stretched the supply line was.

The lorries of XV Corps indicate how stressed the transport was during September 1916. Their 600 lorries carried 1,229 loads every day, travelling 558,339 miles meaning every lorry had to carry two loads. In reality, they had to do more as their records show that in February 1917, 38% of their lorries had been worked to destruction.

Lloyd George's solution was to send Eric Geddes to France in August 1916 to review and overhaul the transport system. Geddes, a career railway man, introduced Light Railway to move the railhead nearer to the front lines. The tonnage carried by the railway was used to reduce the mechanical transport required, despite every ton on the railway being transferred to lorries at the new railhead.



It was thus in February 1917 that the road section of the supply line began to be modernised by bringing the lorries under Corps control, rather than the previous Divisional control. This was far more efficient use of transport but with the Light Railway never performing as planned, the reorganising brought the supply line to the attention of GHQ and Army Commanders and provided perfect conditions for the army to indulge its great love of passing the buck.

The build-up to Third Ypres proved challenging with an estimated 4,500,000 shells fired during the first ten days. Second Army reported that it needed additional road transport as during the week commencing 29<sup>th</sup> July, it required 46,000 tons of supplies and 1,850 troops that Light railway was unable to supply. The lorries, running on roads parallel to the Light Railway travelled 179,000 miles during those seven days in addition to their normal duties. Despite this, a conference was held at GHQ on 15<sup>th</sup> August with the agenda to reduce the manpower from the roads due to the increase in tonnage carried by Light Railways. Some 20,000 men were lost from road transport into the infantry, despite protests from road transport that none could be spared. Clearly, road transport was invisible to the War Office and GHQ who had been sold the dream of Light Railway by Eric Geddes.

The importance of road transport was proved during the German advance and subsequent British advance in 1918 when the rail system was unable to operate with the frontlines becoming mobile. By the Armistice, the British front line was some fifty to sixty miles ahead of the nearest railhead, a gap that only the ASC could cross and keep the frontline supplied.



The hard work done by the Army Service Corps in keeping the troops supplied during the most testing of times was recognised on 17 November 1918 when the Corps was awarded the Royal prefix by King George V to become the Royal Army Service Corps.



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Some of you may know, I subscribe (and have contributed to ) a site called `Academia.edu`. From time to time I pick up papers on WW1 topics. The undernoted came to my attention recently...unusual shall we say ??

## **Britain's wrong decision: how the war of 1914-1918 became World War I from Bettina Schwarz (Berlin, University of Kiel, Germany)**

Britain's decision to declare war against the German Empire was the decision of the majority of the British Liberal Cabinet under the leadership of the heavyweights in the British Cabinet Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, Navy Minister (First Lord of the Admiralty) Winston Churchill, Lord Chancellor Richard Haldane, whom Grey convinced in 1906 in case of a war with Germany ,to position his own field army in



France as Minister of War, and Minister of War Kitchener. The later British Prime Minister and then Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd-George was against it in August 1914, as the recently published Journal of Lord Pease reveals. However, in 1911, after the Agadir crisis, he implicitly supported a war against Germany with the following statement in his famous speech on July 21, 1911 "I would make great sacrifices for peace. I know that nothing could justify a disturbance of international peace except a matter of the greatest national interest. But if we are faced with a situation in which the only way to maintain peace is to give up the great and benevolent position in the world that Britain has gained over centuries through heroism and overcoming, then I say unequivocally that a Peace at that price would be a humiliation that a great country like ours could never tolerate." This was also the opinion of Sir Eyre Crowe, the leading Germany expert in the Foreign Office (where there was a strong anti-German faction), also expressed this opinion to Grey, and not only in his memorandum. Great Britain did not accept a world power of equal rank alongside itself, nor was the British government prepared to accept a power that dominated the European continent. Winston Churchill, whom even British historians call "bellicose" - he even had a statue of Napoleon on his desk as a military role model - tried several times to convince Prime Minister Asquith, who neglected foreign policy, to enter the war. For example, with a secret dispatch to Asquith dated July 31, 1914 (Admiralty Papers 137/452): "it is now necessary that the War Office shd study these plans so that military and naval action can be coordinated and concerted in harmony". And on August 2nd In 1914, as Lord Henry Lansdowne, the former British Foreign Secretary, reported: "We have sent Asquith an intimation that in ours (including Bonar Law and Arthur Balfour - the former and future British Prime Minister). Author) opinion this country should support France & Belgium, & that we will support H.M.G. (His Majesty George?) in this policy." Churchill played a key role in the British cabinet's decision to enter the war and promoted it in the cabinet, not only with the urgent decision to mobilize the fleet early on July 31st. 1914. Churchill wanted war with Germany not just since Agadir, as Sebastian Haffner argued, but at least since the summer of 1910. On a Mediterranean cruise he told the British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey: "why can't England and Germany come together in strength action and for general advantage?" Andrew Roberts is of the opinion that Churchill doubted that this would be possible with the following argument from Churchill in the same year: "We should hold onto Egypt as we should hold onto India, It was not that it brought us any advantage but it was impossible to go back on what we had undertaken, a necessity of Empire. The fate of Egypt would be decided by the issue of the coming war with Germany." Both statements clearly speak for a war against Germany, which Churchill advocated at the time. It remains unclear what Churchill really meant by his first remark to Sir Edward Grey: whether he was thinking of a military confrontation between Germany and Great Britain in or against the Ottoman Empire, with which Germany had strong economic relations before the alliance in the First World War, was thinking, as it later realized disastrously in the battles at



the Dardanelles, or of a strong diplomatic offensive between Germany and Great Britain regarding the problems the Ottoman Empire. Since Churchill hardly thought diplomatically, the former is more likely historically, especially since at that time in Europe people were thinking about dividing the Ottoman Empire as a so-called "sick man on the Bosphorus". He was also never a good strategist, although that was one of his main interests. In May 1912, Churchill also explained to Haldane that the Admiralty's war plans of the last five years "have provided for the evacuation of the Mediterranean as the first step in a war with Germany", i.e. that the war plans against Germany should be started even earlier, namely already took shape in 1907/1908. The war-decisive meeting of the British Cabinet took place on August 2, 1914. Previously, cabinet members were under pressure from a possible break in the government and a looming coalition government, the formation of which would likely have seen some lose their positions. But the Tories supported the decision to go to war. The Irish question ultimately had little influence on the decision. The main reason for Great Britain's entry into the war did not mean allowing a new, all-dominating great power, Germany, on the continent. That is why Great Britain seeks to contain Germany through war. In historical assessment and evaluation, the British cabinet decision, which was made without a vote in parliament, the House of Commons, must be seen as a serious mistake that cost the lives of millions of people, especially British citizens and people from the colonies of the British Empire and fueled Great Britain's economic decline, primarily through the enormous war debts owed to the USA. Germany was curbed in economic growth and politically humiliated by the unjust Treaty of Versailles, but in the long term this was a significant reason for the Second World War as an opportunity for revenge. For Great Britain, however, victory in World War I was a Pyrrhic victory that ultimately ushered in the country's decline. Leading historians such as Sir Christopher Clark, Zara Steiner, F.H. Hinsley and Arnd Bauerkämper (oral communication July 16, 2024) see maintaining the balance of power as Great Britain's decisive strategy to keep Germany in check, but in my opinion they fail to recognize that the balance of power was already guaranteed by the Triple Entente in the alliance. Since Germany, as the second strongest economic and world power behind the USA at the time, which is why the former Fritz Fischer thesis must be rejected, was only looking for its (fair) place within the European and international major powers and joining in was the current policy in Europe at the time, it would not have been possible to win a two-front war against Russia and France. The German military also knew this. The Schlieffen Plan was only an emergency solution to this discord and conflict. The German military strategy of a blitzkrieg or surprise attack like in Silesia, which has been traditional since Frederick the Great at the latest, was from a German perspective the only possibility of an actually unexpected victory and signals a seamless continuity of the blitzkrieg thinking from Frederick II to the Schlieffen Plan. For this reason and only for this reason, Germany was practically forced to take preventive action in order to be able to win if necessary, using this method after the Russian general mobilization on July 30th. 1914 and the French general

mobilization on August 1, 1914 to declare war on Russia and France. Nevertheless, it was daring for Germany to hope for a quick defeat and occupation of France in order to then be able to concentrate all military forces against Russia in the east. The German Reich also underestimated the relative speed of the Russian side's mobilization. After the constitution was drafted in 1906 and the lost Russo-Japanese War in 1904/05, Russia was so weakened both internally and in foreign policy that the Russian government, including Tsar Nicholas II, sought salvation and unity in a foreign policy war, including for their colonial influence to secure and strengthen in the Balkans. The interest in containing Russia was already given in British interests, also in order to secure its power in India, and must be rejected as a decisive reason for entering the war. French Prime Minister Poincaré also wanted war with Germany, not only because he detested monarchies, but also as revenge for the defeat of 1870-71. So both countries had a motive and good political reasons to go to war, but Great Britain did not. Russia was already weakened politically, as described above, and did not need any further containment or dampening from the British side, including for the British areas of influence in Asia, and Germany was virtually isolated in terms of alliances, as its partners Austria-Hungary and Italy were extremely weak militarily. This is one of the reasons why Germany repeatedly sought an alliance with Great Britain. The Haldane Mission in 1912 was doomed to failure because Great Britain did not want to recognize the German Reich as an equal great power, but instead wanted to be better off. The alleged threat of a German naval blockade of the English Channel, which was politically unrealistic since Germany hoped and relied on Great Britain's neutrality until the end, and the violation of Belgium's neutrality were only a pretext for Great Britain to go to war. This is undisputed among historians today. Great Britain's goal was to prevent German dominance on the European continent. It must be noted that there were many prejudices and ignorance about the other country's positions on all sides. The British King George V, who was also in favor of war with Germany, said to Foreign Minister Grey at the time: "You have to find a reason." On the other hand, the German Emperor Wilhelm II, who was for Germany not least through his outstanding support of technology and science had stimulated great economic growth in Germany, so that today one speaks of a "Wilhelmine economic miracle", did not want war at all and argued against it until the end, including temporarily stopping the march to the west on August 1, 1914 with the support of Reich Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg the hope of British neutrality. Wilhelm II began a diplomatic telegram offensive with Tsar Nicholas II on July 28, 1914 and asked him on July 29. to forego such military measures shortly before the Russian general mobilization. The murder of the Habsburg heir to the throne ultimately put the monarchies in danger, and that is why it was absolutely necessary for Austria-Hungary and Germany, among others, to stand up and take action against it. The only question was how? However, the theory that the German Empire sought to preserve its position as a great power by supporting Austria-Hungary against Serbia is wrong. Germany would rather have retained its position without war and not sacrificed its

head and sacrificed for such weak partners. But the dispute was about preserving the monarchy. With the entry of Great Britain, the European continental war became a world war through the recruitment of people in the colonies who were conscripted as soldiers and the colonies were converted to a war.