



The Spire Sentinel



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



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

ISSUE 115 - September 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	<i>AGM + 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>K'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describes the motorcyclists' contribution to the 1914 campaign, using their own words and their own previously unpublished photographs.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 that everyone who attended last month's meeting enjoyed the talk by Roy Larkin, it was an interesting talk as always. This September meeting talk should be another interesting topic - different. Grant has been working hard again to put together next year's speaker list, and it's looking very good, so thank you Grant for all the hard work with all the emails and sorting out the months when the speakers come so it's going to be another good year of talks.

November the 11th is fast approaching as of previous years I will be attending the ceremony at the Cenotaph in London so if anyone is able to make the trip down as well and join in the march it would be good. If any members would like to take part just let me know. Just a reminder if anyone has any ideas for trips just contact one of the committee and we shall see what we can do as this is your branch so we would like some suggestions.

I would again like to thank everyone who turns up every month to support the branch and take part in all the great talks.

Jon-Paul Harding

September Meeting Speaker - Nick Shelley

Nick describes myself as an Englishman from Edinburgh! I was brought up in Scotland and studied English literature at college. Since university I've spent most of my life in England, first in Devon and Bristol, and then moved to Nottingham where my wife and I have long been settled.

After a brief career in teaching at home and overseas, I worked for many years in the Probation service. When I took early retirement I retrained to work as a legal costs specialist. That was largely a desk-bound job but it allowed me to travel

widely to court hearings, including work as an expert witness where solicitors were under investigation for overcharging.

Riding vintage Sunbeam motorcycles was my main hobby, but I've also had years of experience researching family histories (my own family and helping others). I've been giving talks on First World War motorcycle despatch riders since I co-authored a book on the subject – use this link to find the WFA review:

<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-book-reviews/two-wheels-to-war-a-tale-of-twelve-bright-young-men-who-volunteered-own-motorcycles-for-the-british-expeditionary-force-1914-at-war/>





Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the September 2025 edition of our Branch Newsletter / Magazine. It`s been a sad time, as I intimated at our August meeting, Anthony, husband of our Branch Treasurer, Jane, passed away after a brave battle with cancer. Several of you asked regarding funeral details etc but, in accordance with Anthony`s wishes, it was a Direct Cremation with no funeral service. Our thoughts and prayers have been with Jane and her family at this period of sadness and mourning.

As Jon-Paul has intimated elsewhere, I`m well ahead with organising the speakers for the 2026 meetings ...indeed I only have one date to fill December 2026 and as I type this am just awaiting on a response from a potential presenter. I enclose the draft of the 2026 programme - speakers booked...just some topic details to fill in. Thanks to those who suggested speakers / topics...I did follow up on these and fortunately managed to tie up several in line with suggestions - thanks !

Mark and Jean Macartney have been off on their annual trip to Scotland but this year it has been more of a pilgrimage as they have visited sites related to the Quintinshill Disaster 22nd May 1915. Mark`s detailed report is in this newsletter / magazine.

Next month we have the annual visit of the inimitable legend that is Peter Hart, making his annual visitation to his old home town. This year his topic is *“I`m Out! Escape from German POW Camps, 1914-1918”*. I have a feeling Peter will have us rolling in the aisles !

On Tuesday evening we have a first time visitor to the Branch - Nick Shelley - full details of Nick and his topic - rather an unusual one - but one full of interest being delivered by an enthusiast of the subject.

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

August Meeting - Roy Larkin.

Roy presented a profusely illustrated account of the 'adventures' of a Divisional Supply Column in the first month of the war. Here is precis of his talk.

August 1914

When 59 coy ASC (1 Divisional Supply Column) mobilised at 8.35am on 5th May 1914, three officers and five men marched out of the gate at Aldershot North Camp. Ten minutes later, a further nine men and an officer followed and they all arrived at Avonmouth at 2.30pm same day. Whether they lazy getting out of bed or simply fell out over breakfast is not recorded.

The company consisting of just nineteen men, although four were listed as 'spare', as yet had no transport, only two steam engines, still en-route. By the time the company left the berth for France, its Establishment was 340 officers and men. The men comprised Specially Enlisted men, civilian tradesmen who had volunteered to be called up if required. The transport was civilian motor lorries of all types, sizes and condition requisitioned from local companies.

Drafting such large numbers of men into a small company must have created a huge discipline problem as there was not sufficient men initially to provide an established regime. The discipline situation was even more pronounced with 60 Coy ASC (1 Ammunition Sub Park), who, when formed on 17th August, comprised just three officers and 350 civilian volunteers.

This was the supply line that followed the BEF towards the German frontlines through unfamiliar territory, on roads clogged with troops and refugees. For most, the first time in a foreign country and having to learn how to do the work, while learning how to be a soldier.

While supply companies were finding their feet and learning their trade, spare a thought for GHQ. On 7th August it was established in Room 222 at the War office, on the corner of Whitehall and Horseguards Avenue, London. Just as they began unpacking and preparing to oversee the war, they were moved to the Hotel Metropole, Northumberland Avenue on the 8th.

Their offices in France opened in the Hotel Continental at Le Havre on 14th August, then on the 17th they moved to the Ecole des Filles on the Place du Commandant Edouard Richez in Le Cateau. Here they remained at the centre of operations until the 24th when they moved to Saint-Quentin. Two days later, GHQ moved to Noyon, where there was just time to boil the kettle before moving on again to Compiègne.

It has to be remembered that GHQ was still trying to monitor and manage the war. At the same time, messages sent from the Corps and Divisions, found when they arrived that GHQ had moved. It was then left to the messengers, on motorcycles or horseback to try and find where GHQ had gone. Even if the locals knew where GHQ had moved to, they then had to find how to get there when still new to the country and local language. Communications were certainly not easy and are often forgotten when GHQ is criticised.

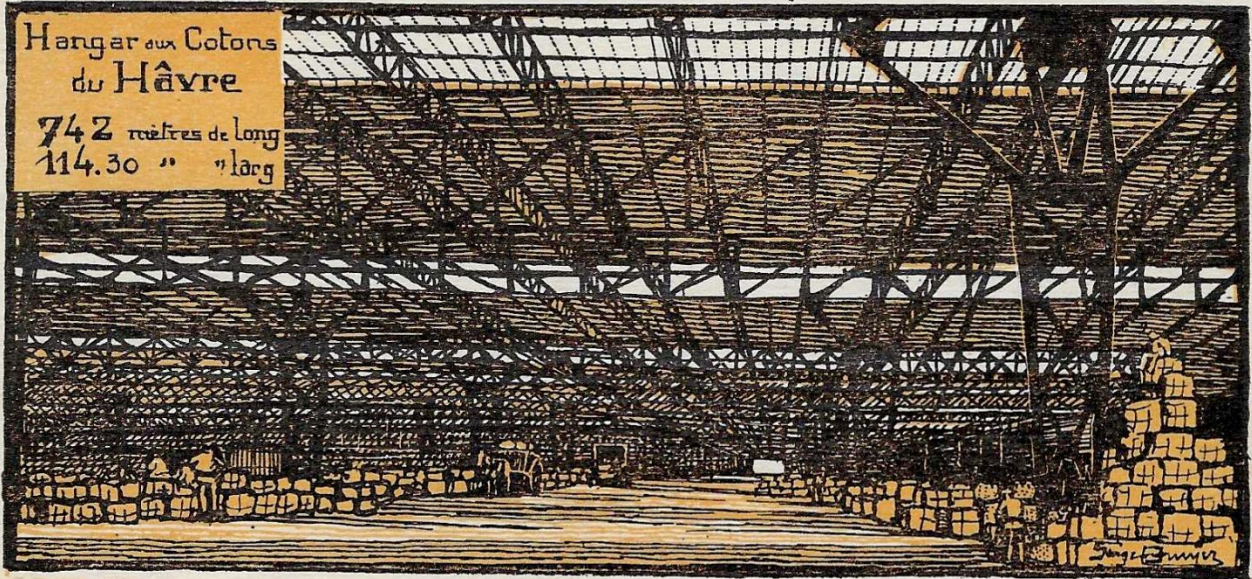
To make supply easier, the vital ports of Boulogne, Le Havre and Rouen were all evacuated by the end of August, creating untold confusion at the ports as ships discharging their cargoes were suddenly being reloaded as the ports were emptied. Inevitably, the confusion and subsequent delays quickly cascaded back to the English ports and as they became gridlocked, back along the British railway supply lines to the factories.

Fortunately, August ended and it was left to September to sort out the chaos that August left in its wake.

Le plus grand **Hangar à Marchandises** du Monde est **Français**

Hangar aux Cotons
du Havre

742 mètres de long
114.30 " " larg



Édition de l'Animateur des Temps Nouveaux (LOUIS FOREST, Fondateur), Revue hebdomadaire illustrée.
Spécimens gratuits sur demande : 131, Boulevard Saint-Michel, PARIS
Même adresse : Jeu de 16 cartes postales, 2 fr. 20 en timbres poste.

Hangar Aux Cotons, Le Havre. Used by the British and capable of complete trains being loaded inside the warehouse.



Ecole des Filles, Le Cateau. GHQ for a few days. The building and adjacent arch still stand and look the same but is now a museum.



Three impressed lorries still in their owners liveries of the type sent to France in August 1914.

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Mark & Jean`s Pilgrimage.

Quintinshill – Rail Disaster 22 May 1915

(The worst accident in the history of Britain`s railways)



**Report by Mark Macartney WFA Trustee & Chesterfield Branch
Publicity Administrator
July 2025 - 110 years on (Part 1)**

To remember this awful accident I, with my wife Jean actioned, -in addition to laying two wreaths -) remembrance of this terrible incident. We also visited two other locations, making four in total on behalf of The Western Front Association, commemorating 110 years since the Rail Disaster, although not to the date of the what is the worst accident in the history of Britain`s railways, 22nd May 1915,

I actually lived at Kirkpatrick (the next station up the track) from Quintinshill, some 2 miles (160 chains) (see map) although our visit was on behalf of The Western Front Association in commemorating 110 years.

I was assisted by Jean (as stated above) who was at times required as official photographer, and we carried out the following commemoration activities at each of the following four locations. This completed our plan of the following “memory route” of the 1/7th Battalion Royal Scots on their ill-fated journey.

- (a) A WFA plaque (Personalised Metal Sign, with Metallic finish) was affixed to the railings at the bridge overlooking the site of the disaster.
- (b) A wreath was laid at the cairn at the Gretna Old Blacksmiths Shop car park where there is a WFA Plaque on top of the cairn. This memorial Cairn is formed of stones taken from near the site of the accident. The dedicatory bronze plaque, headed by The Western Front Association Logo (as it was then)

on a sandstone slab placed on top of the cairn. The badge of the Royal Scots is on two sides of the cairn

(c) Larbert Station, near Falkirk, was visited as it was here where the Troop Train started from. On this visit photos were taken with me next to the plaque at the station. The polished granite plaque is mounted to the main station building and can be viewed on platform 1. Badge of Royal Scots above the inscription, the tablet states that it had been erected by Cllr W Buchanan. 1/7th Royal Scots departed on route to Gallipoli - The battalion was to proceed to Liverpool and then board the HMT Aquitania but never made it past Quintinshill.

(d) Rosebank Cemetery (Edinburgh) here our journey of Commemoration memory finished and a wreath was laid where the majority of the fatalities from the ill-fated Troop Train are buried. The wreath was laid at the Memorial TO THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY

We remember the Quintinshill Rail Disaster (22nd May 1915- 110 years ago RIP ALL, you were doing your duty, for the Country and the War Effort, (The 7th Royal Scots - The Royal Regiment), and all those lost in a place which is now a scene of peace and tranquillity.

WFA Wreath



Dedication on Wreath

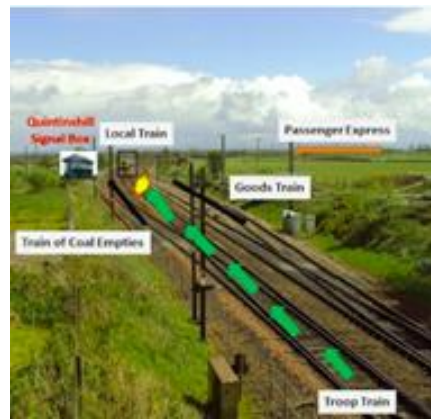


Council Plaque on bridge

WFA Plaque



The Site today



As it was 22nd May 1915 showing position of
trains



Mark with the plaque

The plaque on the fence beside the bridge overlooking the site of the accident



Mark, with the WFA wreath at the Memorial Cairn in the Gretna Green Old Smith car park



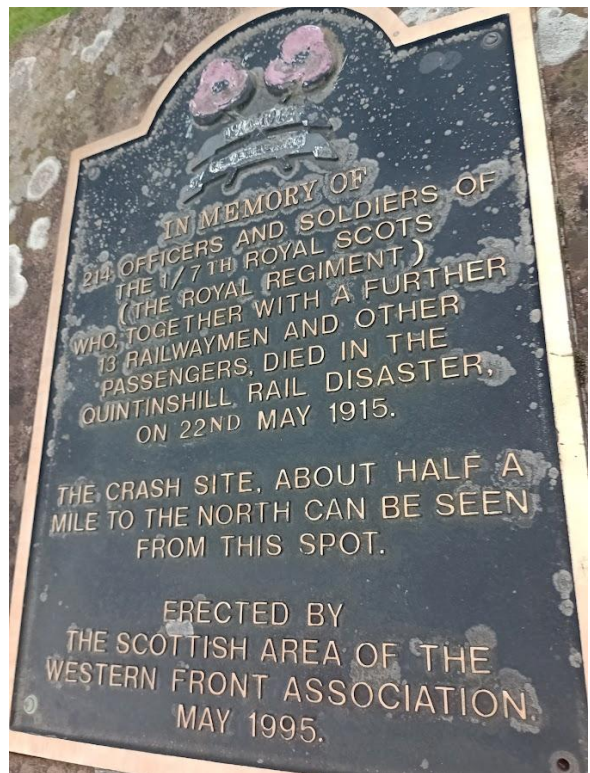
The Memorial Cairn



The Memorial Cairn with the Wreath



Detail of Royal Scots Badge on Cairn The Plaque on the Memorial Cairn





Mark outside Larbert Station



Mark with the plaque behind him



Detail of the Memorial Plaque at Larbert Station near Falkirk
Rosebank Cemetery, Edinburgh



Direction Board to the Memorial in Rosebank Cemetery.....approaching the grave site and Memorial



The Celtic Cross



The Celtic Cross with Wreath



Mark with Wreath



Wreath in position



Commemorative Bronze Plaque

Part 2 The History - Events leading to the crash.

Express trains travelling the whole length of the line could easily suffer delays in wartime, and that was the case with the train that had left London Euston shortly before midnight. It was half an hour late when it reached Carlisle and so the decision was made to allow a local train to run ahead of it, rather than behind, and to stop in the loop at Quintinshill to allow the express to pass. Quintinshill had two such loops, on the up and down lines, which were in full view of the signal box.

At 6.45am on the morning of 22 May 1915, a troop train carrying soldiers of the 1/7th Battalion Royal Scots crashed into a stationary local passenger train. The accident took place at Quintinshill, near Gretna, and the Royal Scots soldiers on board were mostly from in and around Leith - but they had begun their journey at Larbert railway station. Just to confirm the incident took place near Quintinshill Junction on the Glasgow to Carlisle railway line, just north of Gretna in Dumfriesshire

Casualties to the 1/7 Royal Scots The Royal Regiment, Of the 1,028 who set off from Larbert (a small town in Central Scotland near Falkirk and Edinburgh), three Officers, 29 Non Commissioned Officers and 182 men were killed or burned to death. All but ten of the 214. Fatalities are buried at Edinburgh (Rosebank) Cemetery. The grassed area in front of the wall with the bronze plaques is where the soldiers are buried coffins they were buried together in a mass grave in Edinburgh's Rosebank Cemetery. The coffins were laid three deep, with each on the top row covered in the Union Flag. The public were excluded from the cemetery, although 50 wounded servicemen who were convalescing at a nearby military hospital were allowed to attend. The ceremony lasted three hours, at the end of which a volley of three shots was fired, and the Last Post was sounded.

The Quintinshill rail disaster was a multi-train rail crash (involving 5 trains) which occurred on 22 May 1915 outside the Quintinshill signal box near Gretna Green in Dumfriesshire, Scotland. In total it resulted in the deaths of well over 200 people and remains the worst rail disaster in British history.

Here we have the Picture set out:

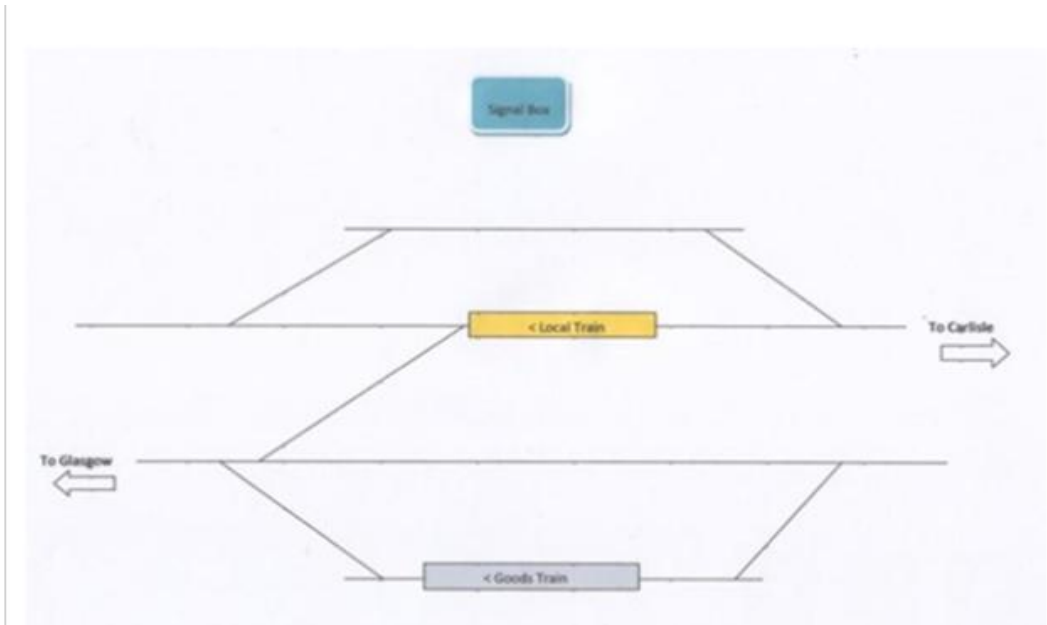
Note;

Up Route is south from Quintinshill to Carlisle

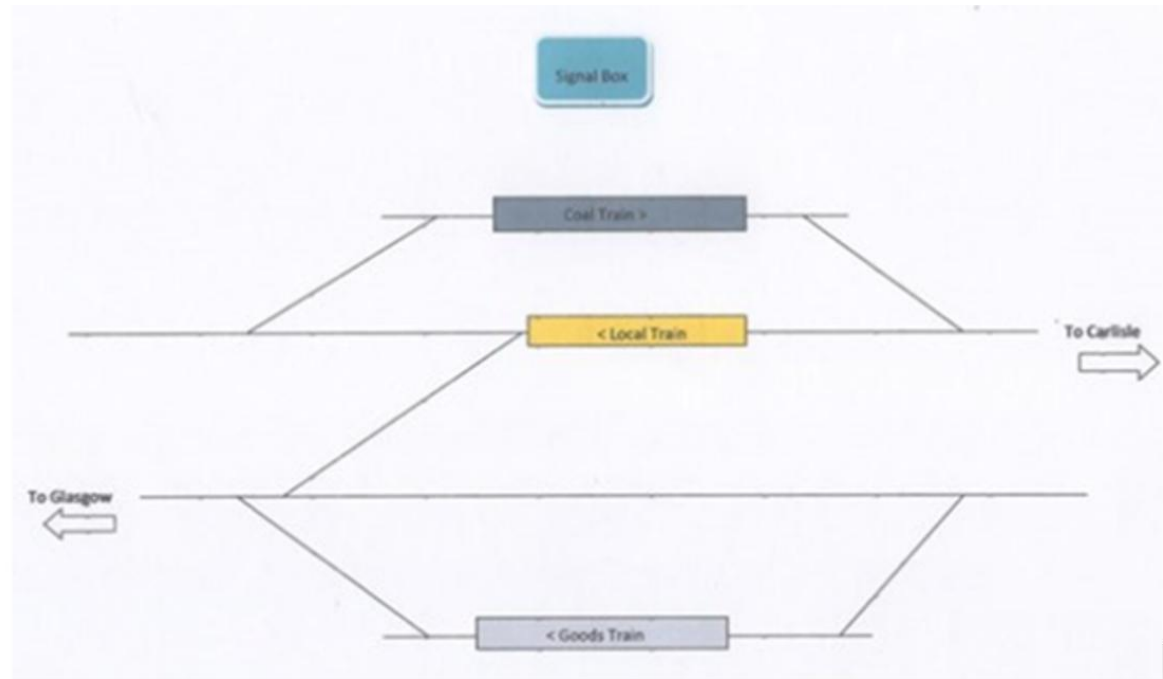
Down Route is north from Quintinshill to Kirkpatrick/Glasgow



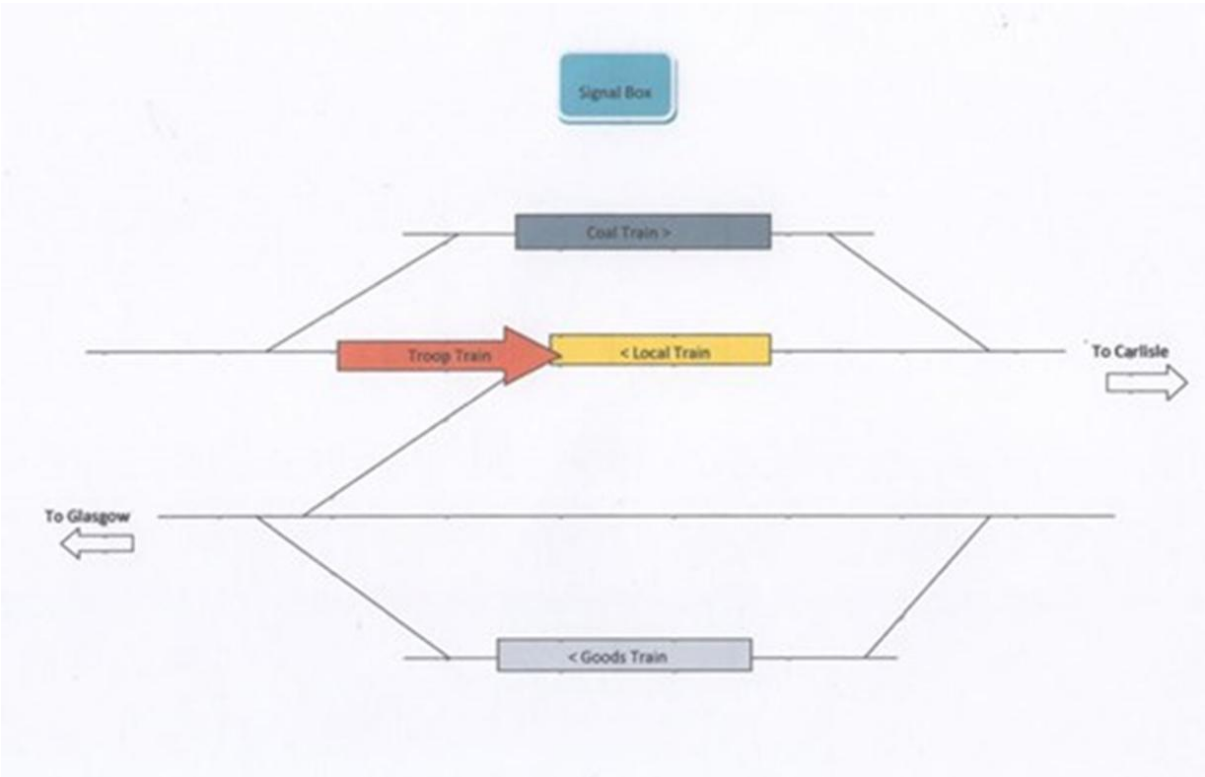
Build up to Disaster - 1



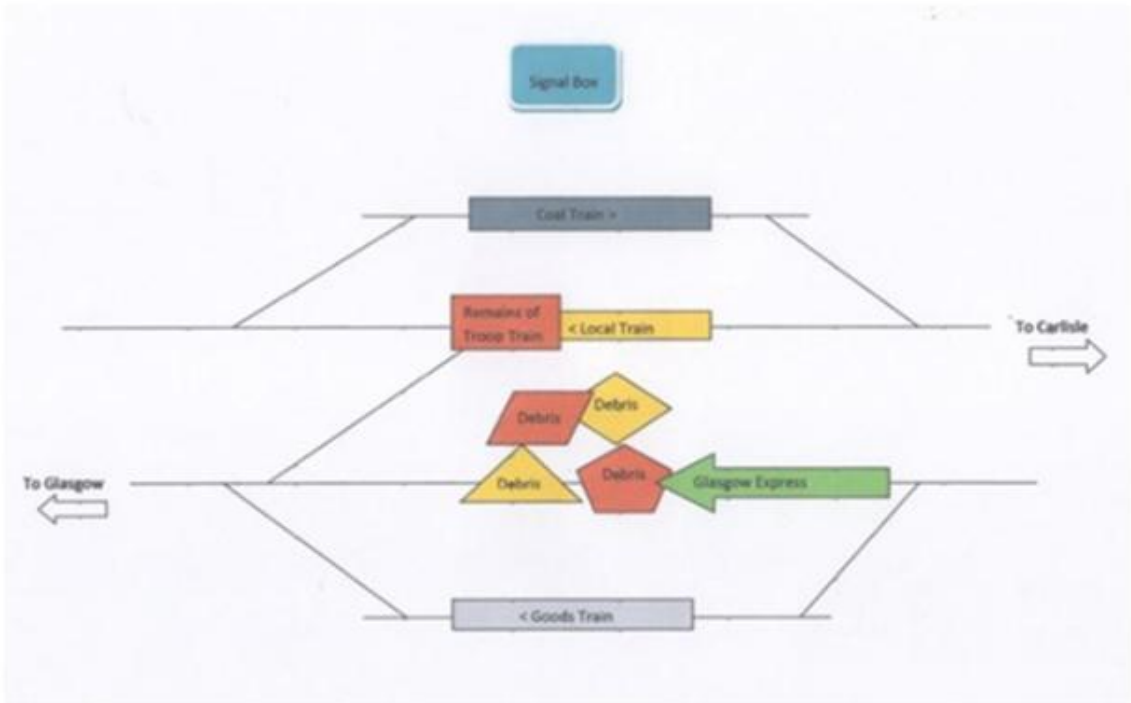
Build up to Disaster - 2

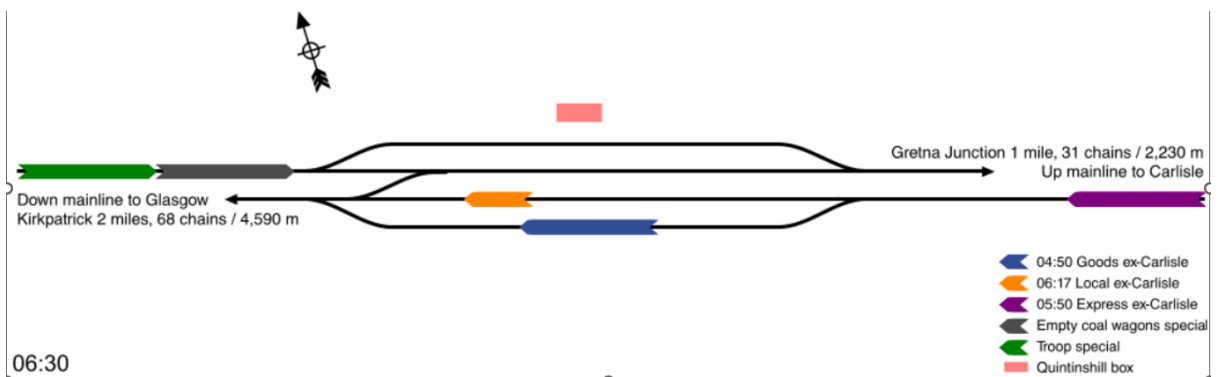


Disaster Unfolds - troop train collides with local train



Disaster Unfolds - Glasgow bound express hits debris from first collision





The five trains involved were:

Troop train carrying soldiers from the Leith Battalion of the Royal Scots,
a **local passenger train**,
a **Glasgow express**
One coal train + one general goods

The situation (on the day)

- (a) a **troop train** carrying soldiers from the Leith Battalion of the Royal Scots, (collided with **local train**)
- (b) a local **passenger train**, hit by **troop train**
- (c) a Glasgow **express** ran into **passenger train**
- (d) a **goods vehicle** (a) The wreckage also included the **goods train** in the down loop
- (e) a **goods vehicle** (b) wreckage also included the trucks of the empty **coal train** in the up loop



Kirkpatrick Fleming - Signal Box and Crossing



Same location today

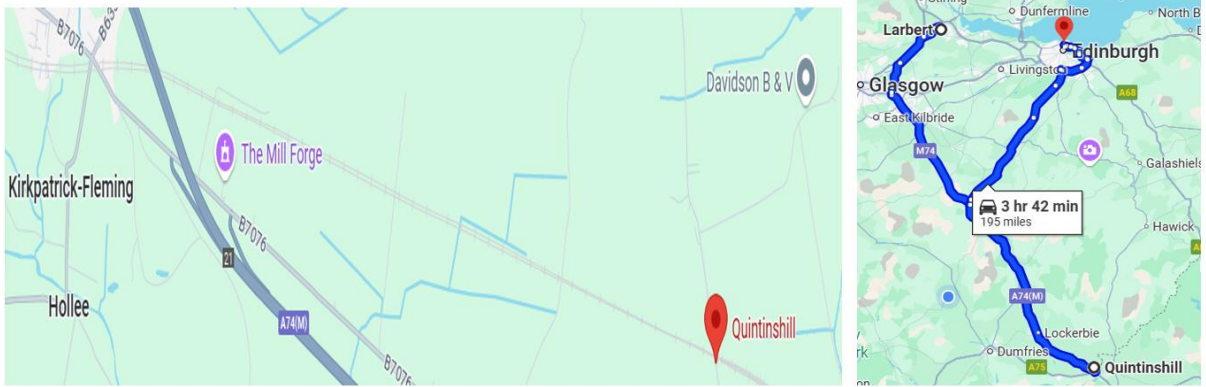


Kirkpatrick Fleming - the Station House is now a private residence and the Footbridge has replaced the level crossing



Original Quintinshill Signal Box (now demolished)

Quintinshill to Kirkpatrick (2 Miles)



Note; (Above right) Locations visited by Jean and myself, re-tracing the route taken by this ill-fated troop train casualties (Larbert - Quintinshill (2 locations) to Rosebank Cemetery Edinburgh)

In conclusion

This disaster, the worst rail disaster in British history, has been covered extensively over the years not least in this Newsletter/Magazine.

In the early part of the 20th century, managing the movement of trains was simple in theory: one signal box would contact the next signal box to ask permission to send (or 'offer') a train; the principle being that only one train was allowed on the stretch of track between signal boxes at a time. If clear, then the train could proceed uninterrupted. If the track was not clear, or if there was a faster or higher priority train coming behind the current one, then the train could wait in a loop until the line ahead was clear. There were occasions when it was necessary, such as when the loops were occupied, to perform 'wrong line' shunting (transferring a train onto the opposite running line to permit another to pass).

What caused the Quintinshill rail disaster?

The event took place (as stated) near Quintinshill Junction on the Glasgow to Carlisle railway line, near Gretna in Dumfriesshire. The initial collision was caused by mistakes made by the railway signalmen.

A Board of Inquiry, convened three days after the crash, found a number of serious failings in procedure which, when combined, led to the disaster. The worst of these was the failure of the two signalmen on duty in the Quintinshill Box, now demolished, but which then immediately overlooked the crash site, to alert the troop-train to the local passenger train waiting in its path.

Finally, Let us Remember:

The 7th Royal Scots, “Leith’s Own”

And all those lost in this Disaster, in the peace and tranquillity of Quintinshill
on 22nd May 1915

**“AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN
AND IN THE MORNING
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”**

Some very important literature well worth a read, I found it very informative, as they give you more detail than my report here.

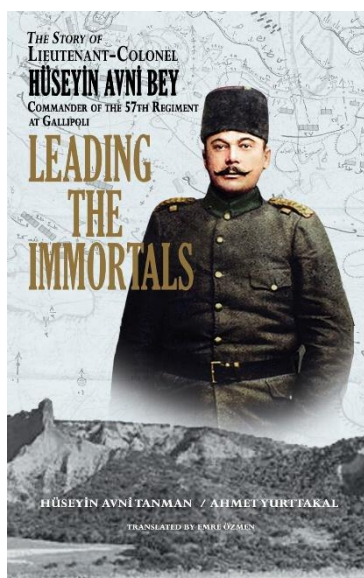
(a) The Caledonian Railway in the Great War 1914-1919 1 Part 4 The Disaster at Quintinshill May 22nd 1915 by Grant Cullen -
file:///E:/WFA%202/(8)%20QUINTINSHILL/Report%20(Grant%20Cullen)/TTL165%20Great%20War%20Part%204%20v3%20(6).pdf

(b) The 1/7th Royal Scots and the Quintinshill Rail Disaster : 22 May 1915
by David Tattersfield -

<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/the-1-7th-royal-scots-and-the-quintinshill-rail-disaster-22-may-1915/>

(c) WFA YouTube by David Carter - www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ml6ZjE1SYLk

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Launch for book *Leading the Immortals*

On Saturday 7th June a launch event for the book *Leading the immortals* was held in Leeds, the event included 3 great lectures from Peter hart, Paul Knight and John Wilson

Leading the immortals is the story of Husseyn Avni the commander of the Ottoman 57th regiment and the defence of Anzac. The book had a strange genesis starting in May 2023 when I was having lunch with Peter Hart on the Gallipoli battlefield when 2 people who were walking through Lone Pine cemetery noticed and recognised Peter. During the ensuing conversation it transpired that

Husyen had written a book about his grandfather that had been published in Turkey,

and was looking for somebody to publish it in English. Introductions were made and two years of work started to get a suitable translation arranged.

The book covers Hussen Avnis military experiences up to his death on 13th August 1915

As Peter Hart said about the book

“You can study campaign histories and personal accounts, but you know nothing until you have looked from the other side of the wire. This new account about Avni Bey helps open our eyes to the reality of the campaign; one the Allies were never going to win. We didn’t lose because of the incompetence of British politicians and generals; nor was it the terrain and logistical incoherence of the campaign. What really did it was the determined resistance of the Turkish soldiers, and I am delighted to have another book to enhance our understanding of their magnificent achievements at Gallipoli in 1915.”



The lectures started with Paul Knight discussing the 127th (Manchester) Brigade at the 3rd battle of Krithia, one of the most interesting elements of Pauls talk was the fact the British military had been planning how to do an amphibious landing since 1904.

Next up was Peter Hart who in his usual style covered the whole of the 3rd Krithia action, and in a change to his normal style actually had a slide although it was a bit small!

Finally John Wilson talked about the Turkish defence of the Anzac landing, including the original plans for the defence by Şefik Aker the commander of the 27th regiment. These had called for the main defence to be on the heights above the beaches, with reinforcements kept close. Şefik Aker had correctly identified the landing places. When Lemman von Sanders took over the defence plan changed due to his belief that the Allies would land at Bulair which was the reason for holding the majority of the Ottoman forces much further back to allow them to quickly reach Bulair. It was interesting to consider what the likely result would have been had the original defence plan been enacted, the thoughts were that the Anzacs would not have gained a foothold on the peninsula.

For anybody that is interested in the book it is available from Amazon or direct from Gosling Press at www.goslingpress.co.uk

Draft of list of Speakers - 2026



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 - topic tba
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 - tba
August	4th	Ian Castle - Gotha Raids
September	1st	Roy Larkin - tba
October	6th	Peter Hart - tba
November	3rd	John Horner 'In the care of St Dunstons : Private Richard Horners story'
December	1st	TBA