

THE POPPY



THE NORFOLK BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Western Front Association

September November 2026 VOL27 No3

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Finally, it seems our Mediterranean type drought may be easing and a few summer showers have returned. I can almost hear my garden sigh with relief. My thoughts return to 1st July 1916 on the Somme, when the fighting commenced, with a midday temperature of 73degrees Fahrenheit. Bad enough standing around in khaki without fighting in it.

I hope everybody has seen the obituary to our former member Dick Rayner, in last month's Bulletin publication. Whilst Andrew England bounced a few ideas off me, it was he who penned such a moving piece. A great tribute to Dick. Thank you Andrew.

I have particularly enjoyed the last couple of talks presented to our branch. Jonathan Dutton was at his usual March hare best and Andy Stuart produced an excellent piece to entertain and inform on his relative.

Please do contact our speaker secretary Paul if there is a topic you feel we have not covered and would like to hear about. Or if you feel you could offer a talk to present to us then do step forward. Even a ten minute slot could be very entertaining. It all helps to bond the group.

Enjoy the rest of the summer.

Kindest Regards,
Chairman Rob Burkett

FROM THE EDITORS

Please let us have any items for consideration for inclusion in the Poppy by the 20th October 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

Local historian Jonathan Dutton's talk in July, on collecting war related "souvenir" items at the time and after the war, was as usual, fast and furious and packed with all sorts of items. We tend to think collecting is a modern thing perhaps, but there was loads of "stuff" for collecting during the war period, some to raise funds for hospitals, wounded, etc. If it was out there Jonathan has

probably researched and got it! I just hope it goes somewhere safe when anything happens to him as this must be a fairly unique collection as some pieces are likely to be getting delicate 100 plus years on. Items ranged from cards from cigarettes etc, hat and other badges, silk and woven items like hankies, pincushions, postcards and much more.

Our August talk was by Andy Stuart on his Grandfather Arthur Walton and "his" war, called Tall tales or real history. A bit of a character, it seems Arthur had managed to join up in August 1914, he was just 16! At his time of death in 1972 a large amount of tales of his war were found in his things, some sounding so unbelievable that Andy wanted to work out if they were fiction or if they could be true.

Stuart has written books on his grandfather's life and is also launching a podcast of unusual tales from the great war, see AndyStuart.net and other sites for info and where you can watch.

One of the branch members said to me good luck trying to review this talk as there were so many things to take in from vodka laced with gold nuggets, stealing trains to shamrock cap badges on Russians soldiers made from material found on snooker tables, a region called Karelia and much more.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

October 6th - Nic Chapman - Researching CWG Archives

November 3rd - On to Aleppo - Stuart Hadaway

IN THE NEWS

Taff Gillingham and one of his fellow Great War Huts colleagues have been to Scotland to collect a WW1 German 10.5cm Howitzer Trophy Gun. Now the work begins as the poor thing is in a bad way after 100 years or so. This poor gun was dumped over a cliff into the River Tweed by former soldiers from a village near Melrose, who (this means it is a very rare find as most were scraped) did not want to be reminded of the war. Later it was dragged to a different location and lost in a covering of silt, before its rescue in the 80's, badly damaged it had been displayed on someone's property till it came to the attention of Mike Taylor of Tayside WFA who called Taff.

We have shared post to our Facebook page so you can see the pictures and read the story or you will have to visit the Great Huts sometime!

A Grade 2 listed war memorial on Ham Hill in Somerset has been damaged by vandals who scratched obscene words into the stone. This incident happened over a weekend early in August. This seems to be a big issue at present, not just in the UK but around the world. Damage to a brand new memorial to men from the Forest of Dean who fought in Korea at Imjin was defaced days after it was installed and an Irish memorial was also reported to have been damaged.

SUFFOLK WFA

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

September 9th - Arras - John Peaty

October 14th - Commonwealth War Graves, history, current work and future plans - Elaine Brown

ONE OF THE LAST FEW Q SHIPS TO BE SCRAPPED

A campaign to save the Q ship HMS President has failed. A recent survey found the World War 1 ship to be in poor condition. The owner seemed to have stopped any contact and the company paying its berthing fees was closing down, scrap was its only option. A postman had spent a decade campaigning to save the ship and doing work aboard her. National Historic Ships UK is photographing the vessel and identifying fittings worth saving, so records will remain.

Launched as HMS Saxifrage in January 1918, she was a purpose-built submarine hunter disguised as a merchant ship, with hidden 4-inch and 12-pounder guns. The set up as we probably know was to trick U-boat captains who did not want to waste a torpedo on a small merchant ship to surface and then sink her with gunfire. At this point the ship would drop her screens and open fire on the submarine.

Renamed President in 1922, she spent 90 plus years moored on Victoria Embankment as a Royal Naval Reserve drill ship and served as an anti-aircraft battery guarding London in the World War 2. HMS President is, or was, one of only three surviving Royal Navy warships of the Great War, with HMS Caroline in Belfast and HMS M33 in Portsmouth.

PORTSLADE ARMY COOKERY SCHOOL

Something I had never thought about was cooking for the men in the army, we have all heard about front line foods - bully beef, jam and bread etc, how you often had to have cold food because you could not risk smoke or the smell of food when in the trenches, and the fact that sometimes you never received rations at all. But there were cooks who were behind the lines cooking for large numbers of men and food was taken forward when possible. Men at this time were unlikely to have done much in the way of cooking, it was very much a woman's job, and men had to learn all kinds of skills, so army schools were set up to train them catering skills. The men from poorer backgrounds would have benefitted from the meat and veg they were fed. It has been said many came home in better shape than they had ever been.

Places such as Portslade in Sussex and Aldershot taught men to cook, with around 14,000 men from Portslade alone, trained over a 2 year period from 1916 to 1918. One of these men was Brighton born Charles Bish who caught my eye as he was with the 3rd Norfolk Regiment, he went to France in 1918 and survived the war.

TROWSE WW1 CAMP

I read somewhere recently that Trowse had a German WW1 POW camp, it is apparently not the case, it was more likely a temporary training camp for British soldiers. A tented camp stood in fields near a place called Mill House and the men were from the Royal Sussex Regiment, who also camped at Stalham (we have seen pictures that were said to be Royal Sussex men in Stalham), this would have been

around 1915.

In the 2012/13 period remains of training trenches were found in the field at Trowse, used by the men to learn about trench warfare. Sadly both Trowse and Stalham sites were being surveyed with plans for building yet more new houses in the future.

As for German POW's Gressenhall farming museum near Dereham and formally known as Beech House was said to hold about 50 men from 1917 to when they returned home in 1919, who would work on the land I would think. As for Trowse, well it is said that there were some POW's held near to the Cock Inn at Lakenham, just a short distance down the road (pub is now new builds) maybe these men worked around Trowse...

THREE HOLME NEXT THE SEA BOYS

A recent walk around Holme next the Sea saw us at the war memorial checking out the names, possibly some long lost in time relatives as my great, great grandparents came from nearby Docking.

Checking out one name Alfred Potter when we got home we found he had died a POW on the 24th October 1918 in the region of Kassel, Germany, and is buried in the cemetery of Niederzwehren, begun in 1915. He was serving with the 2nd Batt Middlesex Regiment. Apparently some camps held some civilians as well as soldiers. This large cemetery holds men brought in from some 190 other locations dotted around Germany during the early 1920's and is one of 4 sites where graves were moved to from these smaller cemeteries. Men included French, Russians and Commonwealth.

My family name on my Gt, Gt Grandmother's side from that area was Callaby. Two brothers George and John were on the Holme memorial. Sapper George Bertie Callaby RE and L/cpl John Leonard Callaby of the West Yorkshire Regiment were the sons of Arthur and Annie who lived in Holme. John is buried in the Cinq Rues British Cemetery Hazebrouck he died 28/6/1918 aged 21 and George is in La Cateau Cemetery age 35, he died on 1/4/1918.

ALGERNON HENRY PORTEOUS EASLEA

Algernon was born in 1886 at Ixworth and served firstly as a Private with the Suffolk 2nd Battalion, later joining the Royal Garrison Artillery as a Gunner. He was the second son of William Easlea, farmer, and his wife Rosalind, the family seemed to be reasonably well off as they had both a cook and a nurse. At the end of his schooling he did some time in a Naval Training College at Dartford, passing out as a midshipman in 1905. By the start of the war he was married and living in Beccles.

In July 1916 while serving with the Suffolks he was injured by a shell which damaged his legs. He then transferred to the RGA he was killed in January 1918 and is buried in Chocques Military Cemetery, France, this cemetery holds mainly casualties who died at the Casualty Clearing Station at Chocques from wounds received at the Bethune front. It was also used to rebury men from smaller cemeteries in the area after the war. There are also a small number of German burials, very few are unknown considering there are 1800 or so buried there.

Algernon left a large estate for the time of £3,530 13s 4d. His wife Vera was by then living in North Walsham. His father William had lived at Tunstead Hall, Norfolk. So why is he mentioned on the war memorial at St Margaret Church in Garvestone and on a brass plaque in Thuxton

Church (which we could not see as the church was locked). It seems to be so because his older brother John Fellowes Easlea was living in a room at Thuxton Rectory at some point.

Lt JOHN ROSS ROBERTSON RFC

If you ever find yourself in the Dunfermline area, in the cemetery on a family grave is a replica wooden cross sunk into the ground by one of the roadways (you may need to ask someone to find it). It honours Lt John Ross Robertson, RFC, who was shot down by the Germans who buried him and erected the original cross in May 1917, the cross was later brought to Scotland for the family and a replica placed on the family grave - the real one had become fragile and is now in the care of the Montrose Air Station.

The German inscription says - He died a hero's death, An English flying officer.

John was originally in the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry and served in Gallipoli, he joined the RFC and was killed not long after flying a small number of missions. He is buried in Quarry Cemetery Marquion, one of 23 British, the rest being Canadians. There are 68 burials in total.

And Finally x2

No1

I've just been looking through clippings and booklets people have passed over to me regarding WW1 and there have been several items talking about diaries men wrote back then. It got me thinking how many did write about their experiences, how many of these have been found, printed or donated to museums and how many more have been lost or remain to be found, lost in boxes in lofts or sheds. We have a Scottish friend who has a family member's diary but he says it is so very brief its hardly worth having as it gives little information about what this man went through. Sadly our family have nothing from either Great Uncles who died although rumours were that there was letters at some point in time, or from my grandfather and an uncle who survived. If there was anything they vanished as both families were large and could have gone to other family members who disposed of them.

No2

Well that will teach me to dispose of notes once I have used them! Due to our Mr Kerry posting on our WFA branch pages the piece I was about to use in this issue, I had done some time back.....