

OX & BUCKS BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2026



@WFAOxBucks



Ox & Bucks WFA

www.westernfrontassociation.com



COMMENT

Welcome to the August Branch Newsletter. I am sorry to report that Ian Johnson one of our long-standing members has died recently and although he had not been able to attend the branch recently, I am sure that many of you will remember him. Nigel, who knew Ian longer than I did, has kindly written a piece about him for the Newsletter. Ian made a significant contribution to our branch over many years and will be missed by those of us who knew him.

August, as always, is a month without a meeting, so I hope that you will enjoy the break. We will be meeting again on 19th September for another fascinating talk from Ian Castle on the air raids on Britain in the later stages of the war.

- David Adamson

Future Meetings 2026

August NO MEETING, AS USUAL

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|------------------------|--------------|---|
| 19 th Sept. | Ian Castle | “Gotha Terror” |
| 17 th Oct. | Nigel Atter | “The 2 nd Leicesters in Mesopotamia” |
| 21 st Nov. | Charles Fair | “Balkan Purgatory - the 60 th (London) Division in Salonika - December 1916 - June 1917” |
| 12 th Dec. | Alan Leahey | “Anti-Tank Gun Hunters” |

Ian Johnson 1935 - 2026

Val and I, after joining the Association, decided to attend that year's WFA annual general meeting being held at the RAF Museum, Hendon. Whilst waiting in line for the buffet, we were introduced to Derek Bracey and Anne Richards who told us about the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Branch meetings. At the time, Derek was chair and Anne the deputy.



Fast forward a few months, and on reaching the Guide Centre in Chalfont St Giles we met Ian and Robin Johnson amongst many others. Over a period of time it became very apparent that they both had a great interest in the Australian forces during the Great War, whether it was Egypt, Gallipoli or actions in France and Flanders. Later during a chat, we found that Robin had been born in Papua New Guinea. Her full maiden name was Robin Anne Timinavaire McCusker. (Amazing what you can find on Ancestry.) When her family moved to Brisbane on the mainland was never disclosed. Born in March 1935, she passed away in April 2005. Robin and Ian married in 1961, living for many years at Green Tiles, on Mill Lane in St. Giles. Both took an active role in their local community. Ian was a trustee of the Memorial Hall, facilitating our branch use to host several well-known speakers including Richard Holmes and Gordon Corrigan.

When Ian joined the committee I'm not sure, but following Derek and Anne standing down Geoff Spring took up the mantle, and it was under his tenure that I joined the committee. Ian was a font of all knowledge, putting forward measured suggestions and assistance. After Ian McEwan stood down as Treasurer, Ian stepped up to the plate, only retiring in 2008/2009 when Val took over but remained on the committee. The branch's finances were on a firm footing, but we had 30 to 35 attendees each meeting then. Anne Richards, on becoming chair, alternated committee meetings between her house and Ian's on Mill Lane.

Ian and Robin every year visited the Australian war graves in Harefield often but most of all on Anzac Day 25th April, laying a wreath and made fellow branch members very welcome for also attending.

Ian stood down totally in 2010 along with Anne although he continued to support most of the visits we organised, such as going to CWGC in Maidenhead and the Cavalry Barracks in both London and Windsor. He retained his interest in all things Australian, asking many questions and making a request to me to see if I could get the grave of Frank Hubert McNamara cleaned. Ian explained that Frank had been a pilot with No1 Sq, Australian Flying Corps when on 20 March 1917, near Tel-en-Hesi in Egypt, he had been awarded the VC for his actions. Later Frank rose to the rank of Air Vice Marshal, dying in 1961. He was buried in St. Josephs Priory, Gerrards Cross. Whilst we managed to arrange the grave to be cleaned then, its current state is not known.

Apart from laying the wreath at Harefield, Ian until only recently took part in the Remembrance Day ceremony in his village. Last year, Val and myself represented the branch. On turning from laying our wreath, I saw Ian in a wheelchair pleased to see we have maintained the tradition he started. We were happy to grab a few minutes to chat, but being a very cold November day, Ian's companions took him back to the warmth. No longer able to remain at Green Tiles, Ian had moved by this time. With his passing, the number of members locally has diminished. He will be sadly missed.
RIP Ian and Robin.

- Nigel Crompton



Report of Meeting of 18th July: **Phil Tomaselli “MI5 and the Struggle against German Espionage”**

Phil kindly gave up a day of research at the National Archives to speak to us on this interesting topic. MI5 was set up in 1909 as a counter-intelligence organisation, with the ex-Special Branch officer William Melville as its first detective. Maj Vernon Kell of the South Staffordshire Regiment was in charge of counter-intelligence; recruiting a team of agents he gradually pieced together the organisation of the German secret service. During a pre-war visit of the Kaiser to Britain, members of Special Branch who were assigned to protect him were able to observe a member of his entourage making repeated visits to a barber called Karl Ernst. It transpired that Ernst was collecting information on the British army and navy and passing on mail, whilst actually working for the Berlin Police Detective Force. He was imprisoned early in the war.

Carl Hans Lody was a German spy who worked on American liners, he could speak with an American accent and had an American passport. In 1914 he went to Scotland and spent time around docks collecting information. However, his mail was intercepted and he fled to Ireland but was caught in possession of invisible ink and notes on shipping movements. He was tried in public at the Old Bailey and stated he “served Germany and consider myself a patriot”; he “did not want to cause problems for your country but to help mine”. He was executed by firing squad at the Tower of London on 6th November 1914. As he had generated some public sympathy during his trial, all subsequent spy trials were held in secret.

William Roos and Haicke Janssen were Dutch nationals who were paid by the Germans to spy on shipping off the south coast of Britain. They came to the country posing as cigar salesmen and used types of cigars as codenames for types of naval ship with numbers against them in telegrams. Three Post Office investigators analysed a quarter of a million telegrams and spotted the coded messages. A police raid on a hotel found invisible ink and notes in Janssen’s room. Both men were tried and executed in 1915.

Many women were employed by MI5 in the censorship department. They would look for suspect addresses on letters and then wipe the letters with developer to see if invisible ink was present. The export of sheet music was banned during the war because it was believed that it was used by spies to send messages in invisible ink.

Karl Friedrich Müller was a German who claimed to be Russian (he had lived in the country) with a Russian passport. He came to the UK and watched army manoeuvres and naval movements. He had very distinctive writing which was easy to spot and intercept and also easy to mimic. MI5 therefore added false details to his letters and sent them on. Müller was difficult to find, but he became so busy that he employed a German



born, British assistant, John Hahn, to take in post for him. Hahn was short of money and wrote to the Netherlands offering his services but his letter was intercepted. Coincidentally, as Hahn was arrested Müller walked in and was also caught. After Müller was shot, MI5 continued to impersonate him and received payment from the Germans ! This money was used to buy a car which we nicknamed “the Müller”, but it was subsequently stolen from outside MI5.

There was also concern about possible radicalism, so the Ministry of Munitions set up the Ministry of Munitions Labour Intelligence to investigate workers and strikes at munitions factories. The department subsequently changed its name to P.M.S.2 (Parliamentary Military Security Department, No.2) to hide its purpose from the public.

Boy Scouts were used as messengers within MI5 but were found to read the messages, so the more discrete Girl Guides were used instead ! Two of the latter later joined MI5 as regular employees.

Message regarding the car parking etc.

As you know, we closed the hall for a week to carry out essential works to the fire escape and to redecorate the hall. Hopefully you will find it much brighter and welcoming. The fire escape steps have all been repaired and coping stones put on the side wall which should stop the rain damaging the rendering. The hook for the door is back in place.

We also took the opportunity to repair parts of the car park walls which had been damaged after being hit by vehicles. We will be placing bollards to protect the walls in the coming weeks. In the meantime, however I would be grateful if you could ask all your attendees to take care when parking – the repairs have cost several thousands of pounds and is not something we are in a position to do on a regular basis.

Many thanks and kind regards
Debbie.
On behalf of
Josephine (Chair, Friends of Guides)

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

