



# The Spire Sentinel



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



**& Magazine  
Chesterfield  
Western  
Association**

**ISSUE 125 - July 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

January	6th	. <b>AGM + Tim Lynch - “Huns on the Run”</b> Tim explores the often overlooked experiences of German POWs held in Britain during and immediately after the First World War
February	3rd	<b>Ross Beadle - Sarajevo 1914</b> This talk examines the sequence of chance events of the preceding 36 years and, even, on the day of the killing.
March	3rd	<b>Andy Rawson - Malta...Nurse of the Mediterranean</b> 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	<b>Mick Byrne - Shot at Dawn</b> 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	<b>Christina Holstein - - Verdun.</b> What was the plan behind the German offensive of February 1916? A thundering opening bombardment brought early success but the German advance soon slowed and the French refused to give up.
June	2nd	<b>Scott Lindgren</b> 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	<b>John Wilson</b> The action at Sheikh Sa'id November 1914. The opposed landing that nobody has ever heard about! .
August	4th	<b>Ian Castle - Gotha Raids.</b> 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	<b>Roy Larkin - Where the Money Went.</b> Following the success of the original 'Where the Money Went', the Sequel explores the financial costs of the Great War. Fully illustrated
October	6th	<b>Peter Hart</b> 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	<b>John Horner</b> 'In the care of St Dunstons : Private Richard Horners story'
December	1st	<b>Neil Taylor....”Winston`s Little Army...Aspects of the Royal Naval Division”</b>

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### **Chairman`s Ramblings**



Jon-Paul Harding Branch Chair

Firstly, I was sorry I was unable to attend Bill Bryan`s funeral as I had work commitments, I would like to thank Grant and the other members who did, for attending both for personal reasons and in support of the Branch.

Last month`s talk on the naval battle of the Falklands was very interesting; it makes you understand a lot more why it was a world war and not just battles on the Western Front. Julys talk will be just as interesting to

all who attend. It has been Armed forces weekend up and down the country and if anyone went to an event I hope they had a good time .On this point I would just like to take this opportunity to thank Mark Macartney (and his wife Jean) for standing on behalf of the branch at Worksop`s armed forces weekend I hope it all went well I unfortunately couldn`t get over as had a running event to take part in.As I write this I`m thinking that 110 years ago, on this day, the Battle of the Somme was raging with nearly 20,000 British and Empire soldiers laying down their lives on that first day. We Remember Them.

The Committee look forward to seeing all who attends the next meeting...an intriguing subject that few, if any, of us know much about....should be interesting. Best wishes, Jon-Paul

## July Meeting Presentation - John Wilson



John is currently Education Officer of the Gallipoli Association, and since his first trip to Gallipoli in 2022 has developed a deep interest in the Indian troops in the Great War and especially those who fought at Gallipoli. His book on the 29<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade on Gallipoli should be published in 2027 by Helion. John is currently researching the Singapore Mutiny of 1915 and how this and other actions on

the Western Front possibly led to the withdrawal of 2 of the Indian Regiments from Gallipoli.

John`s talk is about the Action at Sheikh Sa`id, November 1914 - the opposed landing that nobody has heard of !

In mid October 1914 the General Staff in India started to plan for the landing of a force of Indian troops on a Turkish held area not far from Aden on the Red Sea coast. Orders were despatched to one of the Brigades due to sail to Egypt from India, detailing the proposed attack, but of course Britain did not declare war on the Ottoman Empire until November 5<sup>th</sup> that year.



### ***Secretary`s Scribbles***

*Dear Members and Friends,*

Welcome to the June edition of the Branch Newsletter and magazine - number 125!

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> June was profoundly sad day for the Branch as we gathered at Mansfield Crematorium to say our farewells to one of our most popular and well loved members - William Wilfred Bryan, whom we all knew as Bill. It was great to see Branch members, Jane, Arthur, James and Phil turning out for what proved an emotional day. A tribute to Bill is included elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Mark Macartney had a busy weekend on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, attending the two days of the Worksop Armed Forces Weekend at Worksop Rugby Club with he and his wife Jean manning a WFA stand promoting WFA Branded Goods and of course Chesterfield Branch. Mark has submitted a report which is in this newsletter.

Early June was busy for me making two visits inside a week to Lincoln making presentations, firstly to the Lincoln and North Lincolnshire Branch WFA where my Quintinshill talk was on the menu. Then three days later it was back to the same venue where I delivered my presentation on 1918 to the Friends of the Lincoln Tank Group. In between I gave my Women in WW1 presentation to Bramcote Probus Group, Nottingham. Very well attended meeting - 36 - split 50/50, ladies and gents !

Next up is John Wilson who will present on **The Action at Sheikh Sa`id November 1914**. It is a topic I know precisely nothing at all about so really looking forward to John`s talk.

Although we are not yet at the half way point in 2026 my thoughts are already turning to speakers for next year - suggestions gratefully accepted - I need to know about what you - our loyal, supportive members, want to see, hear and experience at our monthly meetings. Please let me know your thoughts .

But before we get into next year we have a return visit in August from Ian Castle for our aviation topic. Last year Ian spoke about Zeppelin raiders.....this time it`s about the heavy bombers - the Gotha and the `Giants` .....not to be missed !

Best wishes, Grant [grantcullen@hotmail.com](mailto:grantcullen@hotmail.com) / 07824628638

XX

William Wilfred Bryan

3<sup>rd</sup> March 1937 - 4<sup>th</sup> June 2026

“Bill” as he was known to all those who regularly attend Branch meetings passed away in early June after a long battle with cancer, borne with bravery and fortitude.

Many of us will remember Bill giving a talk about his many visits to the Arras battlefields where his grandfather fell in 1917 and is buried in Fampoux CWGC cemetery. The presentation is also remembered for it being held in the Club bar downstairs as our regular room was being used for election purposes.



Bill lived in Nether Langwith and up until his retirement was a colliery manager, indeed one of our own members, Steve Brunt remembers Bill from his early days at the pit. Bill raised funds for the restoration of Nether Langwith war memorial in 2012 and researched all the names of the fallen on the memorial. Bill was active in Worksop Royal British Legion and will be fondly remembered for his stints in Worksop Aldi store during the annual Poppy Appeal.

On March 10<sup>th</sup> this year Bill received an award the very first RBL County President`s Commendation from Deputy Lieutenant Alex Peace-Gadsby.

Bill`s funeral was held in Mansfield on June 26<sup>th</sup> with over 100 attending at the Crematorium. A Guard of Honour escort was provided by the Royal British Legion, with WFA Branch members, Jane Lovat, Arthur Lacey, James Kay, Phil Goodall and Grant Cullen attending.





## Worksop Armed Forces Weekend 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> June 2026

### The Countdown Began on 30<sup>th</sup> May



## **ARMED FORCESWEEKEND**

### Report by Mark Macartney WFA Branded Goods Trustee:

With my wife Jean we manned the WFA table promoting the WFA Branded Goods Shop (with a few items available for purchase) and of course flying the flag' for The Western Front Association and Chesterfield Branch in particular. We were in the main function room upstairs - with a great view from the balcony across the grounds which was full with participant's stalls, exhibits etc,etc. we also made available various information WFA leaflets including planned meetings for Chesterfield Branch, Jean also went round the field dishing out small information flyers to the crowd.

**THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION**  
 REGISTERED CHARITY NO 298365  
**BRANDED GOODS SHOP**  
[www.westernfrontassociation.com](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com)  
 Email: [office@westernfrontassociation.com](mailto:office@westernfrontassociation.com)  
 Tel: 0207 118 1914




In addition to WFA activity and information we all came together to celebrate and honour our Armed Forces community. With live entertainment, displays, charity stalls, cadet groups, family activities, food and drink, and much more, it proved to be a fantastic weekend for all ages

A few general views of stalls, exhibits, entertainment and much more



Chesterfield Branch Member, Peter Chamberlain-Hill had his 16th Lancers team in action one of the popular features of the weekend

**When was the last time that you had a look at The WFA shop? There are some wonderful items to purchase and the profits help support the Association.**

Go to the home page of the website and click on the 'About the WFA' menu and you will see the 'Branded Goods' option



**Record Bag**



**Shoulder Bag**



**Messenger Bag**



**Cap**



**Coffee Mug**



**Mousemat**



**Classic Tie**



**Fridge Tile Magnet**



**WFA Fridge Magnet**



**WFA Bookmark**



**Lapel Badge**



**Despatch Bag**



UNISEX POLO SHIRT WITH LOGO 569M  
569M-001-0000



LADIES POLO SHIRT WITH LOGO 539F  
539F-001-0000



UNISEX SHORT SLEEVE OXFORD SHIRT WITH LOGO 830B  
830B-001-0000



LADIES SHORT SLEEVE OXFORD SHIRT 870F  
870F-001-0000



UNISEX SWEATSHIRT WITH LOGO 762M  
762M-001-0000



LADIES SWEATSHIRT WITH LOGO 34030F  
34030F-001-0000



UNISEX T-SHIRT WITH LOGO 180M  
180M-001-0000



LADIES T-SHIRT WITH LOGO 180F  
180F-001-0000



UNISEX RUGBY SHIRT WITH LOGO FR100  
FR100-001-0000



LADIES RUGBY SHIRT WITH LOGO FR101  
FR101-001-0000



UNISEX BREATHABLE JACKET WITH LOGO 570M  
570M-001-0000



LADIES WATERPROOF INSULATED JACKET 6043  
6043-001-0000



UNISEX FLEECE WITH LOGO 80122  
80122-001-0000



LADIES FLEECE WITH LOGO 80123  
80123-001-0000



## Katherine Mary Harley



The CWGC grave and wartime Serbian memorial for British Nurse Katherine Mary Harley of the Scottish Women's Hospital and then the 3rd Serbian Army.'

The grave is in the Salonika (Lambet Road) CWGC Cemetery within the larger international Lambet Road Military Cemetery in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Although she had previously worked for the Scottish Women's Hospital, at the time of her death in 1916 Katherine Mary Harley was apparently an independent civilian nurse serving with the Serbian armed forces in Macedonia, and therefore might not have normally qualified for commemoration with an IWGC headstone and grave.

Nevertheless, Nurse Harley is granted that honour because of the high regard placed by Serbian forces on her wartime voluntary service as a nurse. She is buried in the so-called 'Officers Row' at the edge of the British section of the Lambet Road Military Cemetery In Thessaloniki in northern Greece. Her grave is marked by a large private memorial organised by the Serbians in 1917.

Her grave and that of the other British burials are immaculately maintained by the local CWGC 'gardeners of Salonika'\*\*. The British graves are a small part of the much larger international Lambet Road Military Cemetery that contains national sections for France, Serbia, Greece, Russia and Italy graves.

Katherine Mary Harley's Commonwealth War Grave Commission headstone is laid flat in a tiny garden plot. Behind is the Serbian memorial carrying a dedication written in both the Serbian and English languages:

"The generous English lady and great benefactress of the Serbian people, Madame Harley a great lady. On your tomb instead of flowers the gratitude of the Serbs shall blossom there for your wonderful acts. Your name shall be known from generation to generation."

Katherine was grievously hit by shell fire and later died of her wounds in March 1917 while entertaining her daughter and other friends for tea. She was in her quarters relaxing in the Serbian field hospital where she was the senior nurse and



**Siegfried Sassoon**  
**1886-1967**

## **Suicide in the Trenches**

I KNEW a simple soldier boy  
Who grinned at life in empty joy,  
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,  
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,  
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,  
He put a bullet through his brain.  
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go.

## Chilwell – the VC factory explosion 1 July 1918

(National Shell Filling Factory No 6)

### The Chilwell Explosion, 1 July 1918

#### WARTIME FACTORY DISASTER

**It was one of Britain's worst wartime disasters - an explosion at a Nottingham ammunition factory. The hidden story of the Chilwell blast tragedy.**

**The forgotten tragedy in which 134 Nottingham workers were killed, (with 5 dying later and dozens more injured).**

**It was also Britain's worst ever disaster involving an explosion.**



#### 1 July 1918 The lead up to the incident

You know that every now and then we get a scorching summers day (not always) well in fact Nottinghamshire was having one on these, you know the ones, when the ice cream melts before it even reaches the mouth and where people go bright red sitting on the beach or in the pub garden. Well the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1918 was one of these scorching days, it had been a very hot day...even as the evening started to longer shadows across the Trent Valley, the air remained uncomfortably warm. Walking across the meadows from the River Trent, the medieval church spire of St Mary's poked above the trees from the little village of Attenborough. The air was filled with the music of blackbirds, robins and wrens, the hedgerows were a riot of colours. The soft white petals of daisies, meadow buttercups. The yellow hues of hay rattle. In the distance, a church bell struck 7pm. In many ways the war on the Western Front seemed so far away, and yet on the other hand it was so close. Because if you look beyond the ancient church spire you will see the towering chimneys of the munitions factory...a huge complex employing 10,000 people, producing 19 million shells to be fired by the British guns on the Western Front. But the carnage of the Western Front was about to be visited to this factory outside Nottingham. Chilwell Munitions Factory was about to go up in smoke - taking 134 civilian workers.

## The Incident

(1st July 1918- 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026) 108 years ago RIP ALL, you did your duty for the Country and War Effort (134 Killed and a further 250 were wounded, five of whom died later. The Incident happened at 7.10pm, in the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1918)

“The Chilwell Story” has been mentioned many times by Mark and many others, but here is a brief re-cap.

**1 July 1918 (the incident)** A substantial part of the National Shell Filling Factory was destroyed in an explosion of eight tons of TNT. In all resulting in the deaths of 139 people. of whom only 32 could be positively identified, and a further 250 were injured. (as stated above)

The Chilwell Shell Factory Disaster, was a vast explosion of eight tonnes of TNT. Many of the dead were so badly injured they were never formally identified, and most were buried in a mass grave which remains at St Mary’s Church, Attenborough. A further 250 were wounded, five of whom died later.

“A lot is made of the service personnel who gave their lives but there are civilians who sacrificed themselves in the line of duty.”

The Chilwell site, originally known as the National Shelling Factory No 6, was hugely important. During the First World War, high explosives were filled into 19 million shells - 50 per cent of the nation’s entire shell filling production.

## 1 July 2026 (108<sup>th</sup> Anniversary)

To remember this awful incident, (details under) Once again (Mark Macartney with Jean Macartney) carried out their Annual Remembrance visit showing their respect by laying a wreath at the Memorial at the Mass Grave, on behalf of The Western Front Association, commemorating 108 years since this terrible Explosion, (see images under) Incidentally Mark worked at Chilwell (Chetwynd) Barracks as the Logistics Distribution Officer (September 1998 - April 2003) at the Distribution Outlet (DO) by then the site of course had been renamed Chetwynd Barracks, after Viscount Chetwynd (Godfrey John Boyle Chetwynd, 8<sup>th</sup> Viscount Chetwynd) who had been Managing Director of the National Shell Filling Factory. During their visit they were made very welcome by a senior volunteer who was very informative on many points relating to the explosion, including King George 5<sup>th</sup> Visit, the old memorial, cross recovered from it acquired from Officers Mess Chetwynd Barracks (all framed) images under, he has promised to forward further information in due course.



Chetwynd Barracks Entrance



8<sup>th</sup> Viscount Chetwynd



Chetwynd Bks  
Directional sign.

**The Mass Grave at St Mary's Church, Attenborough**  
 Mass Grave Prior to 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018      Mass Grave as from  
 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018



WFA Wreath

Personal Label on Wreath

Mark laying Wreath  
at New Memorial



New Memorial with WFA wreath in view



New Memorial



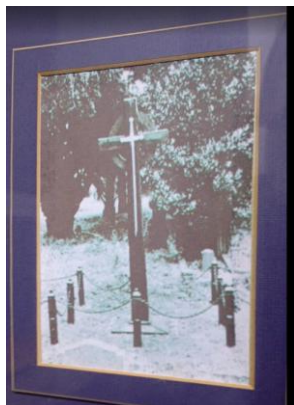
Mass Grave Plaque



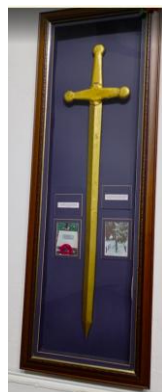
St Mary's Church



Old Memorial



Cross



King George 5<sup>th</sup> Visit,



## Relics of HMS Canopus

At our June meeting Scott Lindgren mentioned the pre-dreadnought battleship HMS Canopus when discussing the Falklands sea battle of 1914.

Peter Garland of Lincoln and North Lincolnshire Branch sent me some pictures of relics of HMS Canopus which are kept in St. Mary`s Church, Wilsford near Grantham. Why these relics are in this church remains a mystery







ground. After getting the range from our observation station we open fire, this gave them a surprise, as we could not be seen from the open seas, the first shot however was short but the second + third caught the "Scharnhorst" as she altering course. By this time our fleet slipped their collars + gave chase. The German fleet now retreating rapidly, no news however was received until 7 pm when the word is passed that the "Scharnhorst" + "Gneisenau" are sunk + later receive another wire saying that the "Leipsuch" was sunk by the "Vlasov" + the "Rudenberg" + "Dresden" got away, but the former was followed by the "Spert" + sunk. Had it not of been for us, our fleet would have been caught like a rat in a trap.