

## THE POPPY



### THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

May June 2026 VOL27 No1

#### CHAIRMANS REMARKS

We had the most unprecedented situation whereby speakers for two consecutive months were unavailable, at short notice, in March and April. Over the many years I have been a member of the club this has never happened. Fortunately, two of our honourable members stepped forward and delivered very entertaining presentations on local subjects. My thanks go out to them and to Paul Evans for arranging at such short notice.

At present, I am preparing two talks that I would be happy to present to the club if required and if any other member has a WW1 tale to tell, do let Paul Evans know.

This May, I will carry out my annual pilgrimage to France and Belgium to visit the lads who never returned. I will be accompanied by my Old Sweat, Andrew England. Our main focus will be on the 8<sup>th</sup> Norfolks 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1916. It is a subject we have covered before but this year we will be using the actual notes of Dick Rayner. I can hear him saying "You won't find that in any textbook lad".

So if any member does have any pearls of wisdom do step forward. There are still many stories to be told and even more people who want to hear them.

Kindest Regards and Best Wishes,  
Chairman ROB

#### FROM THE EDITORS

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

#### MEETING REPORTS

Unfortunately things did not go to plan for our March and April talks as our Chair has mentioned, First Major Phil Watson had to cancel his visit to the Branch due to his wife being

unwell in hospital, and then Scott Lindgren had to drop out in April due to two family bereavements.

Paul had to find replacements and one of our newer Branch members agreed to step in for March. And, so we had a talk on our Norfolk nurse Edith Cavell by John Balls who is part of Thorpe History Group and keen on all things Titanic, as is our Branch Secretary Bob Kerry. I've often wondered of all the young men on board Titanic who died then, how many would have had to fight in the Great War and if they would have died on battlefields around the world anyway.....

The talk told us a few things some of us had not heard of before, and even for us Norfolk folk there is still the struggle of how Cavell should be pronounced it seems, which caused some amusement. Starting out as a governess, much against her fathers wishes Edith trained to be a nurse and ended up in Belgium and the rest is, as they say, history. As we all know she was shot by the Germans for helping men get back to Britain, and apparently, possible spying. With the war ended her remains were returned to Norfolk and she was interred at Norwich Cathedral. It so happens that one of our other Branch members works at the Cathedral - John was not aware of this, but I was and I wondered what might come up, Of course this lead to more snippets of information and laughter, our Chair said it reminded him of being at seminaries he had attended in the past.....

There are loads of places with Cavell in their names around the world in Commonwealth countries, the US and Europe. Many hospitals and medical places of course, streets, schools - both houses and buildings and a wide range of other things from our Norwich Edith Cavell public house, to a Geological feature on the planet Venus, to a Mountain in Alberta which we visited many years ago now, a rose first bred in 1917, to an American race horse who won the American Oaks in 1926, but also her Christian name became popular, with the French singer Edith Piaf being named after her when she was born a few years after Edith was executed.

In April Branch member Andrew England covered for Scott Lindgren by talking about Heacham's Ruskin school run by Bellerby Lowerison. Popular for those families with more unusual ideals and also a boarding school with pupils from all over the place coming there, including some females. For a small school it lost 24 killed in WW1 including the poet Leslie Coulson who was buried in the Grove Town Cemetery after the Battle of Le Transloy in October 1916. Coulson's brother also attended the school.

Heacham is perhaps better known for it's possible links to Pocahontas the native American who married John Rolfe, first settler of the colony of Virginia and who made a success of growing tobacco.

## FUTURE PROGRAMME

June 2<sup>nd</sup> - John Chester - Cesari Battisti - Traitor or Martyr

July 7<sup>th</sup> - Jonathan Dutton - Collecting of war related memorabilia at the time of war and after.

## IN THE NEWS

The stolen war memorial plaques from Chatham's Luton Rd Church, one of which was badly damaged after being found in 2 separate scrap yards in Essex have been repaired by the BBC Repair Shop and a team of experts in lead work. Once in panels on the Lychgate, they are now home and now to be found in the church.

If you did not see the program you can find it on catch up and You Tube.

A spate of vandalism is happening in the UK and at other places around the world. A Tommy memorial at Royal Wootton Bassett has been damaged by vandals who were caught on CCTV scratching racist words onto one of the silhouettes. While a Lincolnshire memorial to the 100 years of the RAF has also been a target with swastikas being scratch into the metal work. The sign was at Long Sutton and has shocked locals. Sadly even Israel has damaged war graves in Gaza, in CWGC Cemeteries using bulldozers it's been reported. Australia has even increased punishments for war memorial damage after recent issues, with long prison terms and/or larger fines.

A US coastguard cutter "Tampa" has been found some 50 miles off Cornwall by British divers. Torpedoed by a German submarine it sank with its 131 crew in 1918, this was the largest US naval loss in WW1. The ship lays on the seabed at about 300ft and has been found as the result of three years research and exploration.

Working on convoy duties, its captain had requested permission to head to Wales for refuelling with coal for its boilers, when it failed to arrive in port a search was carried out and wreckage found.

Its crew was mainly coastguard men, with a few US Navy men, some British Navy and civilians, 11 of the crew were black apparently making them the first minority men to be killed in WW1.

The funeral service took place on March 27th in Deal, Kent for Major Gordon Corrigan MBE FRHistS who died on February 26<sup>th</sup> age 83. A Major in the Royal Gurkha Rifles, he was probably best known to the public for his TV war history programmes. He was interred in the Shorncliffe Military Cemetery.

I have recently seen a post online from the Czech Republic, that the Ministry of Defence in that country have restored a memorial to men killed in WW1 in a village called Vazany near Boskovic. In the time of WW1 this was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

At the end of the war in 1918 it became Czechoslovakia. Perhaps not an area we here much about from that time, but nice to see the modern country looking after its memorials.

There was a large Jewish presence in the area 1914-18 and the historic Jewish cemetery in Boskovic has several burials of Jewish soldiers from that time and loyal to Austro-Hungary.

## SUFFOLK WFA

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

May 13<sup>th</sup> Ross Beadle - The Devon's on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916.

June 19<sup>th</sup> John Johnston-Allen - To shallow for the Navy - Maritime Mesopotamia 1914-17.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

On May 20<sup>th</sup> a rededication service for Lt Thomas O'Neill, RAF and Royal Dublin Fusiliers, will take place at Le Grand Beaumart British Cemetery at Steenwerck will be held. Killed on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1918 recent research shows that he is in this cemetery in a grave with a headstone that is marked as an unknown airman.

There are also two WW2 reburials/rededications during May.

## GEORGE FUTVOYE MARSDEN-SMEDLEY

George who was the 2<sup>nd</sup> son of John Smedley of the Derbyshire firm, John Smedley luxury knitwear company, and his wife Gertrude. He is remembered on the Thiepval memorial. He went to the Front in July 1916 and lasted just twenty five days. Despite a ID given him by his father his body was never found. His father managed to purchase a small piece of ground and erected a private memorial and a wall surround. The memorial carries the following inscription -

In memory of

George Futvoye Marsden-Smedley

of Lea Green, Matlock, Derbyshire

2/Lt 3rd Rifle Brigade

age 19

who fell in an attack

on Guillemont on August 18th 1916

during the Battle of the Somme

and lies near here in an unknown grave

lively and pleasant in life

in death - serene and unafraid

most blessed in remembrance

Other memorials in memory of George can be found at St John the Baptist Church in Dethick, a marble plaque and inscription, and a memorial window in Christ Church, Holloway, both in Derbyshire. Why three pricy memorials, well his father could afford it, he ran the company John Smedley world famous for its luxury knitwear since 1784 and still trading today from Lea Mills near Matlock. In the Company's reception is a roll of honour to 137 men who went to war, 12 did not return including George.

## CIVILIANS IN CWGC CEMETERY PLOTS

J Pobjoy, a civilian is buried in Calais Southern Cemetery. 1st Army Postal Service attached to Royal engineers died 15/4/1916, he has a regular headstone of CWGC, is this normal and how many other civilians are in military Cemeteries?

Well that's funny one it seems, having a read of information on line there seems to be a lot of

information to deal with and different answers to peoples queries.

At least two women who were killed while visiting wounded men in hospitals near the Front can be found in cemeteries with CWGC headstones it seems.

Who else might be classed as civilians? Are some men working on ships not classed as Navy? I think some are but others are not. Did some conscientious objectors get CWGC headstones? I believe this changed by WW2 and it became more common to see non military people with CWGC headstones. Do you know of any WW1 civilian headstones and why they might have one?

And Finally

Having to go to the middle of nowhere to pick up some pond material, I thought we ought to visit the village church and looking it up saw a) it had a grave marker for a Lt Horatio Spencer Walpole and b) it had a most unusual war memorial to the men who died that I have seen - an angel with the names listed on a scroll it held. It stood on the floor of the church right by the door. The village is Wickmere near Roughton in North Norfolk. St Andrew's church has a round tower from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, with further bits added over the centuries. It is linked to the Walpole family of Wolterton Hall, their own church stood in ruins, so they adopted St Andrews, it contains the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Orford who died in 1935 memorial. The Orford title goes back to Robert Walpole the Prime Minister. Lt Horatio Walpole was in the Coldstream Guards and died in fighting in April 1918. He is buried in Bac-Du-Sud British Cemetery, Bailleulval, France. The family must have felt this church was the best location to put the grave marker. The angel has the names of 12 men who did not return from WW1 and 2 from WW2. Looking at the size of the village now and seeing that many modern houses, it must have been much smaller, so it seemed a lot of men. But like a lot of memorials not all men may have lived there or houses were spread out over the area.

