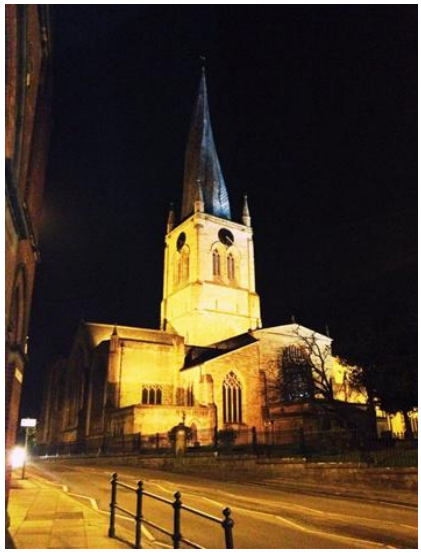
# The Spire Sentinel



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




**& Magazine Chesterfield Western Association**

***Branch Newsletter 129 - November 2026***

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

# Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2026

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

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| January | 6th | . **AGM + Tim Lynch - "Huns on the Run"** Tim explores the often overlooked experiences of German POWs held in Britain during and immediately after the First World War |
| February | 3rd | **Ross Beadle** – **Sarajevo 1914** This talk examines the sequence of chance events of the preceding 36 years and, even, on the day of the killing. |
| March | 3rd | **Andy Rawson** – **Malta…Nurse of the Mediterranean** against the Germans and Italians during WWII. However, over 125,000 casualties from the 1915 Gallipoli and 1916 Salonika campaigns were cared for on the island during WWI. |
| April | 7th | **Mick Byrne** – **Shot at Dawn** Between 1914 and 1920, more than 3,000 British soldiers were sentenced to death by courts martial arms, However, only 346 were executed with 37 of these having committed capital crimes such as murder.The remainder become the centrepiece of our talk. |
| May | 5th | **Christina Holstein - - Verdun.** What was the plan behind the German offensive of February *stein* 1916? A thundering opening bombardment brought early success but the German advance soon slowed and the French refused to give up. |
| June | 2nd | **Scott Lindgren** The Admiralty dispatched two dreadnought battlecruisers to the South Atlantic to eliminate the threat of the German East Asia cruiser squadron. This talk explains the events and consequences of the Falklands battle, along with some of the strategic and tactical lessons. |
| July | 7th | **John Wilson The action at Sheikh Sa'id November 1914.** The opposed landing that nobody has ever heard about! . |
| August | 4th | **Ian Castle - Gotha Raids.** The talk traces the sequence of raids made by the deadly Gotha and massive 'Giant' bombers, and the development of the world's first in depth, integrated aerial defence system. Based on his book London 1917-18: The Bomber Blitz |
| September | 1st | **Roy Larkin - Where the Money Went.** Following the success of the original 'Where the Money Went', the Sequel explores the financial costs of the Great War. Fully illustrated |
| October | 6th | **Peter Hart** Welsh Warrior at Ypres, 1914: The thrilling memories of Captain Hubert Rees who ended up in command of the 2nd Welsh Regiment during the fighting at Gheluvelt. |
| November | 3rd | **John Horner 'In the care of St Dunstans :** Private Richard Horners story' |
| December | 1st | **Neil Taylor…."Winston`s Little Army…**Aspects of the Royal Naval Division" |

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## Chairman`s Ramblings




I hope everyone survived the recent storms and are all well. Its that time of year when we start to prepare for Remembrance Sunday and then Remembrance Day 11th November, I am sure anyone attending an event will show great respect as always. John Sutton and Craig Dudley and I will be traveling to London on the 11th of November to be part of the parade and laying of a wreath. Rob Nash will be the parade marshal, and I am sure he will do a fantastic job as in previous years it's nice to know he is connected to this branch. I will also be attending the service in the Crooked Spire followed by the parade through Chesterfield and then the wreath laying ceremony. If anyone is interested in attending please let me know so we can arrange times.

As in previous newsletter and being mentioned at the meetings the branch trip is still happening if anyone interested details are in this newsletter and we will discuss again at next meeting.

Looking forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting on 3rd of November, to listen to John Horner`s talk on St Dunstans. I am sure it will be as interesting as last month`s talk given by Peter Hart.

All the best to everyone

Jon-Paul

Branch Chair

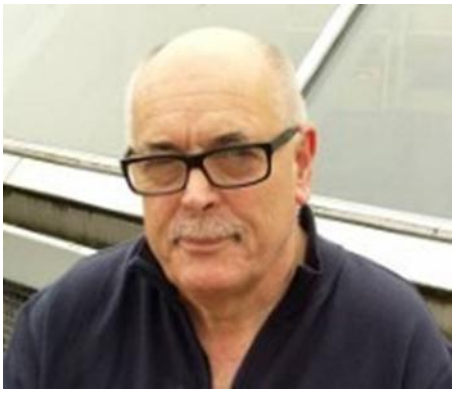
## November Presentation - John Horner

John is no stranger to the Branch as he is a regular attender travelling up from his home in Burton on Trent. Some of you might notice I try to get away promptly after a meeting is concluded – this is to ensure he can catch his train home – if he misses that one he`s got an hour`s wait for the next one and station platforms can be cold draughty places to have to hang about on. John will be speaking about one of his relatives, Richard Horner. This is John`s debut as aspeaker and I hope many of you will turn up to support "one of our own" on Tuesday evening.

Here`s a brief precis on hs talk

***Richard Horner enlisted in the "Dukes" (West Riding Division, 7005/267930), on 1 Apr 1910 (as a Territorial) and was in France in June 1915 as part of 1/7 Battalion. In October the same year he was slightly wounded in the foot, subsequently finding the bullet in his boot. However, in March 1917, Richard was more seriously wounded about the head and eyes, losing his sight. He was repatriated to hospital in Chelsea, London, where he was supported by Sir Arthur Pearson (founder of St Dunstans), himself a blind man, who arranged for him to be trained in shorthand and typing at the Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Hostel in Regents' Park. Richard returned to Holmfirth, having married in 1921, and died in 1971 aged 76, still in the care of St Dunstans. This is his story.***

### *Secretary`s Scribbles…..*



*Dear Members and Friends,*

Welcome to the October 2026 edition of the Branch Newsletter and magazine – number 129

As the year draws us towards winter, we will be arriving and departing in the dark, but a warm welcome awaits all those who attend our meetings.

As always I`m looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible on Tuesday. For those not been before to a meeting , we have free, off street parking, access to the Chesterfield Labour Club bar, before and after the meeting. There is a stair lift up to our first floor meeting room for anyone with mobility issues. We ask for a modest donation (suggested £3) from everyone who attends to cover the cost of the room hire and any fees or expenses requested by our speakers.

As I said in our last Newsletter issue, I was out and about in October delivering presentations to a variety of organisations. Chesterfield.

On Saturday 17th October, I joined with a lovely group – mostly older people (like me !) the Friends of Nottingham Museums meeting at Nottingham Castle where I spoke about "William Henry Johnson VC" Bill Johnson is the only man from Worksop to win the Victoria Cross which he did 108 years ago in WW1. The following Monday I travelled to a meeting of the Friends of Cromford Canal at the Anvil Club, St Ironville where I presented on *"Commemoration & Remembrance of The Great War 1914-1918"*

The next day I was back in Chesterfield at a group called Thom`s Blokes at St Thomas Church, Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield. This time I was speaking about the role of Britain`s Railways in WW1.

November isn`t so busy but there are two dates I really look forward to – November 5th at Ranby House Preparatory School, where together with school chaplain, Fr. Matthew Askey, I will be taking the school`s Remembrance Service. Four days later, again with Fr. Matthew I will be speaking in the Great Hall of Worksop College, again on the subject of Remembrance. The latter is a wonderful setting for such service. On November 17th I will be at St. Theresa`s Church Hall, Warsop where I`ll be discussing "Women Won the War" to the local U3A group

The Speakers` List for next year is now (almost ) complete and is included in this newsletter. We do try to find something of interest for everyone. The WFA 2027 Calendar which Mark Macartney does so much each year to make this a successful publication is available now…remember branches selling the calendars get a share of the income.

Jon-Paul has mentioned it is proposed to organise a branch outing to the Fusiliers` Museum in Bury on Friday 27th November. It is intended to car share for transport. More details at Tuesday`s meeting. Information about the museum can be found here… www.fusiliermuseum.com

All aboard for Tuesday`s meeting.

**Best wishes, Grant,**

**grantcullen@hotmail.com / tgcullen1952@gmail.com**

**07824628638**

**Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2027**

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

**January 5th** Branch AGM + Mobilisation 1914 ! by Tony Bolton

**February 2nd** Haig`s Command, Philosophy and Style - Teacher or Tyrant ? by Phil Watson

**March 2nd** The Yeomanry at Frezenberg Ridge -13th May 1915 by John Beech

**April 6th** What Price a Horse ? -a look at the financial aspects of horses in WW1 by Roy Larkin

**May 4th** A Fine Feat of Arms – The Zeppelin Base Raids, Autumn 1914 by Ian Castle

**June 1st** Crimson Fields. Nurses and Surgeons who served on the front line by Mick Byrne and David Bardell

**July 6th** The Singapore Mutiny of 1915 by John Wilson

**August 3rd** The Story of 11 Field Squadron Royal Engineers during the Falklands Conflict 1982 by Stan Darby

**September 7th** Peter Hart – topic to be advised

**October 5th** The British Army's Expansion during the Great War by Dudley Giles

**November 2nd** Examining reasons why many Barnsley born persons, who lost their lives in the First World War, are absent from commemoration on war memorials in the Barnsley Borough by Linda Hutton

**December 7th** The Cinema in World War 1 by Andy Moody

*October presentation by Peter Hart Welsh Warrior at Ypres*

*Captain Hubert Rees*



Hubert Rees was born the only son of Henry and Harriet Rees in Conway, Wales on 26th March 1882. Rees was educated at Charterhouse School, before joining the 3rd (Militia) Battalion, East Surrey Regiment in December 1900. He served in the Boer War, before he transferred to the regular army as a 2nd lieutenant in the Welch Regiment in 1903. He was promoted to lieutenant on 9th September 1906, and to captain on 12th June 1912.

The personal experience account written by Hubert Rees is one of the finest memoirs of the Great War. The highlights scream for our attention.

Firstly, we have his adventures as a captain in the 2nd Welch Regiment in the 3rd Brigade, (1st Division, I Corps) during the 'Great Retreat'; closely followed by the Battles of the Aisne and Ypres in 1914, when the terrible casualties gave him command of his battalion even though he was still only a captain. It was a responsibility he did not shirk during a series of heroic battles to hold the line against incredible odds.

Let us start back in October 1914 when Rees was still on the Aisne Front. He was a worried man.

Suddenly from the German lines came a tremendous roar of cheering which swept along the Chemin des Dames in great waves of sound. 'Antwerp has fallen,' I thought. The sound was awe inspiring in its volume if merely as an indication of the thousands of men who were immediately opposed to us. The Germans now sang 'Deutschland uber Alles' magnificently and followed it up with the Austrian national anthem. It was one of the most impressive things I ever heard. Thousands of men singing their national anthems obviously under the influence of strong patriotic emotion. After that there fell another intense silence which was broken after the lapse of some couple of minutes by a single cockney voice from our lines on the Vendresse Ridge singing, 'Come, come, come and 'ave tea with me down at the old Bull

and Bush.' The descent from the sublime to the ridiculous was excruciatingly funny and needless to say the British army joined in their reply with enthusiasm. If I had any doubts before this episode as to who was going to win the war, I never had any afterwards.

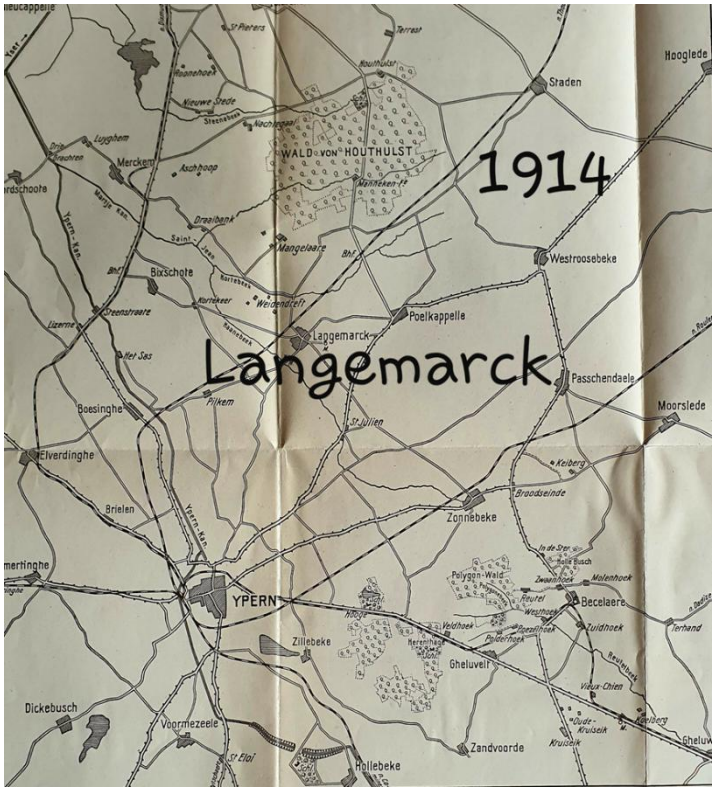
The later fighting on the Aisne front marked the beginning of trench warfare for the BEF. But to the north of the Aisne there was a race by both sides to uncover the flanks of their opponents. This was characterised as the 'Race to the Sea' but that was always a nonsense. The Channel ports were in the Germans sights; they *had* to be stopped. The BEF was transferred north with I Corps moving to the Ypres area.

But the Germans were also moving towards Ypres. General Erich von Falkenhayn, the new Chief of General Staff, had created a Fourth Army which was to advance, regardless of casualties, with its right wing resting on the coast, first towards Dunkirk and Calais, before pushing south.

The reserve corps formations that made up Fourth Army were composed mainly of recruits and conscripts only called up since the onset of war. This meant that although they could carry out basic foot drill, they had negligible weaponry or tactical field training. The Battle of the Marne had overturned the German plans, and Falkenhayn considered his gamble justified to try and gain a significant strategic victory on the Western Front in 1914.

Both sides were trying to advance, but the BEF was badly outnumbered. By 20 October, the IV Corps could do nothing more than hold the line round Ypres, while the I Corps started to move forward ready for an intended 'offensive'. As the Germans pushed forward, the French cavalry were ejected from the Houthulst Forest, and the village of Passchendaele was also lost.

## *Langemarck Map*




On 21 October, still unaware of the threat his forces were facing, John French ordered the 1st Division to attack from Langemarck towards Poelcappelle. The 3rd Brigade took Langemarck with the 2nd Welch in support.

Ferrar, the adjutant, was with brigade headquarters awaiting orders. Presently he arrived, galloping down the road. I was ordered to move with my company through the village and support the attack of the SWB, who were said to be doing splendidly. Ferrar was convinced that we should capture a hostile battery, which was shelling the village, and urged me to hurry up. I met Colonel Morland on the road, when I got on to it, and he gave me what information he had, which he admitted was very limited, and urged me to proceed with due caution. We shook out into artillery formation and managed to dodge the enemy's shells in the village. The road out to Poelcapelle on the east, ran across very open ground, and I halted, when I saw it, to explore. I was promptly urged by some staff officer to go straight up it in fours, as the SWB were in a bad

way 500 yards up the road. I refused to move without putting out an advance guard and started off half a dozen scouts up the road. They had not got 10 yards away from the cover of the last house before a machine gun opened on them at close range and they threw themselves flat. I yelled directions to them, until they got back under cover, and then turned to express my views to the staff officer, but he had disappeared.

They pushed forward to find the SWB in a shallow trench and took up position along a hedge to their left. They were under fire from some farm buildings up the road and began to return fire

**Private Samuel Knight**.

*They are 400 yards in front of us. They appear to be in confusion. We bang away like mad. It is fascinating. I concentrate my fire on a space between a farmhouse and a hay rick. They are seeking shelter. I am 'potting' them one by one into this space. Bullets fall amongst us. Some of my comrades are wounded. I am unhurt.*

On 22 October the Langemarck came under heavy fire.

The Germans opened fire with eight 8-inch howitzers on Langemarck and in about 4 hours, reduced the town to ashes. It was really a splendid spectacle. A number of field guns were also employed. I saw a field gun shell strike the spire of the church just below the cross and send the cross some 20 yards into the air. The church shortly afterwards caught fire and went up in a sheet of flames. A little time afterwards, Colonel Morland and battalion headquarters came to my headquarters. He had had two houses blown down over his head in succession in the village and as he remarked, it was safer in the front line!

Another account came from **Captain Frederick Packe** who was in an exposed salient at the end of the village

*The effect of lying out in the trenches under the fire of these 'crumps' is awfully trying to the nerves as one is absolutely helpless against them.*

*They also turned their attention to the town which they simply and literally destroyed – each house in turn appeared to get a shell in it and when it did, that house ceased to exist. The fine old church was set fire to by a shell, and we saw it blazing behind us – may England never see the horrors we see in this country!*

On 23 October, the Germans attacked.

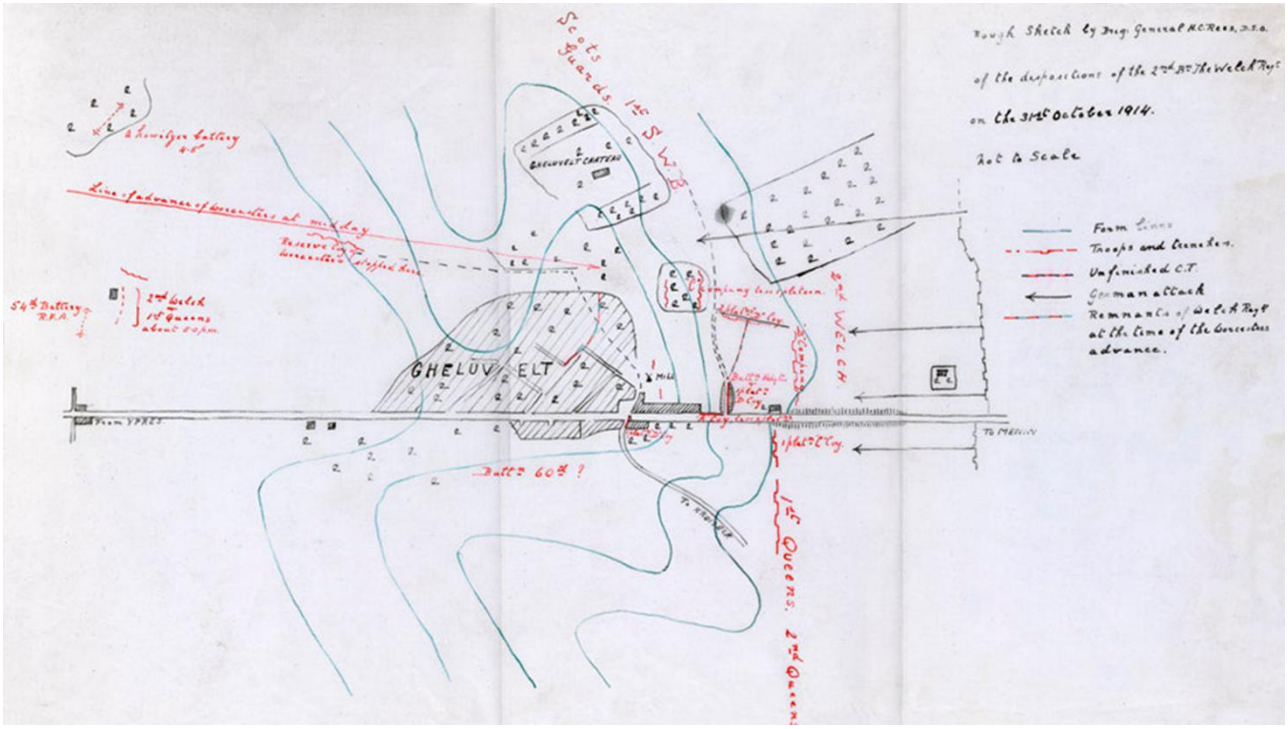
We inflicted very heavy losses on them. At the corner of my hedge, we had a machine gun. Colonel Morland and I stood by this gun for about an hour. We actually saw the Germans form up for attack and opened fire on their first line at 1,250 yards. From that time onwards, we had every form of target from a company in mass, who tried to put a large haystack between us and them, but who formed on the wrong side of it, to a battalion in fours near the edge of the Houlthurst Forest. Sergeant Edward Longdon, who was firing the gun, told me that evening that he reckoned he'd killed a 1,000 Germans. I put it at 400-500 casualties!

Hubert Rees was awarded the DSO for his conduct at Langemarke. There is no doubt that the BEF was struggling and would have probably been doomed to defeat, but for the arrival of the French IX Corps. The French would take over the left of the line around Ypres, relieving the 1st Division around Langemarck, which went into reserve.

The Germans had been held but had not given up. Falkenhayn created a new Army Group Fabeck to insert into the line between the Fourth and Sixth Armies with the intention of smashing through the Allied lines between Ypres and Zandvoorde. While this force was being moved up ready for a planned coordinated attack with the Fourth and Sixth Armies on 30 October, the Fourth Army would launch a covering attack on Gheluvelt at 05.30 on 29 October. At first, they made some gains but then came the British counter-attacks. By this time Rees was commanding 'D' Company.

**On the 29th October, the Welch was ordered to retake Gheluvelt.**

***Gheluvelt Map***




The 29th October was a day of great fighting and the last great open warfare battle that I have seen in this war. The enemy attacked all along the line and most of the I Corps was thrown in to counter-attack. I was despatched with my company to support Evan's company, which attacked south of the village. I lost touch with Evans and with the rest of the battalion but eventually reached a farm in the direction of Kruiseecke, but nearer Gheluvelt than Kruiseecke. The chances of a successful advance beyond this farm appeared very limited. The Germans saw us at the farm and shelled it energetically until they set it on fire. We stayed in the smoke and things got a trifle quieter. I couldn't make head or tail of the situation. I saw three battalions one after the other try to cross an open stretch by an orchard about 800 yards in front and all three get driven back by machine gun fire, after losing very heavily. They advanced from the Zandvoorde direction and probably belonged to the 7th Division. I sent to reconnoitre to my left and found Evans' company; Evans having been hit. I moved in that direction and joined the Queen's in a sunken lane, where we were within 50 yards of

the enemy, who judging by the row they were making, seemed very pleased with themselves.

On 30 October, the Welch were holding a line of trenches just in front of Gheluvelt, north of the Menin road, the 1st Queen's on their right, south of the road, and the SWB on their left holding Gheluvelt Chateau.

Colonel Morland's headquarters were in a sunken stretch of lane, about 300 yards behind the trenches, just in front of the village. I reported to him there and my company was held in reserve, one platoon being left at the barricade across the Menin road in the centre of the village, and two, under 2nd Lieutenant Alan Young, increased the garrison of a trench on our left some 50 yards from the end of the sunken lane. I dug myself a niche in the face of the bank and settled down to try and get some sleep. There was very little chance of that. It became evident that a big attack was impending. We were steadily shelled all day with guns and howitzers of all calibres. The enemy were reported massing in our front and at one time, tried to advance but were checked by Lieutenant George Melville bringing a machine gun into action. Unfortunately, the position was seen and the gun knocked out by a direct hit. Melville was badly wounded in the knee. We were unable to get him away until the evening. Most of us had very narrow escapes that day

On 31 October, the Germans launched a powerful assault, backed by strong artillery support to seize Gheluvelt which controlled the road route into Ypres.

As soon as it became light, the storm broke. The trenches, the sunken lane and the village were deluged with shells of all calibres. It was impossible to move in the sunken lane, and many men were hit. The sunken lane itself was indefensible so Colonel Morland decided to move back to the front edge of the village and hold that with what men he could collect. Alan Young had come in from my two platoons on the left very badly wounded by a rifle bullet. I crawled down to the end of the

sunken lane to see if I could get back any of his men, who were now in a hopeless situation. There was a partially-dug communication trench, only a couple of feet deep between the end of the sunken lane and them. A number of men were trying to run across this 50 yards to the sunken lane, instead of crawling up this trench. I shouted to them to try the trench, but no voice could be heard in the uproar. About twenty-five men attempted the run, but not a single man got more than halfway, and they seemed to me to be all killed outright. It was useless waiting, so I went back and up the ditch alongside the Menin road. I started moving the platoon to follow Colonel Morland. The shell fire around the barricade was very violent. Two shells burst in the house behind which I was sheltered, one cut the signpost neatly in half at the corner, another came through a wall about 10 yards away and killed a man who was passing. Eventually, I got away with about a dozen men, four of whom were carrying Young in a mackintosh sheet, and one man had a machine gun of which the tripod had been blown to pieces and for which we had no ammunition. Several of my dozen men had been slightly wounded by shrapnel, so, without seeing anyone at all, I went through the northern outskirts of Gheluvelt and finally arrived at the battery position of the 54th Battery, RFA, commanded by Major Edward Peel, to whom I reported that I did not think that there were more than 100 men of the Welch Regiment left. He obviously disbelieved me, and I fancy seriously thought of putting me under arrest for spreading alarmist reports. I confess to being very badly shaken, the stock of my rifle had been shot through in two places and the strap of my water bottle cut.

**Lieutenant Ralph Blewitt** an officer with the 54th Battery, RFA was a witness to the arrival of Rees and his men,

*The first group of men properly under control came back and I saw it was Rees in the Welch Regiment. He had, I suppose, about fifteen or twenty men with him. The major asked me who he was and whether I knew him and whether he was the sort of man who would come back. As he had got*

*a DSO only a few days before I was able to convince the major that he was one of the best and that there was no question of his coming back unnecessarily. Rees then came over to the battery, I have rarely seen a man in a more pitiable state, he was muddy and unshaven of course, but barely able to talk for sheer weariness, his equipment had for the most part been shot off him and he was absolutely stunned and almost speechless. By good luck we happened to have some hot tea going in the battery at the moment and a cup and a slice of bread and jam and a cigarette worked wonders. After profuse thanks for the first meal he had had that day, on the major's suggestion, he took his command forward to a half-dug trench which was on the crest about 200 yards in front of the battery and manned it much to the satisfaction of the battery.*

Along with the famous attack of the Worcesters, they received orders that every available man was to counter-attack.

I went on to see what was going on and just reached the end of the village, when heard my name shouted and, turning back, I saw Colonel Morland. He shouted to me to come to him saying that these ten men attacks were no use. He added that Ferrar had been killed leading a bayonet charge of a few men somewhere near the barricade, and that the battalion had been wiped out. Colonel Morland and I started to walk back towards the 54th Battery, and men from all the regiments involved were running back in the same direction, we endeavoured to rally a few of the groups and collected some twenty-five men of the Welch Regiment by the time we had reached the guns.

While the remaining officers assessed the situation the Germans intervened to deadly effect.

A shell burst in front mortally wounding Colonel Morland on my right. It was a final blow. Colonel Morland was a terrible loss. I never saw him the slightest degree upset by anything that happened. He remained to the very end as cool and collected as if he was on parade at home. Half

an hour after I had got Colonel Morland carried off on a door, a message was brought to me (as I now commanded the Welch Regiment) which appointed Colonel Morland to command the 3rd Infantry Brigade.

At this time his command consisted of about twenty-five men and just one other junior officer.

These men I spread out as a firing line across a turnip field a little in front of the guns and went to interview Captain Robinson. I suggested that he should open fire on some houses about 500 yards away on the south side of the Menin road which were obviously full of snipers. He said he had got a few rounds of high explosives up for trial and I remarked that it seemed a priceless opportunity!

**Lieutenant Ralph Blewitt** was the officer called into action.

*An infantry officer came up and said that there were snipers in a house well out this side of Gheluvelt on the main road, and would we do something about it. After we had put about half-a-dozen rounds of PS and two HE into it the nuisance abated. I remember the fact that it was two HE as at that time we only had sixteen rounds per battery. Three rounds per subsection, they were experimental and had only to be shot off under the most careful circumstances, with a long report on its effect etc., and we hadn't shot any yet. We were highly elated at the effect on the house which gave forth clouds of brick dust. And the infantry officer was full of thanks and praise.*

Then a new threat as the Germans brought up a gun to the barricade in the middle of Gheluvelt. Blewett asked permission to take an 18-pounder on to the road to deal with it – almost a duel. The German gun fired first and missed - Blewitt did not give then a second chance.

*I saw a flash over the barricade and realised at once that it was a gun - at the moment I had the impression that it must be a howitzer - even before the crash which followed a few seconds later. It was close enough to obscure with the smoke the gun and even the fuse setter who was*

*alongside me, however, as is so often the case it was all noise and smoke, and no damage was done. No time was to be lost, and we shot down the road about fourteen rounds in all. I thought one might stop for a moment to see the result as all was smoke. When it cleared there was the joyful sight of the barricade with a very hearty hole in it, through which one could see a gun down on one wheel and no signs of life at all.*

If the Germans had pushed home their attack during the afternoon, there was nothing to stop them. The British were crumbling.

About 5pm, I was handed the command of the 1st Queen's, which consisted of twenty-one men. Major Charles Watson of the Queen's, who put me in command, went off to act as brigade major of the 3rd Brigade. My force consisting of these two battalions only totalled some sixty men and two officers, the combined strength of the two battalions that morning could hardly have been less than 1,200 men.

At 02.00 on 1 November, Rees was ordered to withdraw the combined Welch and Queen's, south of the Menin road and dig in on a position - which in the Third Battle of Ypres would be known as the Tower Hamlets Ridge.

Shortly afterwards they were relieved. Rees reorganised as best he could, but even after collecting stragglers and the fortuitous arrival of a 50-strong draft, he still only had 148 men and four officers.

Their battle was not over for he was ordered to counter-attack to retake the trenches they had just vacated.

We advanced past Stirling Castle and Herenthage Chateau under a good deal of shrapnel fire. Hewitt was hit on the leg with one bit, Corder retired with a ball through the forearm, and I got badly lamed by a hit on the foot. When we arrived at the edge of the wood, on the western side of Tower Hamlets Ridge, I was told that Brigadier General Charles FitzClarence had ordered the troops there to charge and retake the lost trenches. Before we had much grip of the situation, we found ourselves

charging into the darkness, led by General FitzClarence - it was then quite dark - with the Gloucesters on our right. We promptly came under a storm of rifle and machine gun bullets, and I found myself in a depression in the ground, lying extremely flat! The men whirled away, back rather faster than they had come. When the air was not quite so full of lead, I had a look round and found one of my quartermaster sergeants, Michael Flavin by name, lying next to me. We agreed that we night as well return and crawled back.

They took up impromptu positions in rifle pits along the edge of the wood, where there were elements of six separate regiments. Rees had his work cut our organising the defences.

On 3 November they came under heavy shell fire.

It was one of the most trying days I ever spent. A German artillery observer established himself in a house 150 yards away and we could hear him making the corrections for his gun fire on our trenches. A 4.2" howitzer shell burst at arm's length to my right at 10an, a 5.9" was 3 yards over at noon, and another 4.2" at arm's length to the left at 4pm. These were the really close shaves. I got out of my trench at one time and lay in a ditch a little distance away, as I thought I would rather get killed outside.

They were relieved on 4 November. And move back, first into support near Herenthage Chateau, and then after relief by the cavalry back to Bellewarde Farm. He reorganised his men into two companies.

There was no rest for the Welch as they were ordered on the afternoon of 5 November to move up in support a brigade counter-attack to stem a German breakthrough towards Zillebeke. This began a series of abortive attacks on the 6 and 8 November, and movements around various sketched out lines of trenches. Finally, on the night of the 8/9 November, the exhausted men were relieved by the 6th Cavalry Brigade and crawled into some shallow shelters in Sanctuary Wood at 3am,

where they had 24 hours rest – the only respite they got during the First Battle of Ypres. Even so they suffered three casualties in Sanctuary Wood – nowhere was ‘safe’ in the Ypres salient.

We had had numerous congratulatory telegrams from every commander in the field who had anything to do with us and their receipt always presaged some more diabolical battle than the last. I went down to see Grant, who had returned to his job as brigade major, and remarked that when we had a message from the King, it would be time to dig a very large hole in the ground and wait there until the storm had abated. He said, ‘You had better start now! Here it is!’

On 10 November, Rees was ordered by Lord Cavan to take over the trenches on the eastern edge of Shrewsbury Forest. He was ordered to prepare a new line just inside the wood. This was easier said than done.

I only had 200 men and six officers, and when I had established sixty men in the Guards old line to cover the working party, I had very few men available to dig. On examination, the wood proved rather worse than the description given to it. I came to the conclusion that the line proposed at brigade headquarters was too far back and would expose the flank of the London Scottish, so I set off through the wood, putting groups of four and six men to dig rifle pits as best they could, whenever we could get a footing on the ground among the fallen trees. It was a very formidable obstacle race, and the bullets made the wood still more unpleasant. Shortly before dawn, we had a rough line of rifle pits, in the tangle of fallen trees. We were lucky enough to complete the work before the rain came. It came down in sheets.

The wood was a sniper’s paradise and continuous rifle shooting went on with parties of Germans, who obtained a footing at the edge of the wood. Then on 13 November the Germans made a bombing attack on the trenches at the junction with the London Scottish.

**Private Gwilym John** brought me the first news. He rushed up saying, ‘The Germans have broken through on the left, bring every man you’ve got!’ and disappeared again. As I fell the men in, *Lieutenant Jack Gilbey* appeared with the blood streaming down his face, having had half of his cap taken off by machine gun fire, and with a piece of metal stuck in his head. I got together twenty-eight men, mostly orderlies and senior NCOs, and started off. I posted my two machine guns to check any advance beyond the wood, there being no reserves of any sort left. When we got to the trenches, we found Private John had collected a mixed force and reoccupied them. I did some adjusting, then went back and wrote a letter to Lord Cavan describing the situation. Cavan's reply to my letter made me laugh for the first time for several days. It ran, if I recollect aright, ‘Dear Rees, Thanks so much for your encouraging note. Should the line be broken on your right or left, I am sure I can trust you to hold on. I hope I have a cavalry regiment arriving shortly.’



Lieutenant Jack Gilbey.

One of his officers, Captain Thomas Aldworth was now clamouring for assistance.

I had nothing whatever to send him, so taking my cue from Lord Cavan's letter, I sent him a similar one and hoped for the best. The difficulty of feeding the men and especially getting the tea to them was immense. The first 48 hours, they had nothing. That night, I determined they should have their tea and went along the whole line with dixies with Regimental Sergeant Major Charles Hampton. He was splendid. Getting those dixies of tea over or through those fallen trees under a shower of rifle bullets in pitch darkness was an experience. The men didn't improve matters by shouting, 'TEA UP!' and all getting out of their pits to secure some of it.

Then as the sag of Ypres came to an end for the Welch, another act of selfless heroism by that relatively unsung hero Private Gwilym John.

We were relieved by the Royal West Kents by 1.30am on the 14th November. Private John volunteered to remain behind and cover the digging of a new trench near the German field gun. He collected six volunteers and rejoined us next day at Hooge. Private John told me he was a religious teacher in private life. I can safely say I never met a more determined man. I recommended him for a VC, in which I was strongly supported by Lord Cavan. He was granted the DCM. He was unfortunately killed at Kimmel at the end of the month.

On the 15th November, the brigade was withdrawn and billeted that night at Ypres.

I have never seen troops in such a state of filth or exhaustion. Probably no troops have been called upon to endure a greater mental or physical strain. Two shells which fell on our house in Ypres that night and blew all the windows in, completed the final chapter of the Battle of Ypres as far as we were concerned.

The Welch Regiment suffered 203 fatal casualties during the fighting at Ypres from 22nd September to 14th November. There were over 400 wounded, and Hubert Rees was the only officer not to have been killed or wounded of those who had gone out to France in August 1914.

After more bitter fighting at Givenchy, in February 1915, Rees was sent back to the UK, where he served as a staff officer with the newly formed 36th (Welsh) Division.

***Picture of Brigadier Rees***



Following this, in June 1916, Rees was placed in temporary command of the 94th Brigade, 31st Division. This formation has gone down in legend for the doomed attack by the 'Pals' battalions on the German trenches at Serre during the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1st July 1916. Rees had only just taken over the brigade, he was dubious as to the plans he inherited and pessimistic as to the likely outcome, but there was nothing

he could do. That dreadful day he had to watch as his men were slaughtered.

Rees was then posted to command the 11th Brigade, 4th Division and saw more action on both the Somme and Ypres fronts. After an interval on home service, he was sent back to the Western Front to command the 149th Brigade, 50th (Northumbrian) Division in March 1917. After more tough fighting during the Battle of Arras his health broke down and he had to be invalided home in July 1917.

Rees returned to action when he was put in command of the 150th Brigade, 50th Division in February 1918. Sadly, 1918 would prove the toughest year yet for Hubert Rees his brigade clung on for dear life, desperate to prevent a German breakthrough. Firstly, in the gigantic Operation Michael offensive in the Somme area commencing on 21 March. Then he was in the thick of it, trying to hold the line along the Lys River after the German thrust of Operation Georgette on 9 April. The culmination came in the Aisne sector, where the 150th Brigade took up defensive positions on the Chemin des Dames. The brigade was torn to shreds in the whirlwind that was Operation Blücher launched on 27 May 1918. Rees himself was captured with only the ‘consolation’ of a private conversation next day with Kaiser Wilhelm. For the rest of the war, Hubert Rees was a prisoner, only released to return home in December 1918.

Truly he was a Welsh Warrior.

# Yorkshire Wartime Experience 2026

As mentioned in this newsletter several months ago, the above was held over a weekend, at a location near Doncaster.

Several of our members attended, including Jane, our Branch Treasurer to whom we are indebted for the following pictures.















# Turkey's underwater plan to save Royal Navy graveyard

## A technique commonly used to protect oil rigs is being applied to shipwrecks on a large scale for the first time



Divers explore the wreck of HMS Lundy on the seabed of the Dardanelles

They have lain on the seabed for more than a century, silent testimony to one of the bloodiest Allied campaigns of the First World War.

Now, a new battle is under way in the clear waters of the Dardanelles – a fight to save dozens of wrecked battleships, frigates and destroyers from the corrosive effects of seawater.

An innovative project has been launched to preserve the wrecks, which were sunk by Turkish torpedoes, mines and artillery fire during the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign of 1915.

In that year, Britain and its allies tried to capture Constantinople, knock Ottoman Turkey out of the war and secure the Dardanelles Straits so that supplies could be sent to the hard-pressed Russians.

The initial focus of the project is HMS Louis, a British destroyer that was hit by Turkish coastal artillery in October 1915.



Bilge Çingigiray, a world record holding free-diver, launched the project with a dive to the wreck of HMS Louis

The Laforey-class destroyer sank in Suvla Bay, one of the focal points of the Gallipoli campaign, where British and other Allied forces landed in August 1915.

To prevent wrecks such as these from rusting away to nothing, the Turkish authorities are installing so-called “sacrificial” anodes, rods made of zinc, copper and aluminium, which divert the natural process of corrosion away from the shipwreck.

The anodes are connected to the wreck by metal cables. Instead of the British wreck losing electrons and corroding, the anodes corrode instead, in a process known as cathodic protection.

Six anodes have been placed on the seabed around HMS Louis, one of more than 100 Allied and Turkish wrecks that lie scattered on the seabed of the Dardanelles, the strategically crucial strait that leads from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Marmara and Istanbul.

It is one of the greatest concentrations of First World War wrecks in the world. They form part of the Gallipoli Underwater Historical Park, a large area which is proving increasingly popular with recreational divers.

“Nearly 100 ships, both large and small, were sunk and hundreds of men lost their lives on them,” Yusuf Kartal, the historical site’s head of projects, told The Telegraph.

“We began looking into ways to protect these historic shipwrecks before corrosion causes them to deteriorate and eventually disappear completely. After all, these wrecks are not just ships. They are important historical monuments that tell the stories of the people who lost their lives there.”




One of the ‘sacrificial anodes’ in place for HMS Louis

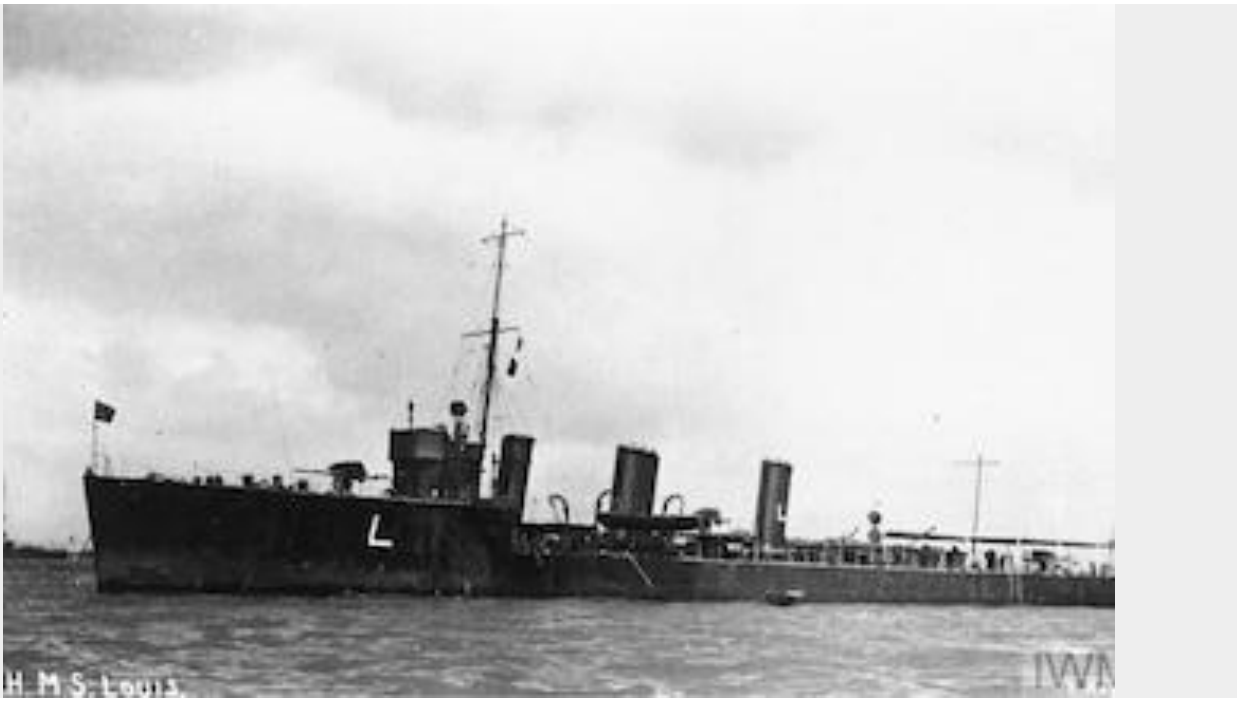
Cathodic protection has long been used to protect oil rigs, underwater pipelines and piers, but this is the first time that the technique has been used to preserve shipwrecks on such a scale.

The need is pressing – climate change is bringing rising water temperatures and increased bacteria, which may hasten the degradation of the battleships.

“Before developing the protection plan, we carried out a series of tests and analyses on the wreck, including chemical composition analysis, microstructure examinations, mechanical property tests, corrosion analysis and water chemistry analysis,” said Mr Kartal.

“We then calculated all the forces acting on the wreck and used these results to develop a detailed protection plan.”

It is hoped that the method will extend the lives of the wrecks for decades.




Many of the wrecks in the Dardanelles are Royal Navy vessels

HMS Louis lies at a depth of around 15m, which is shallow compared with some of the other sunken ships.

“Wrecks in shallow water tend to be a bit beaten up by the waves. The deeper the wreck is, the better preserved it is,” Alexander Dawson, a professional underwater photographer who dived on the wreck in the summer, told The Telegraph.

“On HMS Louis, you can still see the intact boilers from the ship.”

He has carried out around 25 dives on wrecks in the Dardanelles in the last couple of years.

“It’s a really cool place,” said Mr Dawson, a Swede who won the 2024 Underwater Photographer of the Year award for his haunting image of the skeletal remains of minke whales beneath the ice in Greenland.

“The best wrecks are at a depth of 50 metres and below – they are really well preserved.”



The wreck of SS Carthage sits upright off the coast of Çanakkale

Deeper wrecks are also less likely to be damaged by the fishing nets of modern-day trawlers that work the area.

“If it works as well as their calculations suggest then it’s going to be a great project. If we could do the same thing for other wrecks around the world, it would be a huge step forward in preserving them for future generations,” Mr Dawson said.

To mark the launch of the project, Bilge Çingigiray, a Turkish national free-diver and Guinness World Record holder, carried out a free-dive down to HMS Louis.

The Deep Heritage project hopes to protect 17 Dardanelles wrecks over the next few years. It is all part of a plan to make the Dardanelles a prime destination for diving tourism. Already there are 29 locations that are available to divers: 27 wrecks and two reefs.

“We have set the goal of making the Gallipoli Underwater Historical Park one of the leading diving centres in the world,” said İsmail Kaşdemir, the head of the Gallipoli Historical Area.



Divers explore the wreck of a barnacle-encrusted minesweeper

Many of the shipwrecks are British. HMS Majestic, for example, was a battleship that was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat at the entrance to the Dardanelles in May 1915. The wreck lies at around 25m and is largely intact.

The SS Milo, which lies at just seven metres depth, was a steam-driven passenger ship requisitioned by the Admiralty and fitted with generators and searchlights to illuminate the battlefields.

“We need to establish priorities,” said Mr Kartal. “We want to focus on wrecks that are still relatively intact and that we have a chance of preserving with this method.”




| Month | Location | Photographer |
|---|---|---|
| January | Philosophe British Cemetery | Thomas Capiaux |
| February | Tower Hill Memorial | Brian Harris for CWGC |
| March | Leeds Pals Memorial, Colsterdale | Anonymous |
| April | Cuckoo Passage Cemetery | Stephen Kerr |
| May | 90ème R.I. Memorial | Anonymous |
| June | Kitchener Memorial, Marwick Head | David Tattersfield |
| July | Menin Gate, Ypres | Anonymous |
| August | The Nek | Brian Harris for CWGC |
| September | Louvencourt Military Cemetery | John White |
| October | The Household Cavalry Memorial | Anonymous |
| November | Pozieres Memorial | Stephen Kerr |
| December | Vimy Memorial | Carl Liversage |
| January 2028 | Granezza British Cemetery | Andrew Holmes |
| Cover | Vis-en-Artois British Cemetery | Martin Barry. |

## JANUARY– JUNE 2027



**Philosophe British Cemetery** **January 2027**
Photographer – Thomas Capiaux



**Tower Hill Memorial** **February 2027**
Photographer – Brian Harris for the CWGC



**Leeds Pals Memorial, Colsterdale March 2027**
Photographer – Anonymous



**Cuckoo Passage Cemetery** **April 2027**
Photographer – Stephen Kerr



**90ème R.I. Memorial** **May 2027**
Photographer – Anonymous



**Kitchener Memorial, Marwick Head** **June 2027**
Photographer – David Tattersfield

## JULY – December 2027 (+January 2028)



Menin Gate, Ypres July 2027
Photographer – Anonymous



~~The~~ Nek August 2027
Photographer – Brian Harris for CWGC



~~Louvencourt~~ Military Cemetery September 2027
Photographer – John White



~~The~~ Household Cavalry Memorial October 2027
Photographer – Anonymous



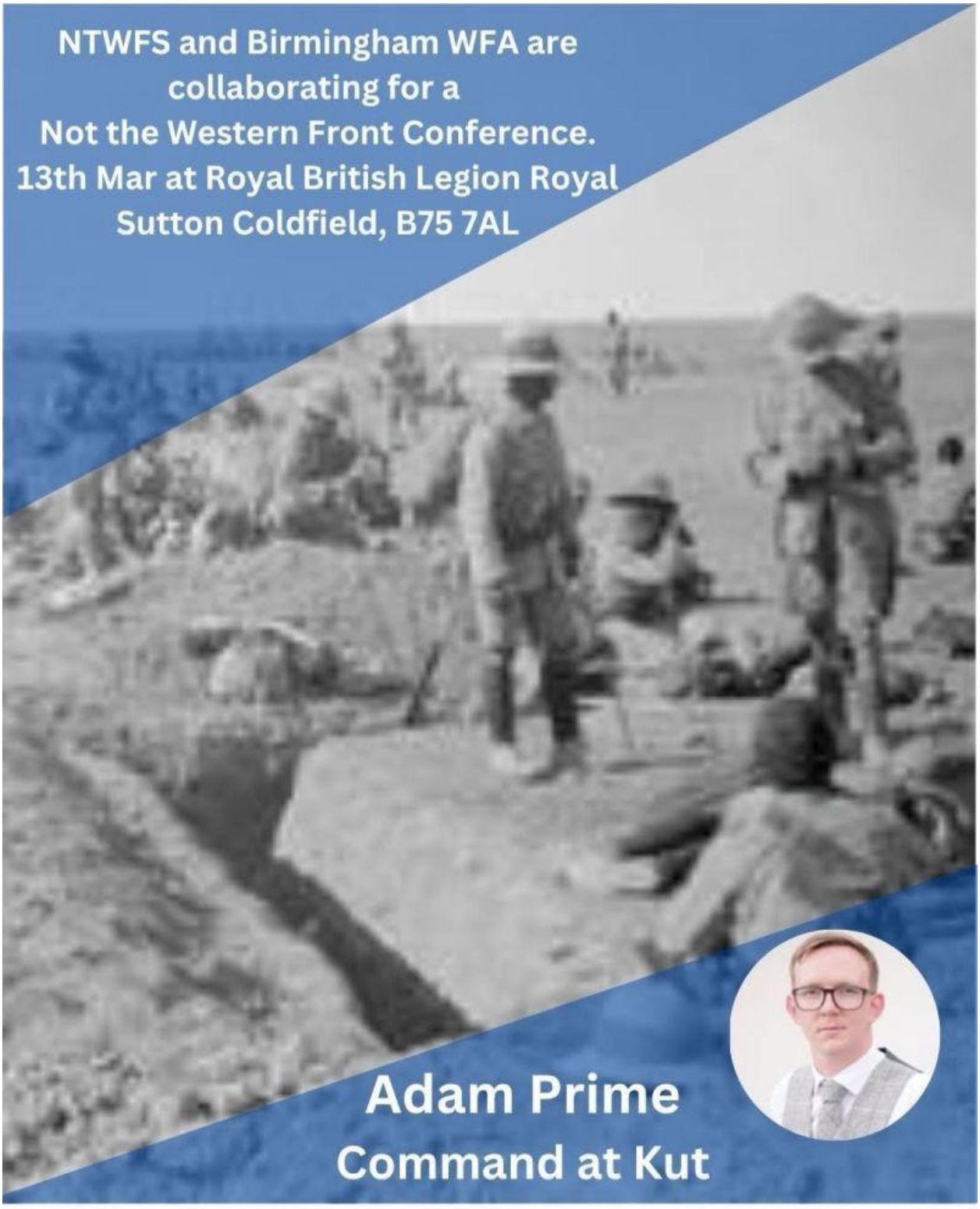
Pozieres Memorial November 2027
Photographer – Stephen Kerr



Vimy Memorial December 2027
Photographer – Carl Liversage



~~Granezza~~ British Cemetery January 2028
Photographer – Andrew Holmes


NTWFS and Birmingham WFA are
collaborating for a
Not the Western Front Conference.
13th Mar at Royal British Legion Royal
Sutton Coldfield, B75 7AL
Adam Prime
Command at Kut




# Branded Goods Shop - Items to purchase



**Lapel Badge**

£4.55 (inc. P&P)




**Despatch Bag**

£36.35 (inc P&P)



**Record Bag**

£28.35 (incl P&P)



**Shoulder Bag**

£28.35 (inc. P&P)




**Messenger Bag**

£28.35 (inc. P&P)



**Cap**

£8.55 (inc. P&P)



**Coffee Mug**

£10.65 (inc. P&P)



**Mousemat**

£7.00 (inc. P&P)



**Classic Tie**

£14.55 (inc. P&P)



**Fridge Tile Magnet**

£3.55 (inc P&P)



**WFA Fridge Magnet**

£5.55 (inc. P&P)




**WFA Bookmark**

£2.95 (inc P&P)

# Sherwood Boys

## Biography of a Battalion

Join us for a talk by author

Michael Somerville

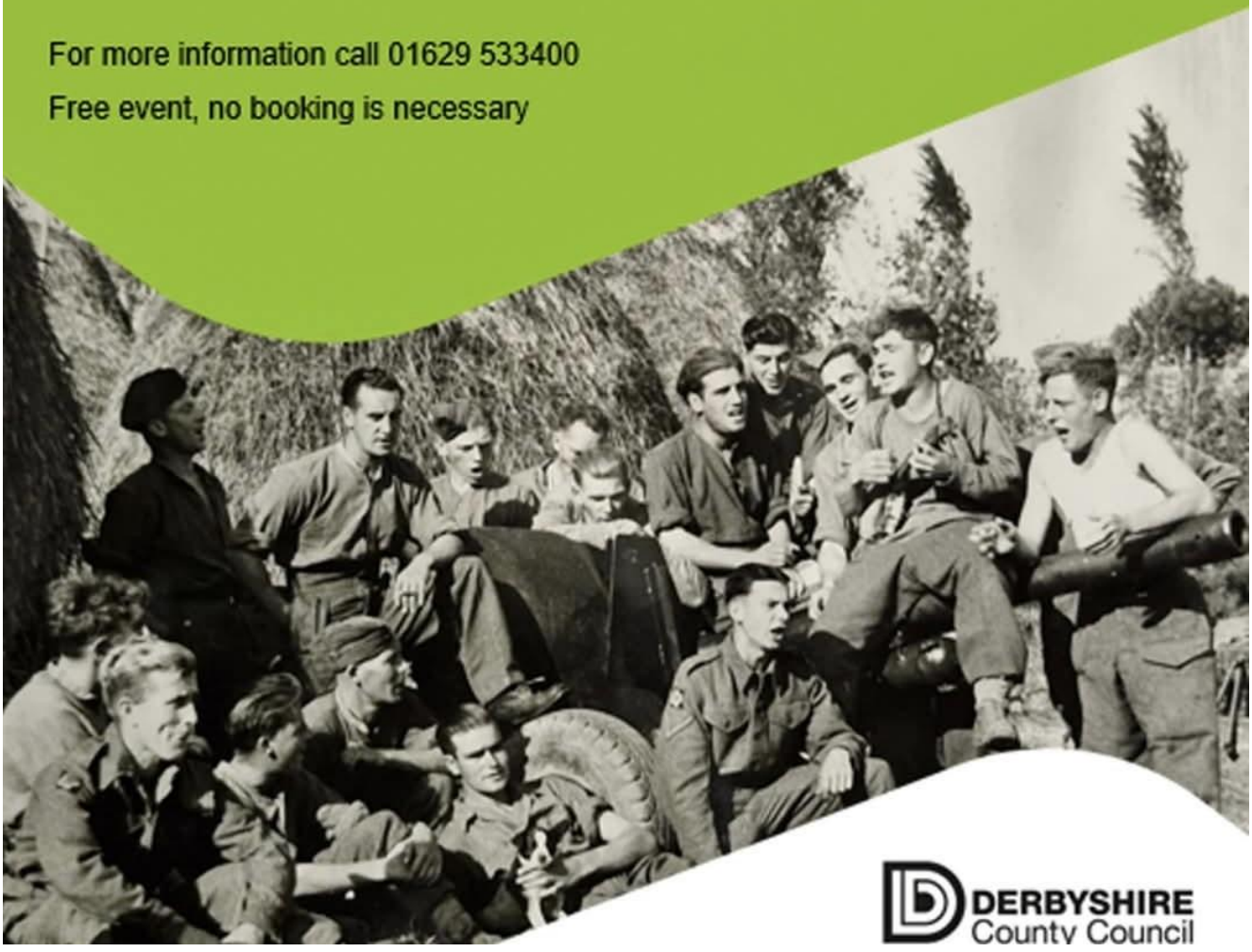
**Chesterfield Library**

**Thursday 5th November**

**10 am**

For more information call 01629 533400

Free event, no booking is necessary



DERBYSHIRE County Council