



The Spire Sentinel



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



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

ISSUE 105 - November 2024

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the
Great War'.



Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2024

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	9th	. AGM + `Finding My Roots` Jon-Paul Harding. ..tracing his Great Grandfathers in The Great War
February	6th	<i>Nobody Of Any Importance: A Foot Soldier's Memoir Of World War 1</i> by Phil Sutcliffe - "How his dad, Sam Sutcliffe, survived his frontline WW1 - in his own Memoir's words".
March	5th	<i>Murphy's Law on the Somme</i> by Andy Rawson. The talk covers the details of the learning process during the campaign and how what could go wrong, did go wrong. We look at the problems encountered and the solutions which were used to try and solve them.
April	2nd	'From Gaza to Jerusalem: the southern Palestine campaigns of 1917" by Stuart Haddaway
May	7th	"Audregnies Flank Guard Action 1914 " by Phil Watson
June	4th	1st Battalion the Wiltshire Regiment in WW1 by Edwin Astill
July	2nd	Legend of the Pilgrimages - Wilfred Pointon, Sherwood Foresters By Bill Bryan
August	6th	Roy Larkin - The Invisible Corps takes a brief look at the Army Service Corps during WW1 through the use of mechanical transport. A story of growth, evolution, inter-service rivalry and meddling civilians.
September	3rd	Kevin Jepson - Project Fast Dog
October	1st	Ross Beadle. 'William Robertson: Architect of a Winning Strategy or merely Haig's "Man of Business in London"?
November	5th	Peter Hart Laugh or Fly: The Air War on the Western Front 1914 – 1918
December	3rd	Hedley Malloch Left Behind - the fate of British soldiers trapped behind German lines in Belgium and France after the Retreat of 191

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November Meeting Speaker - Peter Hart



Peter grew up in Stanhope and Barton-under-Needwood. He attended school in Chesterfield, Derbyshire (1967–73) and Liverpool University (1973–76). He then undertook a post-graduate teaching course at Crewe & Alsager College (1976–77), and lastly a post-graduate librarianship at Liverpool Polytechnic (1979–80). He was an oral historian at the Sound Archive of the Imperial War Museum in London from 1981 to January 2020.

He has written mainly on British participation in the First World War. His books include; *The Somme*, *Jutland 1916*, *Bloody April* on the air war in 1917, *Passchendaele*, *Aces Falling* (on the air war in 1918), *1918 A Very British Victory* and *Gallipoli*. He is a regular contributor to Britain at War magazine.

His books contain references to the eyewitness accounts of the participants, many of whom he interviewed. In recent years, Peter has been a frequent visitor to the Gallipoli peninsula, accompanying group tours of the battlefields. In so doing, he made the acquaintance of Australian historian Mat McLachlan. After retiring from the Imperial War Museum, he launched the "Pete & Gary's Military History" podcast. The debut podcast was made available in February 2020. His friend Gary Bain serves as a Straight man foil to the irreverent Hart persona. The blend of historic analysis coupled with humour has its critics but reviews are generally favourable. The podcast is backed by McLachlan, and is a Living History production.

Any opinions expressed in this Newsletter / Magazine are not necessarily those of the Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch, in particular, or the Western Front Association in general.



Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to issue 105 of our newsletter.

Tuesday evening sees Peter Hart makes his annual visit to WFA Chesterfield - sure to be fireworks - well it is November 5th!

On October 12th we had our second Branch Outing of 2024 when a few intrepid adventurers made their way to deepest

Cambridgeshire to visit the location of `Project Fast Dog`which Kevin Jepson discussed at our September meeting.

A full report is included elsewhere in the newsletter / magazine.

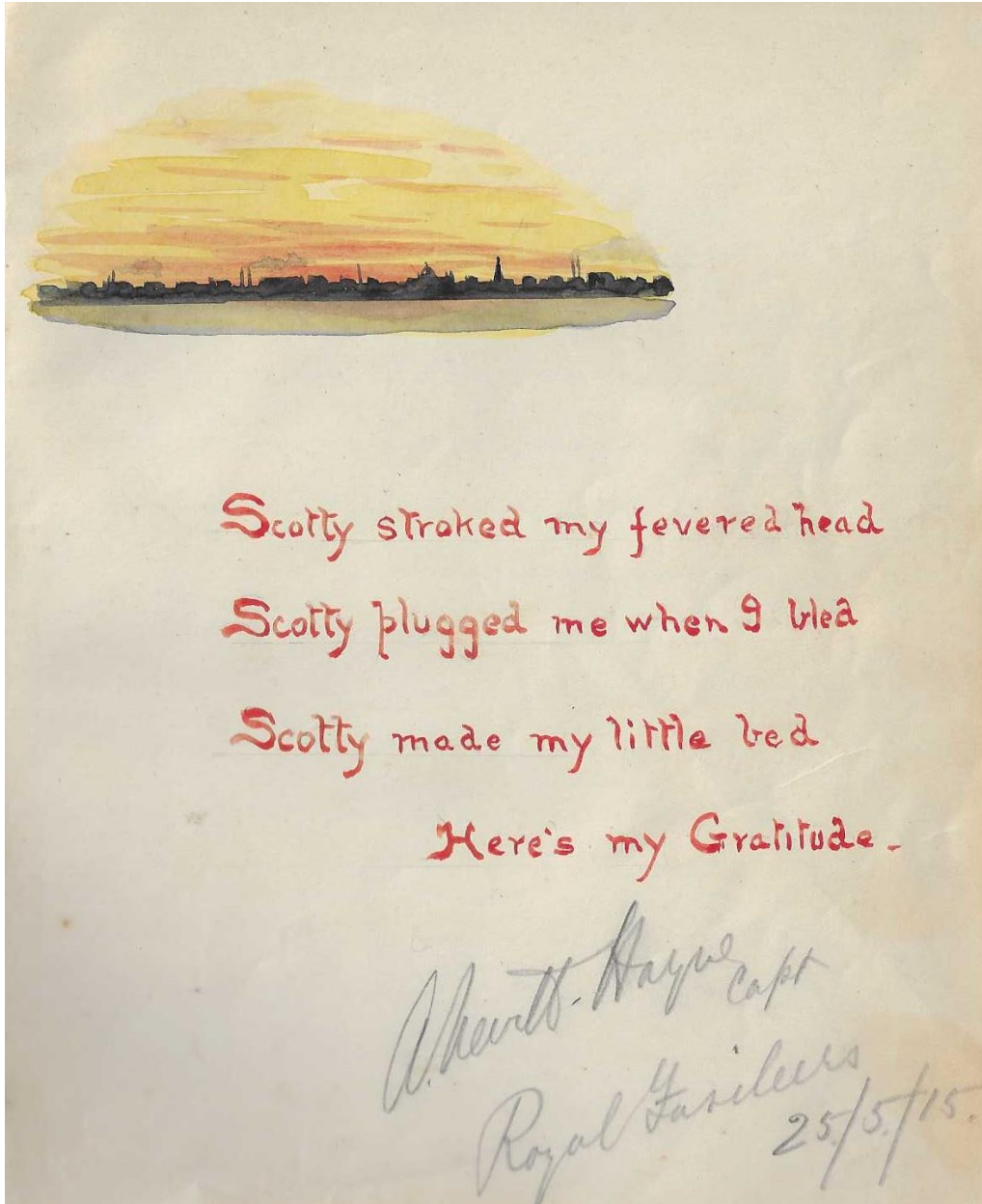
Next month we have the first visit , as speaker, of Hedley Malloch, who will talk about what happened to the British and Empire soldiers who were `left behind`behind enemy lines during the fast advances of Germany forces in the early stages of WW1. There will be a free buffet for all attending - including free drink from the bar and all attending will be given a reaffle ticket - each book on the table with a number which corresponds will be given free to the ticket holder. Branch Treasurer Jane Lovatt would appreciate if you could let her know if you are attending ...another way of the Branch saying `thank you` to those who support the Branch.

Now that we are getting towards the end of 2024 my attention now turns to putting a programme of talks / presentations in place for next year. Whilst I have a few ideas in mind, I want to know what topics / speakers you - members - who come along and support the branch faithfully want to see and hear. Please let me know your suggestions and I`ll see what I can do to get the topics YOU want...it`s YOUR branch...Jon-Paul, Jane and I all want to do the best for the Branch and will always try to accommodate the wishes of all of you. So let me know your thoughts - contact me by e mail...or give me a call - my number is below.

Best wishes, Grant

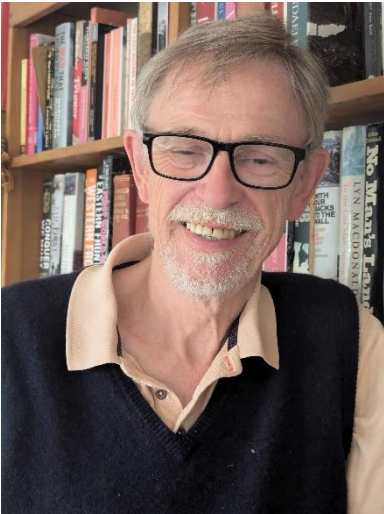
Grant Cullen WFA Chesterfield Branch Secretary 07824628638

From a Nurse`s Scrapbook



The `Scotty` referred to is Nurse Mary Etchells. Originally from Coatbridge she moved to London pre-war where she trained to be a nurse at Guy`s Hospital. Her album of writings, sketches etc done by soldiers she nursed is one of Branch Secretary Grant Cullen`s most prized possessions.

October Meeting - Ross Beadle



Ross Beadle

Ross has been a popular lecturer on the WFA circuit for over 10 years. He specializes in strategy notably the Schlieffen Plan and the March to the Marne. However he also covers set piece battles like Neuve Chapelle and Cambrai where there are important strategic lessons for the history of the war.

He has a degree in history from Hull, but it was a course on the First World War run by the historian and author Robin Neillands at Kellogg College Oxford in 2001 that he now realizes re-directed his life. Since then far too many of his waking hours have been devoted to the history of the war. He is a frequent battlefield tourer, particularly the Somme and the Isonzo. His current long term project is the Continental Commitment: Britain commits to fighting in Europe 1902-14

The title of Ross`s talk was'William Robertson: Architect of a Winning Strategy or merely Haig's "Man of Business in London"?

THE RISE OF SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON AND HIS IMPACT ON BRITISH MILITARY STRATEGY



William Robertson's War

1861 - 1914		Trooper to Director of Military Training
1914	BEF QMG	Replenishing an army in retreat
1915	BEF Chief of Staff	How do you fight trench warfare? How do you change Govt strategy?
1915-18	CIGS	Keeping focus on the Western Front [Chief of the Imperial General Staff]

Replenishing an army in retreat
Quartermaster General July 1914 – January 1915



A Surprise Appointment: 31st July 1914



Sir Charles Douglas
CIGS
[Died October 1914]



John French
C-in-C



Archibald Murray
Chief of Staff

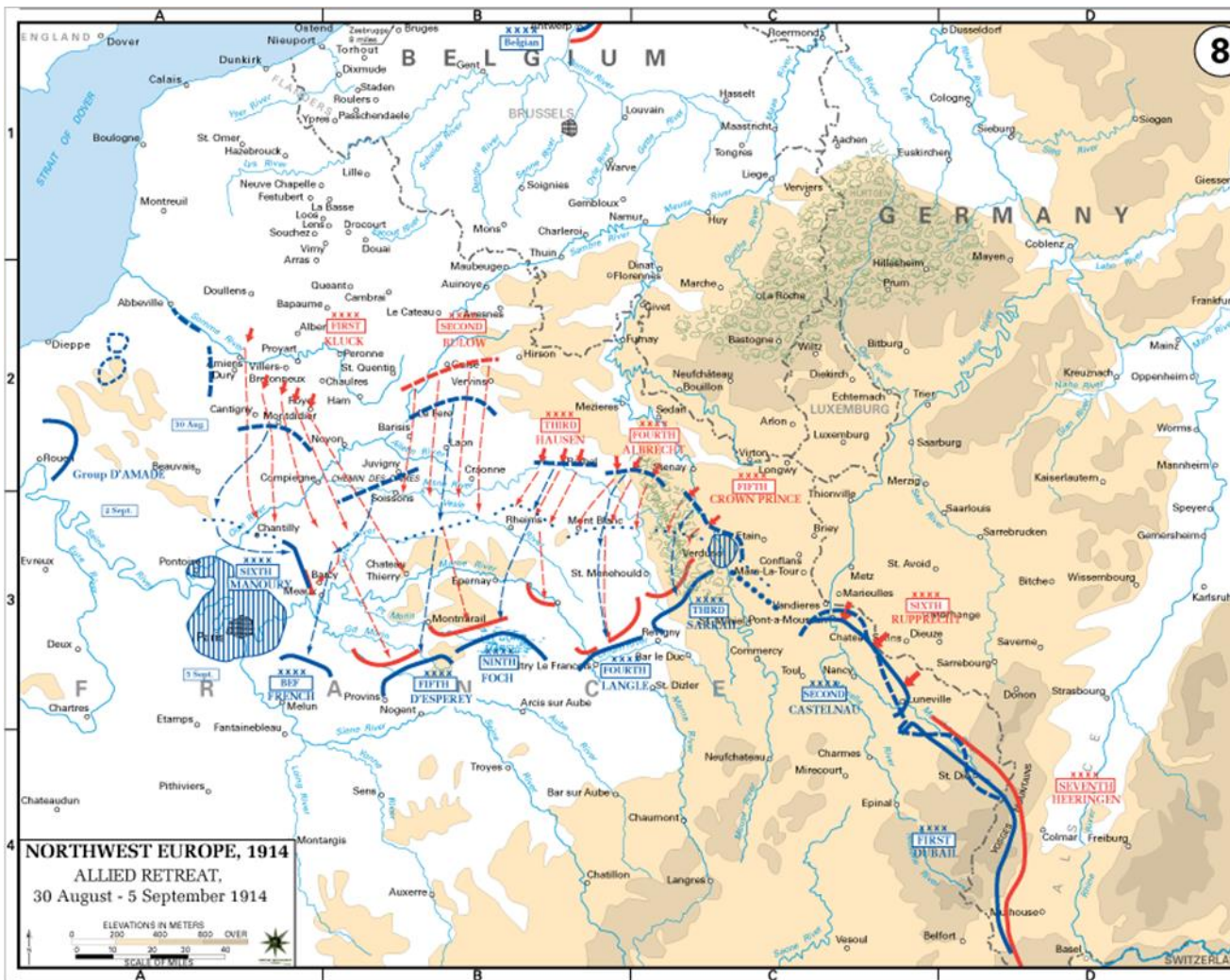


**Henry Wilson
Sub-Chief of Staff**



William Robertson QMG

‘No Army has ever been so well fed’




- Takes control of Lines of Communication
- Anticipates Retreat
- Opens up ports further south
- Drops Supplies on Lines of Retreat

‘Why don’t they appoint Robertson? He is the cleverest man in the Army, and has done marvels with the expeditionary force. No Army has ever been so well fed’ Lord Riddell to Lloyd George Oct 1914

Decision to promote Robertson to BEF Chief of Staff: Dec 14-Jan 15
Best man but also the 'Not Henry Wilson' candidate

Asquith to Kitchener Dec 1914



ROBERTSON 4/3/1
10, Downing Street,
Whitehall S.W.1

18 Dec 1914

Confidential

My dear Kitchener,

I don't see how
you can refuse French,
though I share your
astonishment.

I think I told you that
the person in question,

When I was at the W.O.,
has my name sent to
cool his heels at Bermuda,
or some other remote point
of the Empire. But there is
no doubt as to his capacity
& knowledge.

I wrote a pretty strong
letter to our colleague.

He has just been to see
me, and we have had a
rather turbulent tho' not
unfriendly interview. He
will not go further than
Dunkirk - even if he goes
so far.

I have reflected over our
conversation this morning.
I share your view as to the

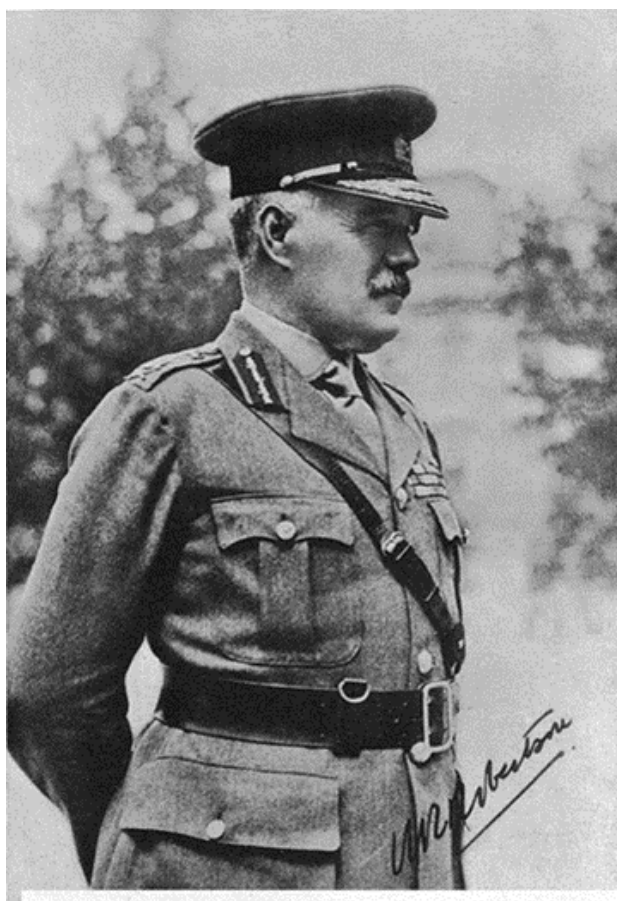
Seriousness of the situation,
and I am anxious that the
next two weeks should not
be wasted — as this has been.
Do you think that it
might be well to ask Sir
John to come over here for
a couple of days?

Yours sincerely
H. H. Asquith

- Asquith & Kitchener vetoed Wilson
- French didn't want Robertson (snobbery)
- Robertson did not want the job (French ghastly)
- Robertson and French reluctantly concede
- 'I can't stand that Henry Wilson'

How do you fight trench warfare?

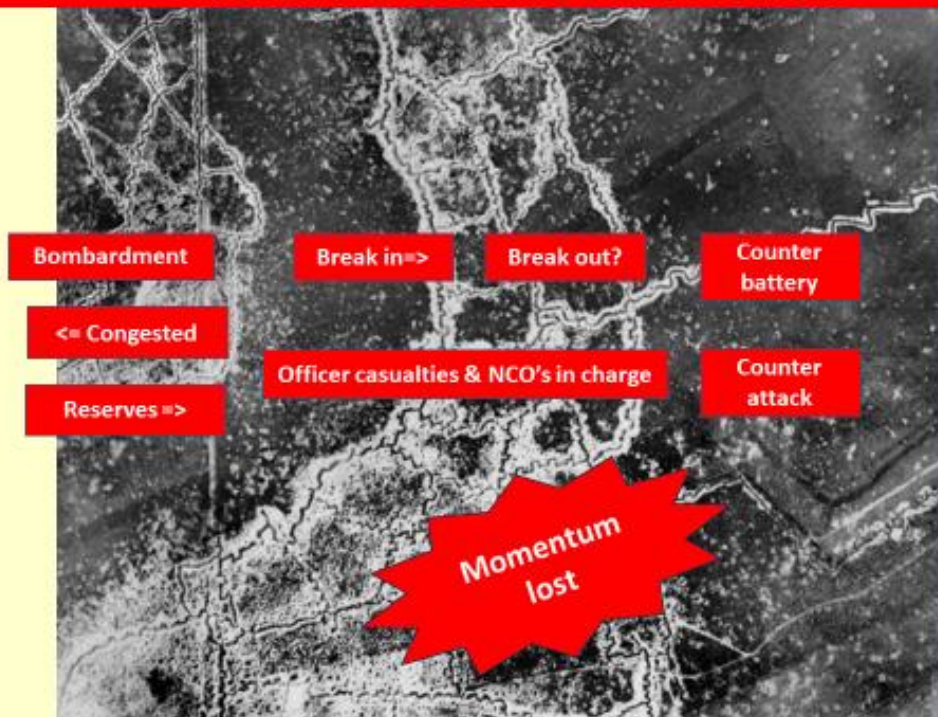
Chief of Staff January – December 1915



The Author

From a Snapshot taken by an American Soldier at Coblenz, 1919

Trench Warfare: The Basic Problem



Breakthrough v Step by Step



- Where do you attack?
- What determines victory?
- Robertson's preferred outcome?

"Use siege methods"... "A long line of trenches thus resembles an elastic band. There is no object of finality for the attacker or is of sufficient importance that the defender will have to hang onto it all costs."

Sir William Robertson 1915

Robertson changes the focus of his attention: July - August 1915

- He can't be C-in-C but has confidence in Haig
- 'War is a one man show'
- Strategy decided by politicians in London in committee
- Confident only he can sort London out
- Launches a lobbying campaign

The Collapse of British strategy & Robertson's campaign for change

Chief of Staff July – December 1915



1914-15: The Politicians Step in (What could possibly go wrong?)



Tommy, Kitchener, Asquith & Churchill

- Wilson's strategy fails by Le Cateau
- Grierson's strategy runs out at Christmas
- Joffre won't wear Kitchener's strategy
- Top heavy, committee structure
- General Staff goes to France leaving London for weak 'dug outs'

Denouement: The most important meeting of the war?



**The Kitchener-Robertson
Agreement:
10th Dec 1915**

War Committee decided "Where?"

C.I.G.S. to be :-

Sole military Advisor
Sole source of information
"Our Bargain"



Keeping the focus on the Western Front

December 1915 – February 1918



1917: Everybody in the War Cabinet was a 'Westerner' - except one man; the trouble was he was Prime Minister



Robertson's rules

- Western Front
- 'We at the top stick together and stand firm'
- Defers to Haig as 'the man on the spot' who outranks him

Robertson as CIGS 1915-17: Four distinct phases



Dec 15 - Dec 16: Asquith PM, Robertson in command
Attritional Western Front strategy, Agreed Somme.

June 1916: LG to War Ministry – cloud on the horizon

Dec 16 - May 17: New PM Lloyd George challenges
Nivelle & Arras

May 17 - Sept 17: The Army back in the saddle
3rd Ypres approved. Robertson's reluctance (twice)

Sept 17 - Feb 18: Outmaneuvered by LG and Wilson
Ypres & Cambrai fail. Deserted by Unionists and Haig.

Earlier life 1861-1914: Four life changing decisions

1878 - Joins up

1886 - Seeks a commission

1891 - Transfers to Intelligence

1897 - Staff College



Trooper to 1st Lieutenant: 1861 - 1891



Sir Edward Cardwell

- “Damned bad footman”
- “Rather see you dead than in red”
- Youngest troop sergeant to oldest 2nd lieutenant
- The moral and practical dilemma of debt
- India & languages

Big Break: Intelligence Department & General Staff 1891 - 1914



- Expedition to the Pamirs
- The Incident at Dir
- Staff College – student 1897-98
- War Game 1905 – plays ‘Schlieffen’
- Staff College – commandant 1910-1913

Explain Robertson's rise before 1914



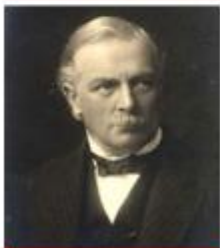
Sir Ian Hamilton: Modernizer / reformer: Thought the ranks preferred gentlemen as their commanders

- Ex-ranker officers declining - 2% by 1900
- Ex-rankers no further than major
- Army more specialist - general staff & intelligence
- Robertson talent spotted in India & at Staff College
- No rise through regimental route

Assessment: Robertson's Post-War Critics



Basil Liddell-Hart



Lloyd George

- The British Way of War 1550 - 1914
- Speed, surprise and mobility
- Peripheral theatres
-but actually, they didn't

October 12th - Chesterfield Branch outing to visit Project `Fast Dog` - Musical Box` the Whippet tank.

This was the Branch`s second outing of the year - at no cost to participants - our way of saying `thanks` to those who give there unstinting support to the Branch.

Branch Chair, Jon-Paul Harding compiled the following report.

The day began with the intrepid band of WFA Chesterfield Branch members meeting at 07.30 outside Chesterfield railway station for the trip to Cambridgeshire to see the only working replica of a First World War `Whippet` tank. The branch had previously had a talk on this project - named Project Fast Dog ` at the Branch`s September meeting given by Kevin Jepson who explained how he became involved in the construction of a full scale replica of a Great War armoured vehicle - the Whippet.. The aim being to display the vehicle and tell the story of her crew, their families and of the people who developed and manufactured the vehicle.

On the journey down interesting conversations were had between members of the group on the minibus about different Great War subjects which passed the time away. We arrived around 10.30 at the farm site were the tank was built and is currently kept. It was already outside the workshop, and was an impressive sight.



Kevin Jepson and the team were there to greet us. We all gathered round the tank called `Musical Box`, and everyone started to take photos before one of the team fired the tank up and started to manoeuvre it a thrilling sight to see the tank moving under its own power. After it was in position the team then started to talk about the project and how building the tank was started and problems they had encountered along the way.





Everyone in the group had lots of questions to ask and Kevin and the team proved very knowledgeable and answered all questions put to them. The group then had the opportunity to climb aboard the tank - both outside and inside to get a close look at the construction.



Everyone had a good laugh about speckled Jim the pigeon which lived with the tank - a plastic one of course - but in reality, every tank carried two pigeons when in action. Lots of discussions continued about World War One in general - tanks in particular. Then one of the team produced an original World War one Hotchkiss machine gun and a pistol from the period and these generated more discussion.



After about 2 hours with the tank the our intrepid travelers set off for the next part of trip which was to the American cemetery in Cambridge which holds over 3000 graves and over 5000 names commemorating missing America personnel of WW2. it was very peaceful place, very well maintained with an excellent visitor centrer with lots of interesting displays and interactive screens. Yvonne Ridgeway and James Kay found 3 air crew from a downed American plane in the cemetery which they had information about and shared the story with the group . There was a very impressive chapel on site with an amazing mosaic wall and ceiling and the doors with bronze plaques depicting different vehicles from the American forces.





We concluded our time there and then moved on to the Cambridge City Cemetery where we spent time paying our respects to the over 1000 Commonwealth War Graves from WW1 and WW2 which this cemetery contains, most of which are RAF crew from WW2 there were also different nationalities Dutch, Belgian, Polish and Czech who served with distinction in RAF. The First World War graves were in two separate plots one for overseas service men and one for British service men and there were separate graves dotted around the large cemetery which were visited until time ran out.

This concluded our day in Cambridgeshire. Everyone appeared to enjoy the day and had a great experience visiting the tank Musical Box which was the highlight of the day.

As chairman I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kevin and the team for a very enjoyable experience, and also a thank you to Jane Lovatt and Grant Cullen for organizing such a memorable day.

Jon-Paul Harding

WFA 2025 Calendars



Statement from Branded Goods Trustee



On a par with last year_Calendars were early and ready for purchase by Mid-September, at Branch Plus on the Website (eshop) or phone Maya or Lisa at the Office, I have already written to Branches giving them an update and the response was very positive. This routinely turns a profit, also it enables branches to gain some income through branch sales, as I say the calendars are already ready for purchase on the Eshop

To give you a feel of the Calendar here are 2 images taken from the calendar that are shown on the Eshop

May 2025 - 'Worcesters at Pigeon Ravine',



June 2025 - 'Memorial at Colonial Hill

Mark Macartney

