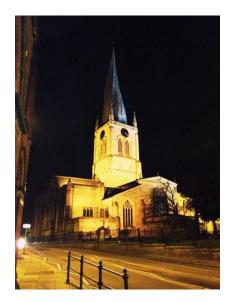


The Spire Sentinel



The Newsletter of The Branch of The Front



& Magazine Chesterfield Western Association

ISSUE 113 - July 2025

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



Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2025

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

January	7th	. AGM + `Quintinshill 22 nd May 1915 - Britain`s Worst Railway Disaster` Grant Cullen. Meeting Cancelled	
February	4th	AGM + Villages at War - Clowne and Barlborough in World War 1 by Paul Burkitt.	
March	4th	Andrea Heatherington - " Scamps in Khaki " - criminal deserters' Deserters sometimes turned to crime to support themselves whilst on the run.	
April	1 st	Grant Cullen Britain`s Worst Railway Disaster - Quintinshill - 22 nd May 1915	
Мау	6th	"Combat motivation and morale in British Empire armies in the two world wars'" by Prof. Gary Sheffield	
June	3rd	'The Forgotten Blitz and the Defeat of the Zeppelins'. by Ian Castle	
July	1st	Jutland - Clash of Titans by Scott Lindgren	
August	5th	Roy Larkin - Follow a Supply Column and others through mobilisation and the total chaos of the opening weeks of the Great War	
September	2nd	' <i>Motorcycle Despatch Riders In 1914</i> ' by Nick Shelley.Nick describes the motorcyclists' contribution to the 1914 campaign, using their own words and their own previously unpublished photographs.	
October	7th	After Kut - What ?. Tony Bolton	
November	4th	Peter Hart topic to be confirmed	
December	2nd	An Historians Wrongful Assumption ? - a short look at Sniping and how it developed in World War One. By Morris Charlton	

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Chairman `s Notes.... Branch chair Jon-Paul Harding



I hope you have all been enjoying the good weather we have been having. Last month's talk was excellent, a very interesting and wellpresented talk on Zeppelin Raids. So onto July's talk which I am sure will be an interesting evening.

On June the 8th I attended and participated part in the Combined Irish Parade in London .The parade was lead out by the Band of the Irish Guards and then by 2 pipe and drum bands. The march went down Whitehall and then stopped at the Cenotaph

for wreath laying and a small ceremony ,after which the Parade marched off and onto King Charles street where the Parade formed up for inspection by the Chief of Staff of the General Staff General Sir Roly Walker KCB DSO. It was certainly an honour to have taken part in this event. I have included some photographs in this newsletter

Grant and Mark Macartney will be attending the Worksop Armed Forces Day 28th and 29th June while I'll be standing on 13th of July for the Armed Forces Event at Poolsbrook in Chesterfield. Although Mark cannot attend meetings he does a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes, making sure everything we do is put on the main WFA website as well as keeping our Facebook page up to date. Mark of course is Branded Goods Trustee for the WFA.

I want to thank everyone for their continued support of the branch and this is your branch so if any one has any ideas for talks, speakers or trips please speak to either Grant or myself.

July Meeting – Dr Scott Lindgren



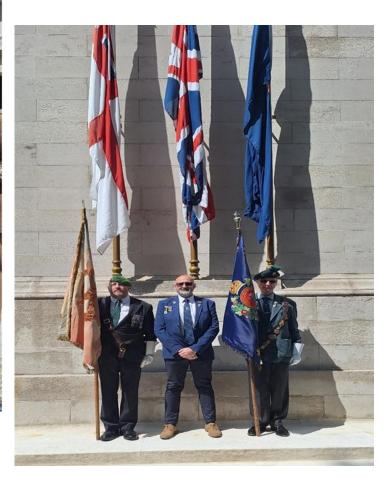
Dr Scott Lindgren is a naval and maritime historian with a specialist interest in the 19th & 20th centuries. Following the completion of his Master's degree in Maritime History at the University of Hull, he went on to take his PhD at the University of Salford under Professor Eric Grove. After spending over a decade teaching naval, maritime & local history at the University of Hull, he now freelances as a naval & maritime historian / researcher & lecturer.

Scott will be giving us detailed presentation of the clash off Jutland between the German High Seas Fleet and the Royal Navy`s Grand Fleet

Combined Irish Parade...June 8th London









Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the July 2025 issue of our Branch newsletter.

As I write this I`m just back home from Worksop Rugby Club where preparations are underway for the annual Armed Forces Weekend...it just gets bigger and bigger

year after year. As in previous years Chesterfield Branch Western Front Association will be represented - I`ll be there with two `hats` on...Branch Secretary of Chesterfield Branch and Branch Secretary of Worksop Branch Royal British Legion, who, with Worksop Rugby Club are organisers of the event.

Mark Macartney and his wife Jean will be manning the WFA table promoting WFA Branded Goods and of course Chesterfield Branch. They will be in the main function room upstairs - with a great view from the balcony across the grounds which were filling up nicely with participant's stalls, exhibits etc. when I left.

Tuesday's meeting will feature a presentation by Dr Scott Lindgren who will give a detailed talk on the biggest sea battle of Ww1 - Jutland. Scott's talk will cover a lot of ground - or should I say 'sea' and may last a bit longer than our regular presentations.

As Branch Chair, Jon-Paul Harding has said in his notes now that we are in the second half of the current year, I start to look at potential speakers for next year. This is why I need YOUR help...please let me, Jon-Paul or Jane know what topics you would like to hear about or what speakers we should be looking at. It is YOUR Branch!

Tuesday, July 1st sees Mark Macartney and I off to Attenborough near Nottingham to lay a WFA wreath on the mass grave in the local churchyard where lies those who perished in the explosion at the Chilwell munitions factor 1st July 1918. Later in the month, Mark, and wife Jean will be travelling to Scotland for their annual holidays and they will be stopping off in Gretna to lay wreaths at the memorials to the Quintinshill Disaster, 22nd May 1915.

Next month sees Roy Larkin making his annual pilgrimage `up north` - please do come along and support the Branch...

Best wishes,

Grant Cullen ...Branch Secretary.... grantcullen@hotmail.com07824628638

June Meeting

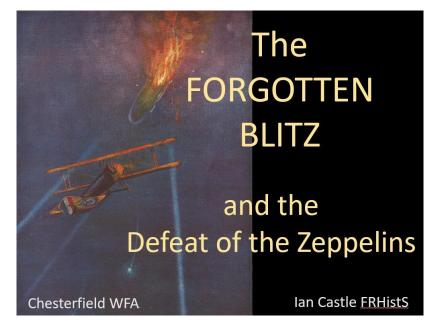


'The Forgotten Blitz and the Defeat of the Zeppelins'.

IAN CASTLE began writing military history over thirty years ago, but for the last seventeen years has focused on Germany's First World War air raids on Britain. Initially exploring the London raids, his later research extended to include attacks across the whole country. He has recently completed his 'Forgotten Blitz' trilogy.

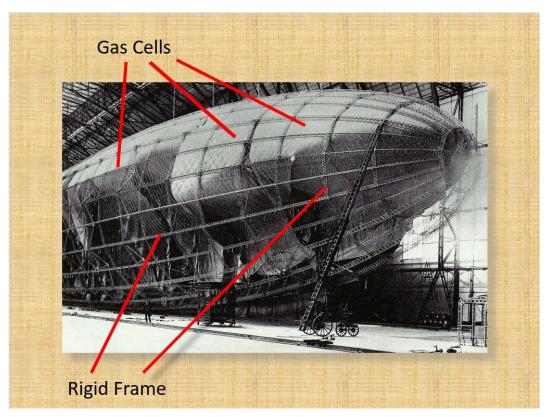
In addition to writing books, Ian regularly contributes articles to magazines and journals and has been involved in several television documentaries exploring aspects of this early air campaign. Besides giving regular talks on the subject, Ian has also built an extensive website (<u>www.iancastlezeppelin.co.uk</u>) highlighting these air raids. In December 2023 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Ian started by saying that up until recent times the raids by Zeppelin airships was known as the `Forgotten Blitz` but now seems to have acquired the title `The First Blitz` with the much more devastating - in terms of loss of life and damage to property - air raids in the Second World War becoming known as The Second Blitz



From the Wright Brothers first flight in 1903 aviation had advanced remarkably and by 1915 there was combat between pilots in aircraft over mainland Europe. When the BEF went off to war in August 1914, Britain steeled itself from attack by Germany`s much vaunted fleet of airships.

So what exactly was a Zeppelin airship? Zeppelin airships were the largest craft ever to fly.



At the beginning of the war a Zeppelin airship was 525 ft. long but by the time the conflict ended they had grown to be 685 ft. long. By way of comparison the unusual building in London, known as `The Gherkin', is actually in height 85ft. shorter than the final Zeppelin designs were in length.



Although size increased, the basic construction remained the same - an extremely strong frame made of Duralumin - an aluminium alloy - gave the airship its characteristic shape. The inflammable hydrogen gas was contained in 19 gas bags hung inside. A cloth cover known as the `envelope` encased the whole structure below which hung compartments, known as gondolas which contained the crew, controls and engines. Both the German Army and Navy operated separate airship fleets.

Not all airships were built by Zeppelin, another company Schutte-Lanz also built a fleet - these being notable for having the rigid frame in plywood rather than aluminium alloy.

However to everyone in Britain, all German airships were known as `Zeppelins`.

The first Zeppelin raid took place on East Anglia on 19th January 1915 but unlike in WW2, there was only 4 killed and 16 injured as a result of this raid but to the residents of Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn it proved a shocking experience.

It was thought to be easy to seek and destroy such a large, slow moving target but in practice, it was extremely difficult. Zeppelin raids were only carried out on the darkest nights so defensive pilots were flying blind unless the Zeppelin could be picked out by searchlights and even, for the first two years of the war weapons against them were ineffective. For 1915 and well into 1916, the recommended method of attack remained the same, get above the zeppelin and drop explosive

devices on it. But there was a fundamental flaw in this - the Zeppelin could easily outclimb those aircraft forming the home defence squadrons.

After that first raid it was to be a further three months before Zeppelins returned this time in the northeast and attacks on provincial towns and villages in the south east.

On the last day of May 1915, the first Zeppelin raid took place on London. By this time the war had been going on for 10 months and London was taken completely by surprise when Zeppelin L38 appeared after 11pm on 31st May dropping over 100 bombs the majority of these incendiaries. That raid claimed the lives of seven civilians, including four children, and injured a further 35 people. Many expected this to be the forerunner of constant attacks but in fact the skies over London remained clear for another 11 weeks. Further north, Hull was bombed heavily in June with the raiders keeping closer to the east coast.

Further raids took place on London during August, September and October, by both German army and navy Zeppelins. Anti-aircraft guns, truck mounted, failed to inflict any damage and losses in both people and property mounted, leading to mounting public anger, with questions being raised in parliament.



There was much `finger pointing` in high places as to who was responsible, the task of defending the capital being officially in the hands of the Admiralty, the Royal Naval Air Service. Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War was facing awkward questions and after the second raid summoned Major-General Sir David Henderson `father` of the Royal Flying Corps and he demanded of Henderson as to what he was going to do about the airship raids. Rather taken aback, Henderson responded that the defence of the capital lay not with the RFC, but rather the Admiralty. This cut no ice with Kitchener telling Henderson that if the RFC didn`t do something about these raids, he would hold Henderson responsible.

Weather forecaster predicted that early October would be the likeliest opportunity for the weather to be clear for the next raids. Despite this the Admiralty`s contribution to the defence of London was unchanged - and sparse - four night flying trained pilots. Henderson acquired land for several new airfields around London and allocated two Be2c aircraft to each. Despite having only the most basic of facilities they were operational by 3rd October. The War Office established three tiers of air defence - the first - ground observers - these were stationed on the coast. The second mobile 13 pounder gun batteries, with the third being the four RFC stations - each with two night flying aircraft. By 12th October no raid had happened and the War Office began to suspect that the Germans had gained knowledge of the plans and extended the period of readiness.

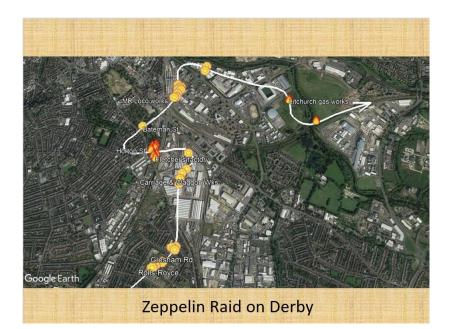
Peter Strasser, commander of the Naval Airships for the Imperial German Navy had, on October 5th been given instructions to select Liverpool on the north west coast as his next target. However poor weather caused the cancellation of raids on two occasions and Strasser turned his attention to London instead and five Zeppelins were prepared for action, four of them for the first time. They crossed the coast then diverged near Thetford. One bombed Guildford then moved on to Woolwich. A second airship lost its way in heavy cloud but bombed a military camp in the Folkestone area, killing fifteen soldiers. The airship proceeded along the cast to Hastings before turning inland where a large railway junction was observed - East Croydon where he dropped 17 bombs killing eleven, before making good his escape across the channel.

The last of the Zeppelins to attack London that night was L15 met with the most success reaching Central London dropping bombs on Charing Cross and The Strand killing 17 but they came under fire from an anti-aircraft gun - something new for the attackers, so the ditched the rest if their bombs and turned for home. Overall this raid killed 71 with a further 128 injured.

That raid in October proved to be the last in 1915. Responsibility for the air defence of London now passed to the War Office and the RFC established ten airfields each with two Be2C aircraft and two experienced night flying pilots.

On the night of 31st January 1916, nine Zeppelins roamed at will over the Midlands clearly highlighting the need that more be done. Only one pilot was in the air and he saw nothing and for the first time bombs fell in Derbyshire.





That evening a blackout of industrial and domestic premises took place and proved effective as a number of Zeppelins did pass over the area without identifying a target. However a little before midnight lighting was restored at Derby Midland Station and shortly afterwards permission was given for trams to return to their depots, as people concluded that the anger was passed. However, at ten past twelve the town was shaken by a great explosion in the Osmaston area. Zeppelin L14 had already passed over without seeing anything but shortly after midnight the crew saw lights start to appear over a previously darkened area...it was Derby

The first bombs were dropped on or close to a prestigious industrial area - the Roll Royce works where one bombed wiped out the test track and shattered windows across the site. Other bombs caused extensive damage to the Midland Railway`s Carriage and Wagon Works. Further incendiary devices caused extensive damage around Horton Street. The huge Midland Railway workshop complex no lay directly ahead. L14 released eight bombs causing damage but only one exploded to deadly effect, killing three men instantly with a fourth dying of his injuries several days later.

Elsewhere across the Midlands the raiders bombing resulted in 72 killed and injured.

In April 1916 saw a further re-organisation of the home defence squadrons with 19 RAS renamed as 39 Air Defence Squadron primarily to guard London but other Air Defence Squadrons were established across the country to form Air Defence Wing with more to follow later in the year.

RFC Home Defe	ence Squadrons - 1916		
Established: March – July 1916			
No. 33	HQ – Gainsborough, <u>Lincs.</u>		
No. 36	HQ – Newcastle-upon-Tyne		
No. 38	HQ – Melton Mowbray, <u>Leics.</u>		
No. 39	HQ – Woodford, Essex		
No. 50	HQ – <u>Harrietsham</u> , Kent		
No. 51	HQ – Hingham, Norfolk		
Established: September - November 1916			
No. 37	HQ – <u>Woodham</u> Mortimer, Essex		
No. 75	HQ – <u>Goldington</u> , Bedfordshire		
No. 76	HQ – Ripon, N. Yorkshire		
No. 77	HQ – Edinburgh, Scotland		
No. 78	HQ – Hove, E. Sussex		
	and the second second second second second		

Although this reorganisation was effective this failed to answer the question as to how a Zeppelin could be destroyed. Although each Zeppelin was filled with 2 million cubic feet of highly inflammable hydrogen gas. Hydrogen only becomes flammable with mixed with oxygen so a means to force these elements to combine was needed. Lead machine gun bullets could only make tiny holes in any of the nineteen gas bags inside each airship, the effect was minimal, there being nothing to ignite the escaping gas and the holes themselves could be repaired in flight with patches and a pot of glue!. It was essential for the attacking aircraft to get above the airship and drop bombs or exploding darts on it something the aircraft of the time were ill equipped to achieve. However new designs were coming forward both exploding and incendiary bullets. Static tests proved promising, combing explosive and incendiary rounds in the drum or belt of ammunition.

By the end of summer 1916 the RFC still relied on the steady old Be2c but with the issue of the new bullets it was about to become a Zeppelin killer.

There was improvements to the Zeppelin fleets with the introduction of the R class which as 650 ft. long and could operate at 13000ft altitude. Since the war had started there had been 116 individual airship sorties over Britain and the British public felt vulnerable to the Zeppelin menace but this changed in the early hours of September 3rd 1916.

On September 2nd the German military launched its largest airship raid of the war - target London. The Zeppelin force was the largest every launched - 16 - 4 army, 12 navy, including two of the new `Super` Zeppelins. The commanders were confident and anticipated in striking a heavy blow on London. Amongst the force was the SL11 - Schutte-Lanz, the latest wooden framed airship.

That night proved to be a watershed in the air war over Britain, the night the apparent invincibility of the airship was broken. By September 1916 there was a growing belief amongst the pilots of the RFC and RNAS that the new bullets they were receiving would give them an advantage in future encounters. On 2nd September at 10.15 pm the `Take Air Raid Action` order was received by HQ of No. 39 Home Defence Squadron and this was passed to the Essex airfields defending the eastern approaches to London. The pilots went up seeking their targets - they were on their on - no radios of other communication means to guide them to their target. The work of the searchlights was critical in seeking and illuminating the targets.



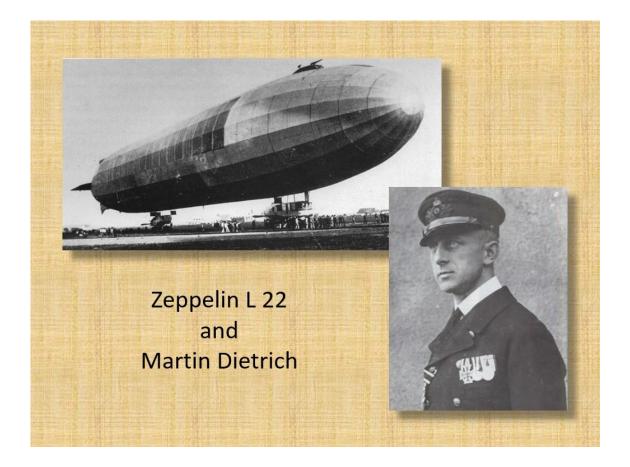
Lieutenant Leefe Robinson took off and, on nearing the end of his two hour patrol spotted a Zeppelin near Gravesend in Kent but lost it. He was heading for his airstrip when he saw a redness in sky over London and, instead of landing, he headed towards the light where he spotted an airship - SL11 caught in the searchlight beams. Now the air defence guns opened up on SL11. Thousands of Londoners awaked by the noise now came out to watch the unfolding drama. L11 now headed north to evade the intense artillery fire. Robinson could now see L11 which shed water ballast and its remaining bombs to enable it to climb more rapidly.

Robinson flew under the airship from bow to stern, emptying a drum of ammunition into her belly which contained a cocktail of the new bullets but, much to his dismay appeared to have no effect and the six defensive machine guns on L11 now opened up. Undaunted Robinson made another run spraying another full drum of ammunition along the side of the airship, again with no apparent effect. He closed again on SL11 but this time concentrated his fire on just one spot. This time he saw a dull red glow and then the rear of L11 burst into flames and the airship plunged towards the ground.

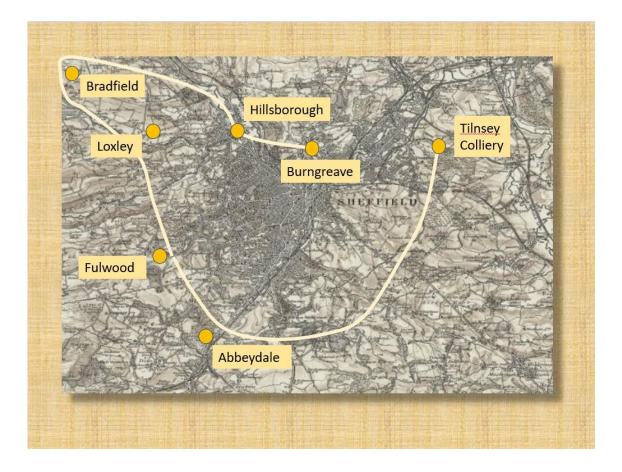


The airship crashed into a farmer's field in Hertfordshire with the entire crew perishing in the flames. The London populace finally realising that after 25 months of war one of the feared 'baby killers' had been destroyed before their eyes. At a stroke the British public no longer felt defenceless in the face of the Zeppelin onslaught. That night when Lt. Leefe Robinson shot down the Zeppelin (for which he was awarded the VC) the air war over Britain changed forever. The German army had never fully embraced the use of airships to attack Britain and turned towards the use of aircraft following this loss and in the summer of 1917 the first Gotha bombers raided London.

The German navy, however, however, continue to believe that airships ere the most effective way of taking the war to Britain and on the night of 23rd / 24th September 1916 launched a 12 Zeppelin raid on London and the Midlands with bombs being dropped on the packed streets of East London. The anti-aircraft artillery opened up and shells exploded rupturing the gasbags and damaging the frame of one of the airships (L33). Despite the best efforts of the crew L33 began to lose height and the descent continued and the Zeppelin crashed into a field in Kent. Captain Bocker tried to destroy L33 by firing his signal pistol which did ignite and explosion of the hydrogen but failed to destroy the metal skeleton. He then called his men together and marched them off down an adjacent lane. Meanwhile the glow from the burning Zeppelin had attracted the attention of Special Constable Edgar Nicholas and he cycled towards the scene but as he rounded a bend he was confronted by 21 uniformed men coming towards him - the crew of L33. Bocker asked Nicholas how far it was to Colchester who replied 6 miles with the column now setting off again with Nicholas bringing up the rear. The prisoners, by now escorted by a police sergeant and six special constables were detained in a village church hall but the arrival of the hated `huns` was not well received by the gathering local residents. The L33 were sent on to Colchester where, after interrogation, they were detained as Prisoners of War.

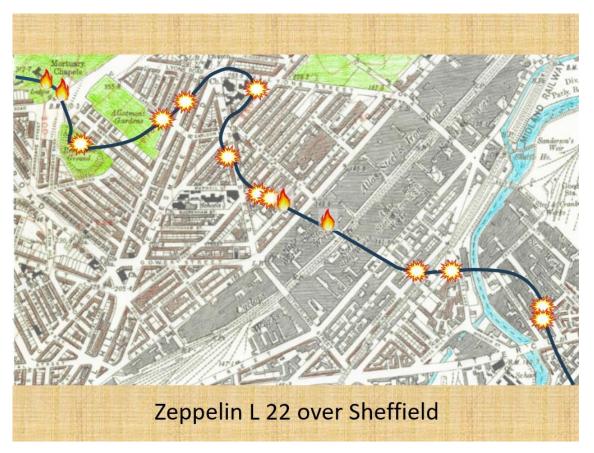


That night had been a very bad one for the German naval airship division as another Zeppelin, L32 had been intercepted over Essex and destroyed by the new bullets. Undeterred by these losses, a further 7 Zeppelins were sent out 24 hours later. Two were to attack London whilst the others were to attack targets in the north and Midlands....one of those struck Sheffield. Zeppelin L22 made landfall over the Lincolnshire coast...the commander of the Zeppelin thought it was over Lincoln and released seven bombs but in fact was over Tinsley Park Colliery in Sheffield but they failed to inflict any damage of note. The Zeppelin circled the city in a clockwise direction much of whose population was still awake after an earlier alarm, passing over Fulwood, Hillsborough and Burngreave where much of Sheffield`s iron and steel industries were situated.



The first bombs fell near the entrance to Burngreave Cemetery with more to follow with two houses being destroyed in Grimethorpe.

Further bombs fell on Petrie Street and other surrounding streets causing numerous casualties. L22 was now just few hundred yards from the heart of Sheffield's industrial centre. Before that however further bombs caused many more casualties. It's bomb load exhausted, L22 made good its escape.



In 1918, the last year of the war only 3 Zeppelin raids took place, inflicting casualties in Hull and Wigan.

The decline of Zeppelin attacks did not relieve Britain's cities and the new long range bombers, Gotha and Gigant continued to rain death and destruction on London and the south but the Midlands and the south were beyond their range.

The crews of the Zeppelins and the pilots of the RFC and RNAS who took to the skies to oppose them were pioneers all and they played their part in how future wars would be fought.

His presentation concluded Ian then participated, with his audience in an instructive Q & A session.

Medals.....



Boer War and a selection of First World War medals:





Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902, 6 Clasps King's South Africa Medal 1901-1902, 2 Clasps.

Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902, 4 Clasps.

1914 Star



The 1914 Star was awarded to personnel who served in France and Belgium between $5^{\rm th}$ August and $22^{\rm nd}$ November 1914.



Three of the British campaign medals, the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Pip, Squeak and Wilfred are the affectionate names given to the three First World War campaign medals.

1914-15 Star

The 1914-15 Star was awarded to personnel who saw service in any theatre of war between 5th August 1914 and 31st December 1915, other than those who had already qualified for the 1914 Star.

British War Medal 1914-20

The British War Medal was awarded to personnel in recognition of the successful conclusion of the first World War. It was later extended until 1920 to cover mine-clearing services and operations in North and South Russia, the eastern Baltic, Siberia, the Black Sea and Caspian.

Victory Medal 1914-19

The Victory Medal was awarded to all personnel who received the 1914 or the 1914-15 Stars. It is often referred to as the Allied War Medal.



For the those who had actually served under fire of the enemy during that period, a narrow horizontal bronze clasp was added to the medal, as can be seen on this 1914 Mons Star sewn onto the ribbon, bearing the dates '5th Aug. - 22nd Nov. 1914'

The Territorial Force War Medal, 1914-1919



Members of the Territorial Force and Territorial Force Nursing Service could earn this medal. They had to have been a member of the Territorial Force on or before 30th September 1914 and to have served in an operational theatre of war outside the UK between 5th August 1914 and 11th November 1918. Service personnel who were eligible to receive the 1914 Star or 1914/15 Star could not receive the Territorial War Medal as well.

Mercantile Marine War Medal



The Mercantile Marine War Medal was a campaign medal, awarded by The Board of Trade to people who had served in the Merchant Navy and who had made a voyage through a war zone/danger zone during the First World War.

Bronze Plaque



Documents enclosed with the bronze plaque sent to next of kin of the fallen servicemen were a memorial scroll and condolence slip.

Silver War Badge





Gallantry Medals

Distinguished Conduct Medal (D.C.M.)





The D.C.M. was the first official medal which recognised an act of gallantry in the field by a member of the armed forces below the rank of officer.

Military Cross (M.C.)

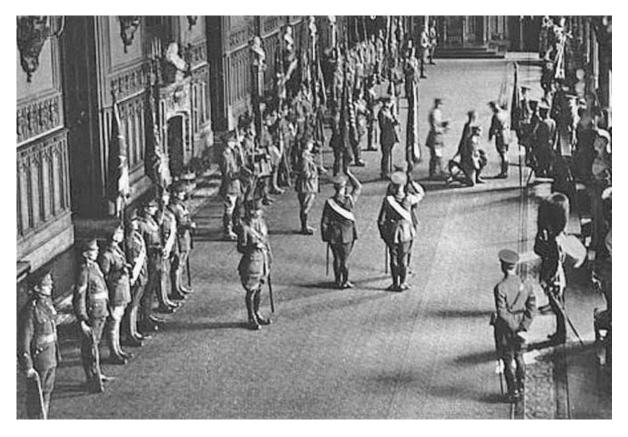


The Military Cross was an award for gallantry during active operations in the presence of the enemy. It was given to individuals in the British Army, the Indian Army or the Colonial Forces.

Military Medal (M.M.)



The Military Cross was an award for gallantry during active operations in the presence of the enemy. It was given to individuals in the British Army, the Indian Army or the Colonial Forces.



On Monday morning the 12th June 1922, a ceremony took place in St. George's Hall at Windsor Castle at which His Majesty King George V received the Colours of five Irish infantry regiments of the British army who were disbanded on that day.

The 18th Regiment of Foot The Royal Irish Regiment

The Royal Dublin Fusiliers,

The Connaught Rangers,

The Prince of Wales's Leinster Fusiliers (Royal Canadians) and The Royal Munster Fusiliers. The South Irish Horse, the sister regiment of The North Irish Horse, was also disbanded. The King, with emotion in his voice, received the Colours saying:

"We are here today in circumstances which cannot fail to strike a note of sadness in our hearts. No Regiment parts with their Colours without feelings of sorrow. A knight in days gone by bore on his shield his coat-of-arms, tokens of valour and worth. Only to death did he surrender them.

....Your Colours are the records of valorous deeds in war, and of the glorious traditions thereby created. You are called upon to part with them today for reasons beyond your control and resistance. By you and your predecessors these Colours have been reverenced and guarded as a sacred trust - which trust you now confide in me. As your King I am proud to accept this trust. But I fully realise with what grief you relinquish these dearly-prized emblems; and I pledge my word that within these ancient and historic walls your Colours will be treasured, honoured, and protected as hallowed memorials of the glorious deeds of brave and loyal regiments.

We Will Remember Them