



The Spire Sentinel



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



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

ISSUE 119 - January 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	. 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
March	3rd	Andy Rawson - Malta...Nurse of the Mediterranean
April	7th	Mick Byrne - Shot at Dawn
May	5th	Christina Holstein - Verdun
June	2nd	Scott Lindgren TBA
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
September	1st	Roy Larkin - Where the Money Went
October	6th	Peter Hart <i>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.</i>
November	3rd	John Horner ‘In the care of St Dunstons : Private Richard Horners story’
December	1st	Neil Taylor....”Winston`s Little Army...Aspects of the Royal Naval Division”

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Chairman`s Notes....



Chairman`s Notes

I hope everyone has had a very Merry Christmas and I wish you all a Happy New Year. I would like to take this opportunity to say a BIG THANK YOU to Jane, Grant and Mark for all the work they have done over the past year, everything has run smoothly because of the effort they have put in.

Looking forward to the year ahead, there are some great presentations lined up, and I hope you will find them all interesting. We kick off the January meeting with our (always brief)AGM and hopefully the branch will go on a few trips to be arranged in the near future.

I hope anyone going over to the WW1 battlefields will have fantastic trips and will pass on any knowledge gained to the branch. Once again thank you to everyone that attends

throughout the year and supports the branch and for supporting me as Chair as this is your branch and may it long continue. Hope to see you all in the New Year for the AGM and for Tim Lynch`s presentation.

All the best Jon-Paul

January Presentation - 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

This talk should tie in well with Peter Hart`s presentation last November which explored the experiences of British servicemen held as POWs in Germany



Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Firstly may I wish all our members and friends a very hearty `Happy New Year` in this the January 2026 Newsletter.

Please note...and this is important - the weather forecast over the weekend and into the week of our meeting on January 6th is looking pretty grim with warnings out for snow and wintry conditions. Your committee has discussed this and will take a decision on Monday if the meeting will go ahead. This last thing we want is to postpone a meeting but the safety and welfare of all attendees is uppermost in our minds. We will send an e mail out to everyone on Monday after the decision - on or off is - taken.

Assuming we go ahead as planned the first part of Tuesday`s meeting will be the Branch AGM. Jane will update us on Branch finances (see following the financial report for 2025) then there will be the election of Office Bearers and Committee. Jon-Paul, Jane and myself have all indicated that, if the members so wish it, we will remain in our respective positions for another year. I put out a note in December thanking all for your support last year and was most gratified by the responses received. Thank you.

Our January meeting on Tuesday sees Tim Lynch making a welcome return to make a presentation to the Branch

All being well we will organise a couple of outings to places of interest for members this year - any suggestions most welcome... As you know I`m always happy to accept articles / correspondence for inclusion in this Newsletter / Magazine.

Note. We should have some remaining WFA Calendars to hand for purchase on Tuesday evening - £10 each of which 50% goes to Branch funds.

Next month we have Ross Beadle making a welcome return...his talk?... Sarajevo...the trigger for the conflict.

Best wishes.

Grant Cullen

Branch Secretary

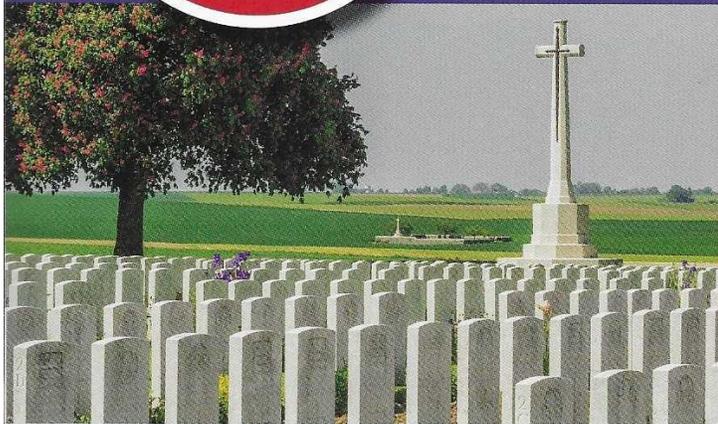
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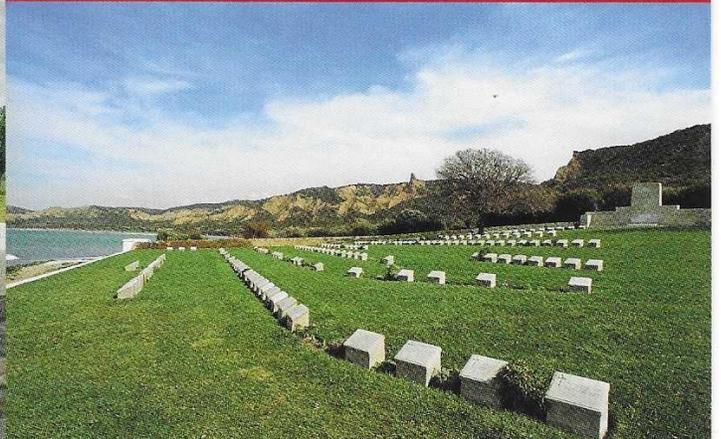
ORDER YOUR 2026 CALENDAR TODAY!



A4 in size when folded, opens out to
A3 when hung on your wall.

• £10.00 (plus p&p)

Order by post (see over) or online on
The Western Front Association website
www.westernfrontassociation.com



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Please advise if this is to be a gift or to go to an address other than your own.

I wish to order ____ Calendars at £10 each: Add postage for the destination

	____ Calendars @ £10 each	£
UK & NI (and BFPO)	£1.50	£
Europe (incl Eire)	£2.75	£
Rest of World	£4.00	£
TOTAL COST		£

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*Cheques made payable to 'The Western Front Association'

Signed: _____

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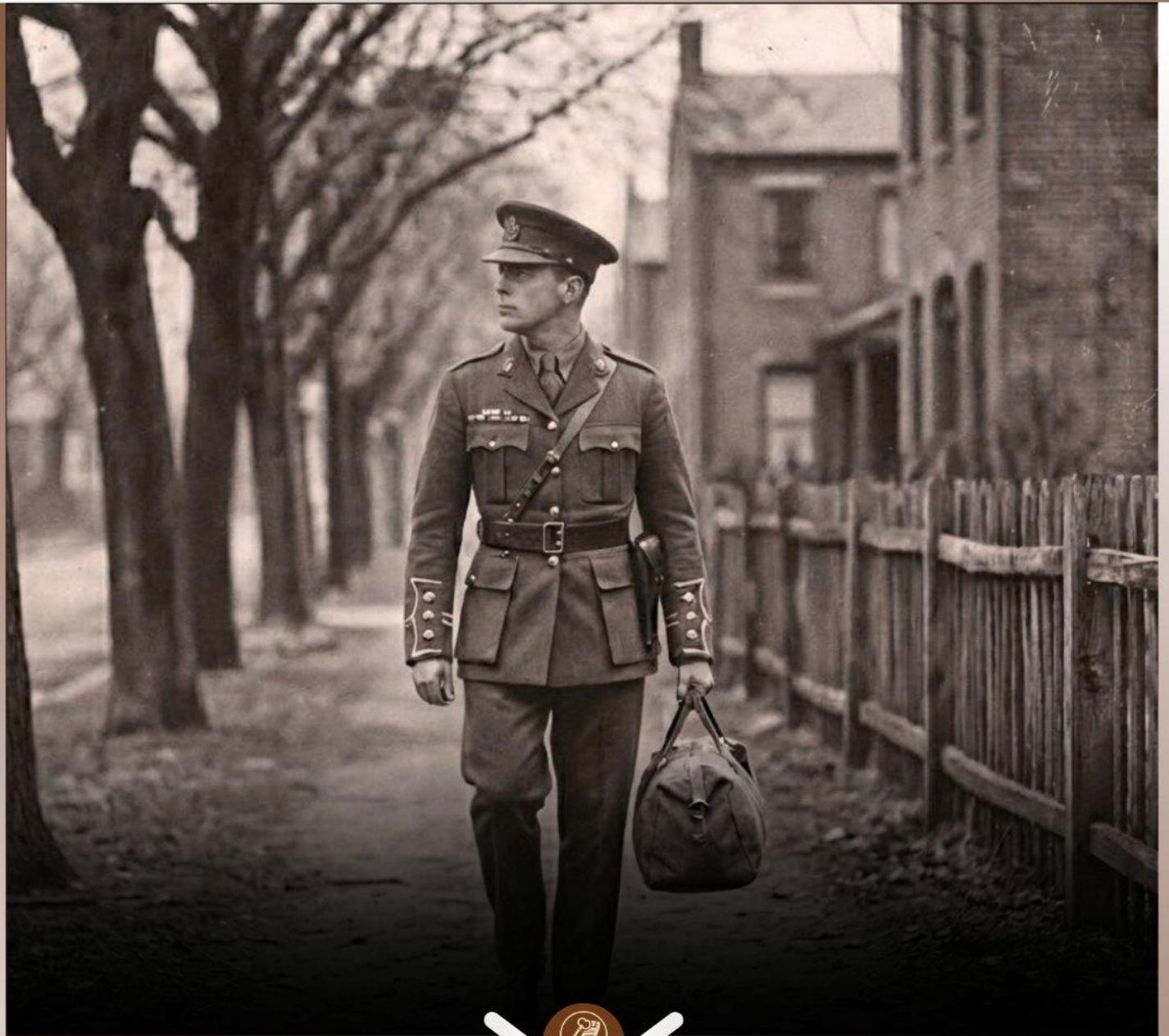
PLEASE NOTE: orders to be despatched by mid-November 2025

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THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION



WHILE A PRISONER OF THE GERMANS IN WORLD WAR I, CAPTAIN ROBERT CAMPBELL ASKED THE KAISER FOR PERMISSION TO VISIT HIS GRAVELY ILL MOTHER IN ENGLAND. HE WAS GRANTED LEAVE ON ONE CONDITION. THAT HE WOULD RETURN TO PRISON AFTERWARD. TRUE TO HIS WORD, HE DID.

He asked the enemy for one last goodbye... and then he walked back into prison. During World War I, British Captain Robert Campbell was captured in August 1914 and held in a German POW camp at Magdeburg*. Months turned into years behind barbed wire—waiting, uncertainty, and letters from home that arrived like slow-motion heartbreak.

Then came the message that crushed him: his mother was dying*.

So Campbell did something almost unthinkable.

He wrote directly to Kaiser Wilhelm II, asking for permission to return to England to see her one last time. The request was extraordinary—and the answer was even more so: yes, on one condition.

Campbell had to give his word of honour as an officer that he would return to German captivity when his visit ended.)

He went home. He reached his mother's bedside and spent precious time with her. And when his leave was over...

He didn't disappear.

He didn't run.

He didn't "take the chance."

He kept his promise—traveling back the same way and voluntarily returning to the POW camp.

In a war remembered for propaganda, betrayal, and mass destruction, his decision feels almost unreal—because it wasn't about politics or victory.

It was about integrity.

Not the kind you post about.

The kind you live... when nobody would blame you for doing the opposite.

And it leaves you with a question that still hits hard today:

What is your word worth when no one can force you to keep it?

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Men....Munitions...and Movement

By August 1916 the Somme offensive seemed to be hampered by a shortage of sufficient gun ammunition for the artillery. Another shell crisis appeared imminent and complaints were directed at the Ministry of Munitions where officials were incredulous as shell output reached the target figure of one million *per* week. In France munitions officials who were investigating salvage operations near the front line noticed severe transport problems on the roads from the railheads. David Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, drew the conclusion that the .reform of transport arrangements on the Western Front required civilian intervention on a scale commensurate with the munitions crusade of May 1915. On the day that news of Lord Kitchener's death reached London, Lloyd George speculated on whether he would become Secretary of State for War and he asked Sir Eric Geddes, Deputy Director General of Munitions

Supply, 'If I do go will you come and put transport right in France? .

The history of the transport mission to the British armies in France in August and September 1916 and the subsequent creation of a new transport directorate at General Headquarters (GHQ) provides an insight into the organisational consequences of large-scale war and its impact on fragile civil-military relations. The membership and recommendations of the commission reflected the quest for 'experts' who might undertake specialist work on behalf of GHQ, but posed the question of how the civilian might be integrated into military decision-making hierarchies. The work of the transport directorate was distrusted by many regular army officers but Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief British armies in France, was more willing to accept innovatory ideas than might be supposed. The political and military consequences of transport developments from August 1916 to March 1917 is a neglected episode in studies of the Western Front and the British government in the Great War and might usefully constitute a case study in the continuing debate on total war. In particular, the relevance of business expertise to facilitating operational activity might become as readily acknowledged in military transport as it has been in munitions supply.

The 'bottleneck' of Cape Town in 1900 brought disturbing evidence of the problems of coordinating traffic on railway lines during the South African war. However, railways marked an advance on the age-old dependence on 'an almost constant stream of under-horsed and overloaded wagons containing flour, powder, cannonballs, as well as clothing and reinforcements for the army'. Consequently, the deployment plans of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France involved the employment of thirty Railway Transport Officers and one Railway Company (Construction) and assumed that supplies would be dispersed from railheads by the horse transport of individual units. Pre-war planning ignored the possibility of an intermediate zone where 70,000 motor lorries would eventually move material closer to the front line.

In 1916 the General Staff planned the opening battles on the Somme without regard for transport implications. In the post-war years the consequences of separating tactical thought and supply arrangements became a prime lesson in staff training on the 'Q' side. At Amiens eighteen miles of trains under load waited to get to the railheads and Major-General Harding-Newman concluded, 'No staff adequately educated in railway operations could have envisaged concentrating a quarter of a million men for the purposes of battle in front of such a bottle-neck'. He concluded from direct experience that the key factor in the congestion on railways and roads was not the bulk of traffic but the absence of overall coordination. General Sir Frederick Clayton, Inspector-General of Communications (IGC), lacked influence at GHQ and had not instituted a systematic transport plan in support of military operations. In addition, the railheads were up to fifteen miles behind the front line and the density of traffic broke up the road surfaces, particularly in wet weather when horse transport left the fields and joined mechanical transport on metalled surfaces.

Ad hoc piecemeal planning to overcome the problems were evident in August 1916. The Fourth Army ordered eighteen miles of track, five locomotives and sixty wagons to relieve congestion on its roads, but a larger response was needed as the volume of British military traffic which left French ports doubled in 1916. The average number of loaded wagons moved daily rose from 2,584 in January to 5,202 in December 1916. On a two-day visit to GHQ in early August Geddes concluded that the operational concentration of divisions in the British sector was not matched by the adequate movement of supplies on lines of communication. In retrospect he summarised many problems:

The organisation was bad; responsibility was divided, and no-one realised the need for Transportation until they broke the machine which was never designed to stand the strain. They blamed the Ports; they blamed shipping . . . the bottleneck was between the rail head and coast. They had no statistics, they were short of material; short of foresight; short of programmes; short of labour and imagination; and they never pushed the rail heads far

forward enough?

These issues were investigated in detail by the transport mission which arrived in France on 24 August 1916 and, with Haig's agreement, freely visited the rearward zone for just under one month. Geddes's summary emphasised problems of control, co-ordination, resourcing, staffing and expansion, which were issues he had rectified in the supply of gun ammunition in 1916 and regularly faced as deputy general manager of the North Eastern Railway (NER) before 1914.

Geddes also had experience of the movement of troops on Indian railways to the north-west frontier during the invasion scare of 1904 before he returned to a home appointment. He was a member of the Railway Executive Committee in 1913-14 which advised the War Office on mobilisation timetables, and of the Engineer and Railway Staff Corps which was a long established corps of executives of principal British railways and civil building contractors. The NER employed 50,000 men in 1913 which made it one of the largest transport enterprises in Britain. Its dominant position in the industry after 1900 was maintained by investment in technical innovation, 'proactive' managerial activity and the constant review of train load efficiency by the analysis of traffic statistics and freight rates. The NER avoided compartmentalised duplication of effort, used elements of scientific management which it referred to as 'American practice', and maintained a working assumption that railways were still instruments of progress. Consequently, railway managers had experience of coherent large-scale organisation and new business methods which Lloyd George 'requisitioned' to expand munitions output. After Lloyd George's departure for the War Office his successor, Edwin Montagu, vigorously complained:

When Geddes left his Ministry he took with him Nash and Beharrell, and since then I can hardly bear to look at War Office correspondence, for almost every day, if you will excuse a slight exaggeration, I receive a request for the services of some new man to be sent somewhere or other, sometimes China, sometimes France. By a curious coincidence they are nearly always North Eastern Railw'D' men, and it looks as though we shall be left without a railway man anywhere about.

Philip Nash joined Geddes's transport mission to inspect British facilities at French Channel ports. His career started at the Locomotive Department, Great Northern Railway in 1897 and he was a manager on the East Indian Railways from 1899 to 1915 when he became Director of Royal Arsenals at the Ministry of Munitions. George Beharrell's statistical expertise was used to project transport requirements of the British armies in France for 1917. In 1914 he was Assistant Goods Manager and Commercial Agent at the NER before joining Geddes at the Ministry of Munitions and, subsequently, in France. They were accompanied by Colonel Mance,