

OX & BUCKS BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

MAY 2026



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Ox & Bucks WFA

www.westernfrontassociation.com



COMMENT

Welcome to the May Branch Newsletter. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Paul Bennett and Simon Cains who joined the committee at the AGM, last month, we are very pleased to have them to help run and guide the branch. This month's meeting coincides with the FA Cup final, but I hope that this will not deter too many of you from coming to hear Peter's talk on the Italian front. As a Liverpool supporter, I will certainly not be missing anything by being in Chalfont St. Giles!

- David Adamson

Future Meetings 2026

- 16th May Peter Caddick Adams "The Italian Front 1915-1918"
20th June Dr Anne Samson "The Indian Army in East Africa 1914"
18th July Phil Tomaselli "MI5 and the struggle against German Espionage"

August NO MEETING, AS USUAL

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



Serviceman Remembered:

Pte. Joseph John Curtis, 1st/1st Bucks Battalion, High Wycombe, 16th May 1917.

Joseph John Curtis was born in High Wycombe in 1898, the second of seven children of Joseph, a labourer, and Ellen Curtis. Joseph worked as a chairmaker for William Birch Ltd and was living with his parents at 8, Townsfield Terrace in 1911. The Bucks Battalion was in the 145 Brigade, 48th (South Midland) Division and had relieved the 11th Division near Le Transloy. Joseph was killed the next day, has no known grave and is commemorated at High Wycombe Memorial and on the Arras Memorial, France.

Report of Meeting of 18th April:

Wenlan Peng “The Chinese Labour Corps”

Unfortunately, Wenlan was unable to come to the meeting, but had sent a documentary film that she has made about the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC) and this was shown at the meeting, after the AGM.

The eastern Chinese province of Shandong was controlled by Germany from 1898 but was seized by Japan in 1914. When Britain was looking for manpower from outside the Empire it recruited the Chinese Labour Corps, predominantly from this province. There were a number of British missionaries along the Jiaojin railway and areas where they worked were key recruiting areas. Recruitment was quick and a camp was set up on the coast until transport could be arranged. The first men left in January 1917 traveling across the Pacific to Canada. 100,000 men travelled across Canada in sealed trains which took 10 to 14 days to arrive in Halifax. On 19th April men arrived in Le Havre, together with many expatriate Britons, who had been living in China.

Each CLC company had six to seven British officers who usually only spoke Mandarin and had to have translators (into the other Chinese languages), eight Senior Gangers, 16 Junior Gangers and 1,001 Labourers. The CLC worked in docks, on road building, railway lines, salvage and trench digging. Living in closed camps, with a base at Noyelle, the men cooked for themselves and were given Chinese holidays with some making gongs from shell cases to use in celebrations.

As non-combatants, the members of the CLC were guaranteed that they would not be on the front line, but they were often near it and many were killed. Many stayed until 1921 and were involved with battlefield clearance where more were killed. Even on ships back to China some died of TB or jumped overboard. In all over 2,000 died. Many of those who did get back bought homes and land. Some of their descendants still have the British War Medals (engraved with the men's number rather than their name) that they were awarded.



West Wycombe War Memorial

The West Wycombe War Memorial is in the churchyard of St. Lawrence's Church and was unveiled in 1928. As reported in the 24th April edition of the *Bucks Free Press*, an appeal has been launched to renovate the memorial in time for its centenary. The work will include cleaning the stonework, conservation and site clearance. Donations of any size, whether one-off or regular, are welcomed to help reach the funding goal. Funds will be held by the West Wycombe Charitable Trust, a registered charity. The public is also encouraged to share photographs, stories, or family connections to the men named on the memorial. To find out more or join the mailing list please email westwycombe.memorial.100@gmail.com.

Appeal launched to restore century old war memorial

Katie Worrell
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A village war memorial aims to be restored in time for its centenary in 2028.

An appeal has been launched in West Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, to raise funds for the conservation of the memorial, which stands in St Lawrence's churchyard near West Wycombe Hill.

The memorial honours residents who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars and has suffered from nearly 100 years of exposure to the elements, resulting in biological growth and overgrown vegetation.

Mark Herbert, a member of the West Wycombe Parish Council, said: "The idea is to get it restored in time for its 100th birthday."

Mr Herbert said the aim was to "Make it a better place for the next 100 years."

The restoration project aims to raise £5,000 through community donations and grants.

This will fund professional stone cleaning, conservation, and site clearance, as recommended by conservators.

West Wycombe Parish Council will authorise the restoration under the War Memorials (Local Authorities' Powers) Act 1923.

Recent research by Ellen Carter confirmed the memorial was dedicated in 1929, not 1927 as previously believed.

This correction gives the community more time to plan a centenary event that will recreate the original dedication ceremony and order of service.

The project has already received strong local support.

Sir Edward Dashwood, the scheme's patron, has overseen initial clearance works to improve visibility of the monument.

Reverend Lance Sharpe is liaising with the flocks and supporting the involvement of the Bucks Army Cadets.

Research and expertise have also been contributed by Ellen Carter, Susie Chester, Simon Cope, Martin Cooke, and members of the St Lawrence's Church Trust.

Mark Herbert described the memorial's origins, saying that it was built later than many others and was driven by the persistence of local veterans.

Three professional conservators who have visited the site have expressed enthusiasm for the project and offered encouraging feedback.

West Wycombe Parish Council has confirmed it will authorise the restoration work.

A project spokesperson said: "This centenary gives us a rare opportunity to honour the past, strengthen our community and ensure that the sacrifices of West Wycombe's servicemen are never forgotten."

Donations of any size, whether one-off or regular, are welcomed to help reach the funding goal.

Funds will be held by the West Wycombe Charitable Trust, a registered charity.

The public is also encouraged to share photographs, stories, or family connections to the men named on the memorial.

WEST WYCOMBE
Unveiling of the 20-Service War Memorial
The unveiling of the 20-Service War Memorial, which stands in St Lawrence's churchyard near West Wycombe Hill, took place on Monday, Sept. 24th, 1928.

The memorial, which was unveiled by the Rev. Mr. Herbert, is a fine example of the work of the Bucks Army Cadets.

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WEST WYCOMBE
TASK ENDS
Committee Celebrates Cross Debt Settlement

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The Memorial and Bucks Free Press from 1928-1932

Committee

Chairman & Newsletter Editor - David Adamson

Deputy Chairman - Nigel Crompton, Treasurer – Lance Hale, Speaker Liaison – Bob Swayne, Simon Cains, Paul Bennett

Meetings: The Guide Centre, School Lane, **Chalfont St. Giles. HP8 4JJ**
Usually on the third Saturday of the month, starting at 2:30

