



The Spire Sentinel



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



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

ISSUE 118 - December 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 + <i>'Quintinshill 22nd May 1915 - Britain`s Worst Railway Disaster`</i> Grant Cullen. Meeting Cancelled
February	4th	AGM + <i>Villages at War - Clowne and Barlborough in World War 1</i> by Paul Burkitt.
March	4th	Andrea Heatherington - <i>"Scamps in Khaki"</i> - <i>criminal deserters'</i> 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
May	6th	<i>"Combat motivation and morale in British Empire armies in the two world wars"</i> by Prof. Gary Sheffield
June	3rd	'The Forgotten Blitz and the Defeat of the Zeppelins'. by Ian Castle
July	1st	<i>Jutland - Clash of Titans</i> 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 Nick describes the motorcyclists' contribution to the 1914 campaign, using their own words and their own previously unpublished photographs.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	Peter Hart <i>I'm Out! Escape from German POW Camps, 1914-1918</i>
November	4th	<i>After Kut - What ?.</i> Tony Bolton
December	2nd	<i>An Historians Wrongful Assumption ?</i> - 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 this finds you all well. November`s meeting saw a great talk by our very own Tony Bolton very interesting very well researched and well presented, Thank you Tony.

I am sure it was a busy Remembrance time for many of you and hopefully everything went to plan. In Chesterfield the Remembrance service in the Crooked Spire and then the march to the town hall for the wreath laying was very well attended and was good to see Max Kerley from the branch in attendance. On Tuesday 11th November Remembrance Day, I travelled to London to lay a wreath at The Cenotaph on behalf of the branch again a fantastic parade and very well attended. Rob Nash did an excellent job as parade marshal; the event seems to get bigger each year. It was great to see branch members Yvonne Ridgeway and James Kay make the journey down to take part in the event and to attend the service in the Guards Chapel.

As this is the last edition of the newsletter I would to say a big thank to everyone who has supported the branch through the year by attending each month thank you to all the speakers for giving great talks and a big thank you to the committee for working so hard behind the scenes to keep everything running smoothly. So, onto a successful year in 2026 for more great presentations and hopefully couple of branch trips.

Wishing everyone a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Jon-Paul Harding

December Meeting Speaker - Morris Charlton

Morris is making his first visit to the Branch and was, until recently WFA Branches Coordinator. A well-travelled individual, his talk on Tuesday should prove interesting, entitled **An Historians Wrongful Assumption?** - a short look at Sniping and how it developed in World War One.



Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the November 2025 edition of our Branch Newsletter. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those members and friends who took time out to contact me to enquire about my wife Jean`s problems after her replacement hip joint displaced (for the third time this year). Initially

at Doncaster Infirmary they simply manipulated the artificial joint back into place under general anaesthetic. After several days in recovery, X rays and scans were reviewed by the orthopaedic consultant who decided that the full joint should be replaced such was the damage to the inserts. This was duly carried out - replacement of a replacement joint is a major undertaking. She`s now at home recovering - a very slow process. Again, thanks.

We have a good selection of photographs in this issue covering the Remembrance Sunday services in Chesterfield plus the Armistice Service Parade at the London Cenotaph on November 11th. Several Branch Members attended, and of course the Parade was marshalled by our own Rob Nash

Our December meeting on Tuesday sees a first time visitor, Morris Charlton coming to give us his talk... ***An Historians Wrongful Assumption?*** - A short look at Sniping and how it developed in World War One. We will also have a free drink / buffet for all attendees - our way of saying "Thank You" to attendees for your support throughout the year. All being well next year we will organise a couple of outings to places of interest for members. As you know I`m always happy to accept articles / correspondence for inclusion in this Newsletter / Magazine. Ian Callan has sent in some interesting pictures as a follow up to the short article in the last Newsletter regarding Bernard Montgomery.

The calendar for 2026 is now complete and our first speaker in the New Year is the ever popular Tim Lynch who will discuss the experiences of German prisoners of war in the UK during and immediately after the conflict

Best wishes.

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

This was received by our Branch Chair, Jon-Paul

Hello WFA Chairs, I hope this finds you all in the best of health. First of all, apologies for the impersonal/generic nature of this email - but with the deadline of the next edition of the Bulletin approaching, I thought that this might be a good time to formally introduce myself to those of you who do not know me or have not already been in contact.

My name is Dr Martin Purdy and I am taking over the editorship and design of the Bulletin from Ralph. I am sure that you will all want to pass on your own messages of thanks to Ralph after 20 years of service in the role. Needless to say, I already have - which was not too hard given that we have known each other for years as fellow members of the Lancashire and Cheshire Branch. (Ralph, is by the way, still working on the design of Stand To! with its editor, Matt - it is just the Bulletin that is passing over to myself.)

I have worked in the newspaper and magazine industry for decades and still do as a freelance; regularly researching and writing about the Great War for national publications and the likes of the BBC. I have also written popular history books and academic works on a range of specialist themes concerning the conflict and have been a WFA member for more than 20 years.

I have always believed that the branches are at the very heart of the organisation and have been a speaker at many of them. As such, I am very committed to promoting what you all do.

One of my remits is to tighten up (edit and shorten) copy to allow for and encourage an even wider variety of contributions, but I can guarantee that there will always be a place for your work. Indeed, I am hoping that by tighter editing and shorter features we will actually be able to include more branch material. For example, I am incredibly impressed by the quality of some of the branch publications and newsletters that are being produced and would like to create more space to be able to draw on some of that material, whilst also helping to publicise it more widely to the broader membership. There will also be a number of new features (including 'places to visit on home shores') that will benefit hugely from your local knowledge and participation.

The Bulletin now comes out TWO TIMES each year (in FEBRUARY and AUGUST). This means that your talks/branch line information should run from February to July for the first edition of the year and then from August to January for the second edition.

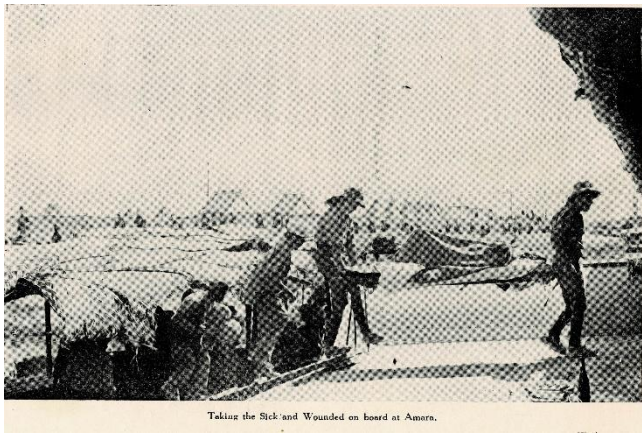
The DEADLINE for the next edition (February 2026) is December 5, 2025, and the deadline for the August 2026 edition is June 5, 2026.

I am not retired and have a number of other commitments, so it does mean that there will sometimes be a bit of a time lapse in communications, but I will endeavour to respond to messages as soon as possible via this email address

I really look forward to working with you and being able to communicate on a more personal level than this email in the future.

All the very best,

Martin



Taking the Sick and Wounded on board at Amara.

After Kut What?

November's talk saw Tony Bolton former Chair here at Chesterfield answer the question of what happened after the surrender of Townsend's garrison on 29 April 1916.

It was without doubt a huge and damaging dent in British prestige, particularly throughout the East. The failed relief attempts had resulted in 23000 casualties. As the inevitability of surrender became increasingly apparent a debate was underway, as to what was to

happen after Kut fell. Essentially the debate can be summed up as **'stay or go.'** - Was it better to pull the failed relief force back down river to where the totally inadequate transport of the Mesopotamian theatre could actually keep them fed? Or would a retirement just add to the huge loss of Imperial prestige occasioned by the Kut surrender and evacuation of Gallipoli earlier in the year. CIGS Robertson, never a fan of sideshows instinctively favoured the former while the Viceroy fearful of the effect on Indian opinion, favoured holding fast. There were other more tangible factors at play too. If the Tigris Corps did retire down river, it would be an invitation to the local Arab tribes to show their loyalty to their returning masters by resuming their hostile attitude and behaviour. It was also recognised that without at least the threat of a renewed British advance, the Turks could redeploy their forces to counter the Russian advances in the Caucasus and Persia.

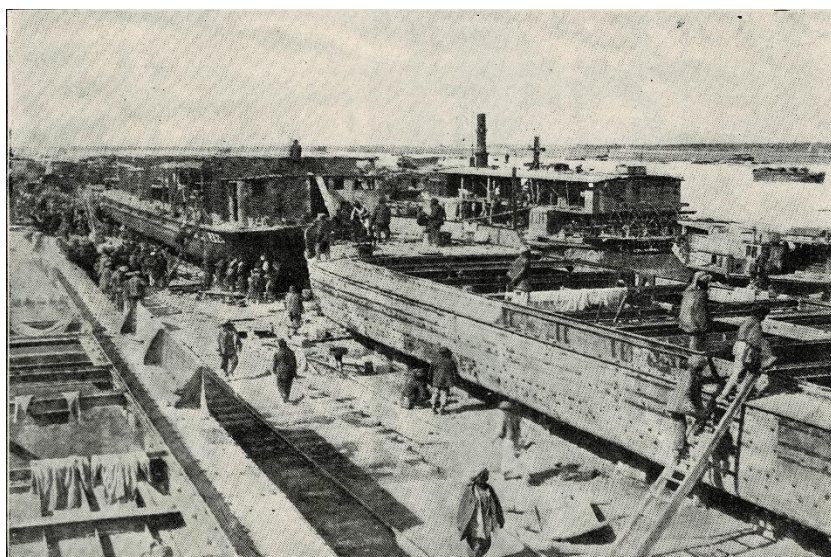
Having decided that the Tigris Corps would stay upriver facing the Turks, the troops suffered as the inadequate logistical supply lines could not even keep the men and animals properly fed. Given the inability to feed the troops there was no chance that comforts which would have relieved the conditions for the men could be moved upriver. As summer temperatures soared, under thin canvas tents where men spent most of their days the 120F in the shade was greatly exceeded. By mid-June the heat of Mesopotamia is normally slightly abated by the *'Shamal'* a northern wind but in 1916 it arrived a month late, adding greatly to the discomfort of the Corps. The sickness rate for the force began to escalate enormously. British troops suffered mainly from intestinal diseases, fevers and jaundice. Indian troops suffered particularly from scurvy due to the inability of providing them with fresh vegetables. Despite the heat and the difficulties in supply, the Turkish withdrawal from their positions on the Tigris right bank was followed up.

Between May and June two thirds of the Corps were sick at any time. That is sick enough to require hospitalisation, it ignores the sick who were able to carry on. Efforts were made to keep the sick upriver in the dry heat of the desert rather than bring them back to base hospitals at Basra where the heat was humid. The policy also reduced the strain on hospital transport which like every other form of transport in theatre was inadequate. The difficulty of treating the sick was compounded by the sickness rate amongst medical staff and S&T men themselves. At one time a 1,000-bed hospital down river at Amara was being staffed by one senior and one junior doctor.

Newly arriving drafts were particularly susceptible, many arrived and went immediately to hospital, others were evacuated back to India before ever having seen the front. The equivalent of almost a division strength was being evacuated back to India in each of the summer months. So many sick cases needed evacuation, that the 15 hospital ships on the run had to be supplemented by external charter to carry the less serious cases.

While the army did its best to survive the summer, changes were underway to the senior command. General Gorringe who commanded the Tigris Corps was removed by Lake on 9 July. Gorringe had been a hard-working, capable but difficult Corps Commander. He was almost widely disliked for his blunt and demanding ways. His replacement in command of the Tigris Corps was Stanley Maude who had arrived in Mesopotamia at the head of 13 Division following its evacuation from Gallipoli.

Maude's meteoric rise continued, less than two months later he replaced Sir Percy Lake as GOC. Mesopotamia. Lake was by then over sixty and tired from the exertion and the debilitating climate. He had however begun the process of reorganising the base and supply lines which would greatly assist Maude. Maude himself recognised that he had inherited a base organisation undergoing a considerable reorganisation. Maude had a huge advantage in that he was known and respected by Robertson. With his appointment he threw his considerable effort and ability into preparations for a renewed advance.



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A busy scene at an inland water transport dockyard constructed on the foreshore of the Tigris to facilitate the development of the natural resources of Mesopotamia, which was part of the Imperial work energetically begun by the conqueror, Sir Frederick Stanley Maude.

DEVELOPMENT OF WATER-BORNE TRANSPORT IN MESOPOTAMIA UNDER THE BRITISH.

operate against the current but very shallow draught for some of the upper reaches of the Tigris. One of the most effective means of providing these craft was for them to be transported in sections and reassembled in theatre.

The autumn's cooler campaigning weather was slipping away and the rainy season which makes movement impracticable was due to begin in December. Maude however remained resolute that there would be no premature resumption. It was not until 14 December that Maude struck. While most of I Corps made every indication of a renewed attack on the Sannaiyat position, where the Turks always expected an attack, III Corps and the Cavalry Division advanced to the Hai which it reached around 6am. The advance encountered little resistance. As the Cavalry advanced up the west bank of the Hai, 13 Div pushed two Bdes.

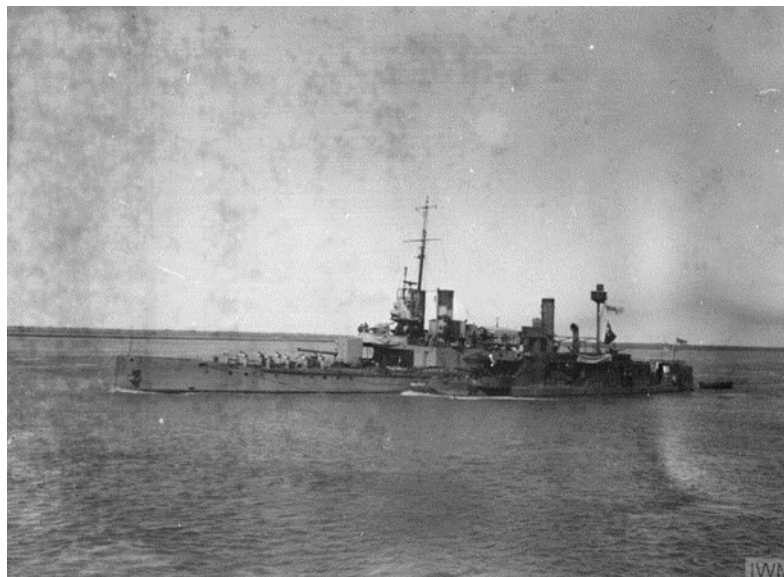
As the summer progressed there was a tremendous growth in the supply capacity of the river fleet. The dramatic rise in the river steamer and barge fleet was the result of great effort. The Empire was scoured for river steamers some making their way to the Gulf under their own power by port hopping. Others were towed to the head of the Gulf. The difficulty of transporting these craft is illustrated by the numbers lost in transit. The sad thing is that despite arduous journeys at great risk to their civilian crews many were unusable on the Tigris which needed powerful engines to



Up the east bank. Establishing and consolidating a new line in contact with the Turkish lines. The advance and consolidation had begun just in time as the rains arrived at Christmas and New Year rendering all land-transport impossible, even the light railway was affected by the mud left on the rails by passing troops. Supplying the troops once again became difficult.

Fighting began in earnest on 9 January when 3 Lahore Division began clearing the Turks from the Khudaira Bend, which they completed by 18 January when the remaining Turks withdrew across the Tigris. III Corps then began the clearance of the Hai Salient. Attacks on the west bank met particularly heavy opposition, the more lightly held east bank was cleared by 4 February at which time the Turks again withdrew into the Dahra Bend positions. By 15 February Maude had cleared the bend and now occupied the whole of the right bank of the Tigris between Sannaiyat and Shumran.

On 23 February while I Corps attacked the formidable five separate and heavily wired trench lines at Sannaiyat to pin the Turkish defenders; III Corps crossed the Tigris at the tip of the Shumran bend. Covered by landings from pontoons, each carrying ten fighting troops, four volunteer oarsmen and a cox. Bridging began at 7.30am and a 290 yd pontoon bridge was complete by 4.30pm it had been delayed more by the strong current than by Turkish opposition. By nightfall the whole of 14 Indian Division were across. The Turks abandoned Sannaiyat during the day but were soon outstripping 7 Meerut Division's pursuit. During the 24 February the Turks stubborn defence of the neck of the Shumran prevented Maude's Cavalry Division from cutting off the retreating Turks from Kut and Sannaiyat.



The Turks proved adept at using the many dry water cuts along the Tigris bank as extemporary defences forcing the pursuing infantry and cavalry to repeatedly deploy allowing the columns of retiring Turks to retire. It was the Royal Navy which turned the Turkish retreat into route. On the morning of the 26 February three insect class river gunboats overtook the fleeing columns. Where the road ran alongside the river the gunboats poured fire from all their weapons into the panic-stricken Turks. By evening the navy had overhauled and captured all the Turkish river fleet and recovered HMS Firefly which had been lost in Townshend's retreat from Ctesiphon. Official Eye Witness Edmund Candler describes the scene the following day,

"We found Turkish dead on the road. There was every sign of panic and rout- bullocks still alive and unyoked entangled in the traces of a trench mortar carriage, broken wheels, cast equipment, overturned limbers, hundreds of live shells of various calibres scattered over the country for

miles ...Every bend of the road told its tale of confusion and flight. Here a wrecked field post-office with Turkish money orders circling round in the wind; there a brand-new Mercedes motor car held up for want of petrol; cartloads of small-arms ammunition, grenades, a pump. Well drilling apparatus, hats, boots, oil drums, things destroyed or half destroyed, decapitated carcasses of stock which could not keep up with the rout, white columns of smoke ahead telling of further destruction, enough litter by the road to keep the army in fuel for weeks; then a whole battery of 12 centimetre field guns, their breech blocks removed, but buried too hastily nearby, and betrayed by an entrenching tool."

Having paused at Aziziya to allow his supply line to reorganise, Maude renewed his advance on Baghdad on 6 March, the Turks fought delaying actions at Lajj and the Diyala River on the left bank of the Tigris and at Umm at Tubul and its forward line at Tel Aswad on the Tigris right bank after Maude switched his attack on 8 March.

In a blinding dust storm on 10 March the Cavalry Division at last showed some initiative and got around the Turkish right flank at Umm at Tubul, one squadron was within a mile of the Baghdad - Mosul railway line. With this threat to their line of retreat the Turks abandoned Baghdad and retreated north, small detachments entered the city the following morning to prevent the rioting and looting which was taking place.



Turkish Commanders had consistently overestimated the Cavalry Division. Their failure to live up to this potential must at least in part be down to its commander who was replaced the day before Baghdad fell. It is also evident that Robertson's repeated warnings not to incur heavy casualties which could not be easily replaced had a restraining effect on Maude. He achieved what he set out to achieve at relatively low cost. He manoeuvred the Turks out of Baghdad rather than annihilating their army. As he approached Baghdad, he does not seem to have envisaged a major thrust to cut the railway and trap XVIII Corps, perhaps by then he was disillusioned by the limited achievement of his cavalry and happy that the fall of the city gave Lloyd-George and the long-suffering population back home something to cheer about at last.

REMEMBRANCE 2025









Received this from Ian Callan.....

Was interesting to see the story about Montgomery in the last newsletter.

My grandad was shot through the face by a sniper at High Wood and was declared not worth saving by stretcher parties.

He called comrade to some surrendering Germans (my grandad was a communist and very reluctant conscript) and was carried in and subsequently recovered enough to be seriously wounded again.

My dad said that he was within a quarter of an inch of being killed outright.

He said he witnessed one of the last cavalry charges. There was a memorial in London and they wanted witnesses to come to the unveiling. My granddad would not go and never let the kids go to anything to do with the royal family.

My other granddad was an old contemptible with the Royal Welch Fusiliers and came through unscathed (Isaac Sawyer mentioned in The War the Infantry Knew).

Another quarter of an inch and we would never have been here. Makes you think doesn't it.

As an additional note my grandad (the one who was wounded) was a Saville Row tailor so luckily finished the war as ground crew for the Flying Corps sewing the canvas on the planes.

We have some great pictures of him in flying gear and as part of the scruffiest looking ground crew you could imagine.

My mum was only four when her mother died of TB. She was subsequently brought up by an aunt whose husband was an old contemptible with the Lancashire Fusiliers so we had 3 grandads who all got through the war. Pretty lucky family eh!

Ian sent in the following collection of pictures and comments.....

My grandad is third from the right in the group photo. We believe that this is the RFC ground crew where he was sewing the canvas.

His name was James Callan 1/23 London Regiment.

I am pleased to say that we have his medals and those of my mum's dad Isaac Sawyer 2/RWF.





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 Horner's story’
December	1st	Neil Taylor....”Winston`s Little Army...Aspects of the Royal Naval Division”