The Dugout

Newsletter of the Dorset and South Wiltshire Branch of the Western Front Association

Parish Notes

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Diary Dates 2009 / 2010

Meetings:
Saturday, 15 August
Peter Starling: Mistaken Gallantry
Saturday, 26 September
Prof Chris Bellamy: The Eastern Front, The Brusilov Offensive
Saturday, 17 October
Martin White: Edith Cavell
Saturday, 14 November
Fred Hoskins: The Royal Flying Corps
Saturday, 5 December (AGM)
Kevin Patience: The East Africa Campaign

Saturday, 9 January 2010
Andy Robertshaw: Ghosts on the Somme
Saturday, 13 February
Victoria Burbidge: Aubers Ridge, 2nd Bn Rifle Bde
Saturday, 13 March
Joanne Legge: A Study of German Defence, Ist July 1916

At Pimperne Village Hall, Blandford - 2pm for 2.30pm start.

Further details on WFA website www.westernfrontassociation.com

Field Trips:
Friday, 4 - Monday, 7 September:
The 1915 Battles
6 March 2010:
The RLC Museum

Further details from the Secretary, Judy Willoughby, or the Chairman

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Helen Kerridge:
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From the Editor

I started putting this issue together the weekend we heard of the death of Henry Allingham, one of Britain's three remaining First World War veterans and the world's oldest man. Little did we all know that within the week Harry Patch, the last veteran of the horrors of the trenches would also be dead. And now only Royal Naval seaman Claude Choules, aged 108 and living in Australia, remains, one of only three alive in the world.

I am sure I am not the only person who had soft spot for Harry Patch; a man who appeared to have great dignity and an unassuming nature and who did not speak of his experiences until after his 100th birthday. The passing of Harry and Henry Allingam is very much the end of an era but thanks to them, the sacrifices made by the many who did not return remain in the public consciousness.

Chairman's Chat

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks of behalf of our members to our Editor for her marvellous work in producing our third Branch Newsletter. It is going from strength to strength and I hear there is a wealth of material awaiting inclusion, so please be patient if your piece hasn't made it this time and keep the articles coming.

With great sadness we learn of the passing of Harry Patch and Henry Allingham our last World War One veterans. This marks the end of an era and it is now important that the Branch continues its work in Education and raising awareness of such an important event in our national history.

I am pleased to say that the Branch is a leader in its field, our recent School Prize Award Scheme and presentation evening was an outstanding success and has set a benchmark for others to follow. The branch has had a very busy year so far in other respects attending a number of events including: Tankfest, Family History days and the Princes Teaching Institute. These events have helped to raise the profile of the branch, attract new members and of course supports the aims of the Association at national level.

Our monthly meetings continue to provide interesting topics and our battlefield tour is fully subscribed and promises to be superb. Planning for next year has started already; our Spring Field Trip will be to the Royal Logistics Corps Museum on the 6th March 2010 and will include a presentation by Andy Robertshaw and some behind the scenes aspects. That we are able to do so much and be effective in doing it, is very much down to the efforts of the committee and the continuing support from members, my thanks to you all.


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Henry Allingham dies aged 113
18 July 2009

Mr Allingham died in his sleep at 3.10am on Saturday at his care home near Brighton, after a life that saw him marked out as a national treasure. He was one of the last three surviving British veterans of the First World War.

He was also the last surviving founder member of the RAF, the last man to have witnessed the Battle of Jutland and the last surviving member of the Royal Naval Air Service.

On 20 June Guinness World Records had announced that Mr Allingham, who celebrated his 113th birthday on 6 June, became the world's oldest man after the previous incumbent, Tomoji Tanabe, died in his sleep at his home in Japan, also at the age of 113. He jokingly attributed his longevity to "cigarettes, whisky and wild, wild women".

Mr Allingham, who became a familiar face at Remembrance ceremonies, was born in Clapton, East London, in 1896. After his father's death he was brought up by his mother, who persuaded him not to join up as soon as war broke out. When she died in 1915 he enlisted, serving first as a seaplane mechanic and then as a spotter, or bomber. He later confessed that he did not realise what war meant when he signed up, but his experiences at the Third Battle of Ypres, widely known as Passchendaele, resulted in his naïve enthusiasm for battle and glory that gave way to a passion for peace. He once told the BBC: "War's stupid. Nobody wins. You might as well talk first, you have to talk last anyway."

The scenes he witnessed of soldiers waiting to go over the top at Ypres have stayed with him ever since. They would just stand there in 2ft of water in mud-filled trenches, waiting to go forward," he said. "They knew what was coming. It was pathetic to see those men like that. I don't think they have ever got the admiration and respect they deserved."

Mr Allingham and his wife Dorothy were together for more than 50 years, living to see his first great-great-great-grandchild. After the war he went into the motor industry, eventually joining the design department at Ford before retiring in 1961.

When asked how he had lived so long, Mr Allingham, who held the Legion d'Honneur, said: "I don't know if there is a secret, but keeping within your capacity is vital. "I've had two major breakdowns, one during the war and one after but both when I was trying to do the work of three men. "The trick is to look after yourself and always know your limitations."

Mr Allingham's nephew, Ronald Cator, said it was "a very sad day for the family". He added: "He had an incredible life - a hard one, and an enjoyable one in the last few years. He was an incredible man. It's a very sad day for everyone." Mr Cator, 75, from Acle, Norfolk, said he last saw Mr Allingham last month at his 113th birthday celebrations in London. He said: "He was very, very frail. I visited him in April as well and he had been going steadily downhill ever since then."

Asked what memories he had of Mr Allingham from earlier years, he said: "I always remember him singing. He would sing all the old songs. He and my father would love to get together and have a good sing-along."

Since April 2006, Mr Allingham, who lost his sight as a result of macular degeneration, had been cared for by St Dunstan's, the charity providing support for visually impaired ex-Service men and women, at its centre in Ovingdean, near Brighton.

Robert Leader, chief executive of St Dunstan's, said: "Everybody at St Dunstan's is saddened by Henry's loss and our sympathy goes out to his family. He was very active right up to his final days, having recently celebrated his 113th birthday on HMS President surrounded by family. As well as possessing a great spirit of fun, he represented the last of a generation who gave a very great deal for us. Henry made many friends among the residents and staff at St Dunstan's. He was a great character and will be missed."

Mr Allingham had five grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren, 14 great-great grandchildren and one great-great-great grandchild.

A funeral will take place later this month at St Nicholas' Church in Brighton.

Mr Alllingham's death leaves just two surviving British veterans of the First World War - Harry Patch, 111, who is the last surviving soldier in the world to have fought in the trenches, and Claude Choules, 108, who served in the Royal Navy. Speaking from Fletcher House care home in Wells, Somerset, Mr Patch paid tribute to Mr Allingham, saying he was "very sad at losing a friend".

Prime Minister Gordon Brown paid tribute to Mr Allingham on Saturday. He said: "I had the privilege of meeting Henry many times. He was a tremendous character, one of the last representatives of a generation of tremendous characters. My thoughts are with his family as they mourn his passing but celebrate his life."

A spokesman for Buckingham Palace said: "The Queen was saddened to hear of the death of Henry Allingham. "He was one of the generation who sacrificed so much for us all. Her thoughts are with his family during this time."

Malcolm Rifkind, the former foreign secretary, said Mr Allingham's death marked "the end of an era".

Mr Allingham left a legacy of memories to the nation, according to Dennis Goodwin, from the First World War Veterans' Association. He said: "He left quite a legacy to the nation of memories of what it was like to have been in the First World War."

The oldest surviving member of the Armed Forces holds a clutch of honours, including the British War Medal, Victory Medal and the Legion d'Honneur – the highest military honour awarded by France.

In his personal life, Mr Allingham was married to his late wife Dorothy for more than half a century and heads a dynasty which includes his great-great-great grandchild. His grandson Tim Gray, 53, from Michigan, has described him as a "really incredible man with a great sense of humour".

Born in London on June 6 1896, the Air Mechanic First Class's father died when he was a baby. As a young man, he has said, he thought joining the war effort would be an adventure, not realising what it meant. "War's stupid," he told the BBC. "Nobody wins. You might as well talk first, you have to talk last anyway."

He was initially persuaded to remain at home by his mother but in September 1915, after her death, he joined the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS) and was sent to France, maintaining seaplanes. Enthusiastic to play his part, pilots would take him flying and he would take the role of a spotter or a bomber. In late 1917, Mr Allingham was posted to an aircraft depot in Dunkirk and became a member of the Royal Air Force following the merger of the RNAS and the Royal Flying Corps.

He is now the last founder member of the RAF and the only remaining survivor of the infamous Battle of Jutland off the Danish coast in 1916. He had a miraculous escape from his ship, the Kingfisher, when a German shell heading directly for it bounced over the top.

He has also described how he remained haunted by scenes from the third battle of Ypres. "They would just stand there in two feet of water in mud-filled trenches, waiting to go forward, they knew what was coming. It was pathetic to see those men like that. In many ways I don't think they have ever got the admiration and respect they deserved."

He was also shot in the arm, commenting: "It's so long ago that the scar has gone."

In 1919 he left the air force after service at Cologne and went into the motor industry, eventually joining the design department at Ford before retiring in 1961.

Despite being mostly self-taught, his career saw him placed in charge of several chartered engineers. Mr Allingham's skills proved vital to designing counter-measures to the Germans' magnetic mines during the Second World War. In 1941 he helped defuse the mines used to blockade Harwich harbour.

Yet despite his admirable service record, Mr Allingham would later tell the BBC: "Like so many, I have tried to forget my time in the war. In the last few years I have met other veterans, and we never spoke one word of the war, not one."

Asked about his longevity, he said: "I don't know if there is a secret, but keeping within your capacity is vital. I've had two major breakdowns, one during the war and one after but both when I was trying to do the work of three men. The trick is to look after yourself and always know your limitations."

In his later years, Mr Allingham won praise as a frequent visitor to schools and youth organisations, sharing his experiences of war and the importance of peace. He became a symbol of the generation which sacrificed its lives in the First World War and in 2006 joined thousands who gathered to remember one of its bloodiest conflicts – the Battle of the Somme.

The same year saw him set foot on German soil for the first time in more than 85 years, meeting 109-year-old counterpart Robert Meier. In the Ruhr industrial heartland of Germany, the wartime foes cast aside their wheelchairs to embrace as friends and discovered that for more than a year they were both at the Somme. Mr Allingham grasped his new friend's hand, saying: "My very best wishes, and may you have a long life still."

He celebrated his 110th birthday with a fly-past, joined at the Grand Hotel in Eastbourne by family and the then-Chancellor Gordon Brown, who gave him a letter from the Queen, a bottle of whisky and a copy of the Budget statement from the year he was born.

Squadron Leader Jim Pruden, from RAF Innsworth, said: "For us, Henry is an inspiration. He inspires countless veterans who are younger than him but also those who are looking at a future in the Armed Forces."

The following year, Mr Allingham celebrated his 111th birthday on board the Royal Navy's oldest warship, Lord Nelson's flagship HMS Victory, at Portsmouth, Hants. Mr Allingham said: "I'm pleased to be seeing another tomorrow. I'm happy to be alive. I never imagined I'd get to 111." Another fly-past was organ-

ised for his 112th birthday, this time by a Lancaster bomber flanked by two Spitfires.

Months later, in September 2008, he launched his autobiography at the RAF Club in London's Piccadilly – a place close to his heart as he had been a member of the force when it was founded in 1918. He was joined by family, friends and the co-author of the book, Dennis Goodwin, who founded the First World War Veterans' Association.

Paying tribute to his old friend, Mr Goodwin said Mr Allingham was a recluse when he first met him. "I think he has done so well to now because the more you engage people and focus attention on them, the more they develop a will to live and that's the case with Henry. If he had been allowed to vegetate he would have disintegrated."

For his most recent birthday – his 113th – earlier this month, Mr Allingham celebrated turning teenager for the second time around with family members and forces' representatives at a party at HMS President in London. He declared: "It's wonderful, I never expected this honour."

Mr Goodwin said at the time: "He seems to captivate anyone that meets him. Perhaps he embodies the spirit of the First World War. We all had grandfathers and fathers who were just like Henry and this gives them a chance to express themselves."

Henry Allingham's Life

June 6, 1896: Henry William Allingham was born in Upper Clapton, east London. He was brought up by his mother and grandparents after his father died from tuberculosis. He left school to become a surgical instrument maker at St Bartholomew's Hospital in central London, before training as a coach-builder.

1914: He was keen to join the war effort, but was persuaded against the idea by his mother. After she died, Mr Allingham enlisted with the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) as a mechanic and body builder.

He was sent to Chingford, east London, and Sheerness, Kent, before being posted to Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, where he helped maintain a wide range of aircraft and met his future wife, Dorothy Cater.

January 19, 1915: Mr Allingham experienced Britain's first aerial attack when the Germans, who were aiming for the Humber estuary, launched a Zeppelin raid on Great Yarmouth by mistake.

September 21, 1915: He was formally ranked as an Air Mechanic Second Class.

April 13, 1916: He narrowly missed out on meeting King George VI when he visited Great Yarmouth air station.

Mr Allingham moved to nearby Bacton, where night-flying was carried out. Later he was involved in supporting anti-submarine patrols from a variety of seaplane carriers.

May 1916: He joined the armed trawler HMT Kingfisher, which carried a Sopwith Schneider seaplane and shadowed the British Grand Fleet during the greatest naval battle of the First World War - the Battle of Jutland.

September 1917: Mr Allingham, now an Air Mechanic First Class, was posted to the Western Front to service and rescue aircraft. When he joined RNAS No 12 Squadron based at St Omer, near Calais, France, it and the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) were already involved in the third Ypres offensive - the Battle of Passchendaele.

He was also posted to the Somme.

November 3, 1917: Mr Allingham was sent to a depot in Dunkirk where he spent the rest of the war recovering and repairing aircraft.

April 1, 1918: The RFC and the RNAS amalgamated to form the Royal Air Force (RAF). Mr Allingham was transferred to the service and given the rank of Rigger Aero, Aircraft Mechanic Second Class, and allocated a new service number - 208317.

November 11, 1918: Mr Allingham celebrated Armistice Day in Cologne, Germany, by getting his hair cut.

February 1919: He returned home and was formally discharged two months later.

Shortly afterwards, he joined car manufacturer Ford, where he worked until his retirement, and married 22-year-old Miss Cater.

During the Second World War, Mr Allingham worked on weapons development for aircraft maker De Havilland and helped neutralise German magnetic mines.

May 8, 1945: Mr Allingham marked VE Day by turning on all the lights in his house in Essex, and going into the garden to dig.

1960: He retired to a flat in Eastbourne, East Sussex.

1970: His wife Dorothy died.

2003: Mr Allingham received France's highest military award, the Legion d'Honneur.

July 24, 2003: He met the Queen for the first time at a veterans' garden party in the grounds of Buckingham Palace.

June 21, 2004: He was one of the first veterans to receive the HM Armed Forces Veterans' Badge.

August 4, 2004: Mr Allingham led the congregation in the Lord's Prayer at a ceremony to mark the 90th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War at the Cenotaph in Whitehall, central London.

September 11, 2004: He unveiled a memorial in St Omer to the 4,700 British air personnel who died fighting on the Western Front.

October 6, 2005: He received honorary membership of the Fleet Air Arm Association which represents those who have served in the Fleet Air Arm - the aircraft division of the Royal Navy from 1937.

November 13, 2005: Mr Allingham attended the annual Remembrance Sunday service at the Cenotaph for the fourth consecutive year.

April 21, 2006: He received the freedom of Eastbourne.

May 2006: With his eyesight deteriorating, he moved from his flat in Eastbourne to St Dunstan's, a care home for blind ex-servicemen and women, in Ovingdean, near Brighton.

March 2009: He reached a new milestone when he became the oldest ever British man, clocking up 112 years and 296 days.

March 2009: Mr Allingham is awarded an upgraded Legion d'Honneur from French ambassador Maurice Gourdault-Montagne in London.

June 2009: Guinness World Records named Mr Allingham as the world's oldest man following the death of the previous record holder, Tomoji Tanabe, in Japan.

Harry Patch, Britain's Last Tommy dies aged 111 25 July 2009

When the television documentary makers started to interview the small corps of centenarian veterans at the turn of the 20th century they found that several retained vivid memories of the trenches. But Patch was the one who burned with the strongest indignation - at the constant danger, the noise, the rats, the lice and the biscuits that were too hard to eat at Passchendaele.

He remembered the fear and bewilderment of going "over the top", crawling because walking meant the certainty of being mowed down by the German machine guns. As his battalion advanced from Pilckem Ridge, near Ypres, in the summer rain of 1917 the mud was crusted with blood and the wounded were crying out for help. "But we weren't like the Good Samaritan in the Bible, we were the robbers who passed them by and left," said Patch.

As his unit came across a member of the regiment lying in a pool of blood, ripped open from shoulder to waist, the man said: "Shoot me". But before anyone could draw a revolver, the man died with the word "Mother" on his lips. "It was a cry of surprise and joy," recalled Patch, "and I'll always remember that death is not the end."

When they reached the enemy's second line four Germans stood up, and one ran forward pointing his bayonet at Patch who, with only three rounds left in his revolver, wondered what to do. He then deliberately fired at the man above the ankle and above the knee.

At 10.30pm on September 22 his five-man Lewis gun team was crossing open ground single file on the way back to the support line when a shell exploded, blowing the three carrying the ammunition to pieces. Patch was hit in the groin, and thrown to the ground. Waking in a dressing station he realised that, although very painful, his wound was little more than a scratch

The following evening a doctor explained that he could remove a two-inch piece of shrapnel, half an inch long with a jagged edge, but there was no anaesthetic available. After thinking over the prospects Patch agreed to have the sliver removed, and had to be held down by four men as it was extracted with tweezers. The operation took two minutes, during which he could have killed the doctor.

The son of a master stonemason, Henry John Patch was born at Combe Down, near Bath, on June 17, 1898, and educated at the local Church of England school. On leaving at 15 he was apprenticed to a plumber. One of his brothers, a sergeant-major in the

Royal Engineers, had been wounded at Mons, so young Harry knew enough to have no wish to go when he was called up at 18.

Sent for six months to the 33rd Training Battalion near Warminster, Wiltshire, he learned to lock up his kit after his boots were stolen, and earned his crossed guns badge for marksmanship, which came with an extra 6d a day.

On landing in France in June 1917, Patch became a Lewis machine-gunner with C company of the 7th Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry at Rouen, and he was in the trenches on his 19th birthday. Although he did not go into action that day, he saw the Yorkshires and Lancashires climbing out of their dugouts to be mowed down before reaching the German line.

While watching through his firing aperture two dogs scrapping for a biscuit, he found himself wondering why he was fighting for "19d a flipping day".

Nevertheless there were some compensations, such as the comradeship and learning to smoke with his pipe upside down so that there was no glow at night, or by getting under a groundsheet to ensure no smoke showed by day.

He would receive occasional parcels from home, though one containing a slice of his brother's wedding cake and an ounce of tobacco had became so jumbled that they had to be thrown away. There was also the respite offered by Talbot House behind Ypres, where there was a sign "Abandon all rank ye who enter here" and the Reverend "Tubby" Clayton offered games and led the singing.

After being evacuated to England, Patch was sent to a series of hospitals; he met Ada Billington, his future wife, when he knocked her over while running past a cinema at Sutton Coldfield. By the time he was full fit again, the Armistice had been declared, and he only wanted to forget.

He never watched a war film, or talked about his experiences, even to his wife, with whom he had two sons. Instead he concentrated on returning to plumbing. He did not go back to his old firm because the foreman insisted that he must complete the final two years of his apprenticeship, though a lawyer told him that the contract had been broken when the firm failed to release him from his indentures in 1918. After flirting with the idea of joining the police, Patch spurned an offer of his old job back at a full rate and worked on a housing scheme at Gobowen, Shropshire, before being invited to work on the Wills Memorial Tower being built at Bristol University.

With financial help from his boss, he passed the exam to become a member of the Institute of Sanitary Engineers and was made manager of his company's branch in Bristol, to which he cycled 12 miles each day from his home during the General Strike. After 10 years he bought his first car, an Austin Seven, and set up his own business.

At 41 Patch was too old to be called up for the Second World War, but he joined the Auxiliary Fire Service in Bath, and was trained to use a Vickers machine-gun if the Germans arrived. In 1942 Patch found himself called to deal with the results of the "Baedeker raids" and found himself fighting fires all night, not only in Bath but also in Bristol and Weston-super-Mare. The pumps ran out of water because the drains were fractured, and he found himself diving under his fire engine as it was sprayed with bullets from a low-flying plane.

After three of his plumbers were called up, he sold his business and moved to Street, in south Somerset, after seeing an advert for a sanitary engineer to service military camps. He bought a partnership, and found that the job meant that he knew about all troop movements, except the launch of the Normandy invasion. Returning to one camp the next morning he found plenty of food and the fires still burning. The Americans had left behind large amounts of equipment which, after finding no-one prepared to take it, he sold.

Starting up again after the war he had charge of 10 plumbers and 18 fitters when he reached 65, but was adamant that he was going to work no more. He and his wife enjoyed 10 years of retirement before she died, and a few years later he married Jean with whom he was asked to to visit the Normandy battlefield by a friend who had two seats going in his coach. He was driven to tears on Omaha Beach, thinking of the Americans he had known, and had no desire to go again. But at 92 he was asked to don a hard hat and dungarees to guide geologists from Bath University underneath Combe Down, where the disused quarries have been causing increasing concern about safety. He had not been down for 70 years, but was able to lead the way to one, which had been completed forgotten by the local council.

It was after his second wife's death and his admission to an old people's home, aged 100, that the light outside his room prompted, as he lay in bed, a recurring nightmare about the flash of the bomb that hit his unit.

By now there were television crews eager for interviews. While agreeing to appear in Richard van Emden's The Trench, in which veterans talked about their experiences and a group of today's young men relived their hardships, he still voiced doubts to the camera: "You can make the programme, you can

imitate a shell burst by a thunderclap firework ... you can improvise everything, except the fear."

Roundly declaring that anybody who claimed not have been afraid at the front was a liar (pronounced in his defiant West Country burr), he expressed thanks that he had never killed a man. No war was worth the loss of a couple of lives, let alone thousands, for what was nothing but "a family row", he said, though he admitted he would have shot the Kaiser and Hitler to save millions of lives.

As one programme followed another Patch became a new phenomenon of our age, a centenarian celebrity. He had a cider, Patch's Pride, named after him, and was awarded an honorary degree by Bristol University, where he had worked on the Wills memorial 80 years earlier. He also received the Legion d'Honneur from the French government and was induced to meet an Alsatian who had fought on the German side at Passchendaele. He found him "a very nice gentleman"; they exchanged gifts of a bottle of cider and Alsatian biscuits, then attended the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate.

His second wife and the sons of his first marriage died. When he went into the old people's home he found a girlfriend in her eighties but the thought of the fuss the press would make put him off marrying again.

It was the loss of his three friends on the night of September 22 almost 90 years ago that haunted him. "Those chaps are always with me. I can see that damned explosion now," he would say.

All articles care of the Daily Telegraph on line

Dorset & South Wiltshire Branch Western Front Association School Competition 2009

At a Presentation Evening at the Bovington Tank Museum on 30 April 2009 two students from the Thomas Hardye School in Dorchester, Molly Borland in Year 9 and Ben Winsor in Year 12, became the overall winners of the first School Competition on the Great War organised by the Dorset & S. Wilts Branch of The Western Front Association.

The students who entered all worked very hard and the final projects and essays were excellent. At the Presentation Evening at the Tank Museum Molly and Ben each received a cheque for £100 and all entrants received a book on the Great War, presented to them by the Branch chairman, Martin Willoughby and the branch Education Officer, David Seymour.

The competition was launched, as a pilot scheme, in February with the help of the History Department at the Thomas Hardye School and the students were given six weeks to complete their entries. Students in both competitions could choose from a variety of topic areas on the Great War including the home front, conscientious objectors, women in the armed forces, the war in the air and at sea, racism in the British army and the 1918 campaign on the Western Front.

Year 9 (aged 13 to 14) students had the opportunity to present their findings as a project and they could choose from a variety of formats including a television/radio programme, a piece of artwork, a model, or a piece of extended writing. Each project had to show evidence of research and the student's point of view on the topic.

Molly Borland's winning entry was a pencil drawing with a watercolour background in response to her research into the final campaign on the Western Front. The red and yellow background wash represented, as she wrote in her research notes for this drawing, "poppies, death and the strange light created from the firing of weapons".

Year 9 Winner Molly Borland with Branch Chairman Martin Willoughby

Molly chose to show General Sir Douglas Haig in the forefront of her drawing, using, as she said, "shades of grey to represent the strains of war after he took command of the British army". She added that "he used tactics during the war which were heavily criticised and were blamed for the heavy loss of life" but she pointed out "in 1918 Haig oversaw the successful British advances on the Western Front which led to victory for the Allies in November." As well as explaining what she had found out about the final campaign from the books and websites which she had consulted, the research booklet which accompanied Molly's artwork contained sketches showing the stages which she had gone through before arriving at her final piece and an explanation

of the background elements of her drawing. These included “figures of soldiers….drawn without any features in dark shades…..to represent the millions of lives lost during World War One”. She showed “destroyed buildings and uneven ground” to represent “land ruined and destroyed after heavy bombing” and she also included “a sentry in a trench alone to represent the loneliness of war”. At the Tank Museum prize-giving evening, Molly was clearly delighted to be rewarded by the judges for her hard work by being presented with the first prize in her age category.

Runners-up in the Year 9 category included Harry Stonhill, with his diorama of a trench scene which included duck-boards, barbed-wire and an approaching tank; Jules Bone, who investigated the role of submarine chasers through the diary of Chief Machinist’s Mate David Williams; Tom Owen, who entered a striking portrait of a sniper drawn on canvas; and David Lyons, who chose to write an extended essay about the final campaign on the Western Front. These Year 9 pupils were each presented with a copy of “Harry’s War”, the illustrated memoirs of Great War soldier Harry Stinton.

The Year 12 (aged 16 to 17) essay competition required an essay of between 1,500 and 2,000 words, fully referenced with a bibliography. It was stressed to the entrants that they should develop, in their own words, a convincing argument and show evidence of having read widely.

Ben Winsor’s well-argued winning essay addressed the question “What led men to conscientious objection during the First World War?”

Year 12 Winner Ben Winsor with Branch Chairman Martin Willoughby

Runners-up in the Year 12 competition included Rosa Hartnett, who also chose to investigate conscientious objection, and Emily Osborne and Cyrus Navvabi, who both decided to research the way in which British Society coped with the pressures and crises of World

War One. All were presented with books chosen to reflect their individual areas of interest.

The evening was well attended by members of the Dorset Branch as well as competition entrants and their families. Proceedings began with a guided tour, given by the museum's Education Officer, Chris Copson, of the new "Tank Story" exhibition. Guests then listened to a lecture by the Imperial War Museum's oral historian, Peter Hart, who spoke about how historians use oral accounts as evidence. All those who attended had the opportunity to view the projects and essays produced by the students.

This very successful School Competition and impressive Presentation Evening indicates the way forward and the Dorset Branch looks forward with enthusiasm to involving more schools in the 2010 event.

Following is Ben Winsor's winning entry

What led men to conscientious objection during the First World War?

"War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today."- President John F. Kennedy

Objection to war, as a concept, is exempt from the pages of history. Past societies, such as Ancient Rome, were built on militarism and violence, entire populations existed solely for the purpose of destroying other populations. War was not a choice; it was a way of life. The Crusades were a matter of religious importance, the Boer War a jingoistic adventure. However, the outbreak of World War One saw the emergence of a new phenomenon; conscientious objection. Society was fascinated, then appalled at these men, guilty of the "crime" of refusing to fight for something they did not believe in, did not support and did not understand. Societal progression had led these men to question themselves and their government as to why they must fight, and thus, be it due to religion, politics or the human conscience, these men refused to fight.

Religion, it appears, was the most influential decision when it came to deciding whether to fight. In an interview with The Telegraph, Ian Hislop notes how "the Church of England wasn't the limp and liberal institution it is today", and yet the Church was often bifurcated as to how to deal with the moral dilemma the war posed. A few preachers wholeheartedly supported fighting to rid the world of "evil Germans", yet the majority saw the war as an opportunity to further the declining figure of Christian solidarity. Many men were torn between devotion to God and their country, and often felt let down by their beliefs when faced with the horrors of trench warfare. The poet Wilfred Owen, in his poem "Exposure", notes how "love of God seems dying", but on the outbreak of war, the main reason for objection was religious beliefs. Organised religion still formed the backbone of society, communities dependent on the local Church, the morals it enforced and the relationships it formed. Ian Hislop, in a documentary for Channel 4, notes how the phrase "Would Jesus bayonet a German?" became the principle argument for objecting on religious grounds, and it was this kind of moral impact that other aspects of society could not match.

However, societal progression was another key reason for conscientious objection. Society had moved on from a time when war was the *raison d'être* for its inhabitants. The industrial revolution and the emergence of democracy had rendered war an outdated and unnecessary tool in the eyes of the civilian, and yet, paradoxically, was now capable of creating more destruction than ever before through the creation of new weaponry. The society of 1914 had no experience of a major war, the closest conflict being the 1899 Boer War, of which many citizens had vivid memories of British military inefficiency and the atrocities committed. It is not surprising therefore that around 16,000 men became conscientious objectors. These men were simply not prepared to die for a war that they deemed anachronistic and avoidable. Their views were echoed in Sigfried Sassoon's Declaration that appeared in The Times on July 31st 1917. It states how the war was being "deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it", and many men in society agreed with this. They did not want to risk their lives for a war that may achieve nothing, and saw better ways to end the conflict.

It is easy to forget that many men refused to fight purely out of the strength of human morals and emotions. Society ostracised these people, handing them white feathers in the street to shame them, yet, for the most part, their courage is to be respected. These men felt that killing, for whatever purpose, was murder, and that war was unnecessary. Pacifism is essentially the refusal to fight and the avocation of peaceful alternatives. A famous anti-war campaigner was Bertrand Russell, who believed "Patriotism is the willingness to kill and be killed for trivial reasons." It was these sentiments that many men held, and the belief in peace was so deep-rooted that, for some of them, imprisonment was a more acceptable option. Many men had never seen war on such a scale, and had learnt from the Boer War that atrocities and conflict go hand in hand. With memories of scandals

such as the treatment of Chinese workers in the Boer War fresh in the mind, these men could not justifiably believe that the conflict they would be involved in was morally sound. Killing a fellow human being was irreconcilable for these men, and saw the violence of war as avoidable and damaging.

It is not inconceivable that many men were simply scared of war. Those not swept away in the jingoistic fervour or indoctrinated by propaganda knew that the horrific stories coming back from the front were to be believed. Pat Barker's "Regeneration" recounts some of these stories, one of the men landing on a rotting German corpse whose stomach then exploded, "filling my mouth and nostrils with rotting flesh". Although more difficult to comprehend, many men were simply selfish, and could not see the point in self-sacrifice instead of a comfortable life at home. Whatever the emotions, some men were simply so swayed by their conscience, war became an impossible option to them.

Human free will and its preservation was another factor in the emergence of conscientious objection. January 1916 saw the passing of the Military Service Act, which introduced conscription for men between the ages of 18 and 41. The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, had previously been criticised for his ruthless and dictatorial attitude to running wartime Britain, introducing many Defence of The Realm initiatives having removed Herbert Asquith from power. For many people, his removal of many social liberties was inconvenient and somewhat over-zealous, kite-flying one of the more abstract pursuits banned under the DORA regulations. Thus, the introduction of conscription was, for many people, a violation of individual freedom too far. Britain is one of the oldest democracies in the world, and many people were outraged at being told what to do by their government. The war was such an immense risk, many men were convinced that such self-sacrifice should be based on free will, not government intervention. Disillusionment was also beginning to take hold. The previous century had been a period of immense poverty for much of the country, with little government intervention to help relieve it. Thus, when the government did finally intervene, it was only to send men to fight. Conscientious objectors realised that this pragmatism and dichotomised values was not characteristic of a trustful government.

Conscientious objection did not mean a categorical abstention from involvement in the war. Many men refused to fight on a military level, as they believed their skills would be better utilised in other areas. The Non-Combatant Corps had a strength of 3,400 conscientious objectors, and was the same as any other military division except the men did not carry weapons or fight. Instead, they performed a variety of physical labour, relieving pressure upon the regular infantry. Many "conchies", as the objectors became known, lent their individual skills, such as translators or medics, to the war effort, and saw it inappropriate to waste their skills on learning how to become a soldier. The Quakers and other religious group also became attached to regiments to provide moral and spiritual guidance, as well as caring for the wounded.

Lastly, perhaps a more subtle and psychological reason for conscientious objection was due to an adverse reaction to the torrent of pro-war patriotism manufactured in order to encourage war support. Many people blindly followed government instruction and volunteered, indoctrinated by the mass of propaganda initiatives such as the commissioning of artists and writers to produce propaganda. Jessie Pope, for example, wrote the infamous poem "Who's for the game?" which encouraged men to "grip and tackle the job unafraid". The face of Lord Kitchener became ubiquitous and synonymous of the government's encroachment into personal freedom. Perhaps, ultimately, this flood of patriotism sparked a moral repulsion in many men, and, ironically, turned them against the war. Although this may appear ambiguous, it is not inconceivable that the minds of many men simply refused to comply with the mass of pro-war images, and ignited an anarchic sense within them that revolted against the status quo.

Conscientious objection did not receive status as a human liberty until 1987. Consequently, the men who refused to fight in the First World War were subject to verbal, mental and physical abuse from the media, public and government. However, these men stood their ground for what they believed in; a rejection of militarism. These men had deep-rooted emotions and values that many did not, and were gifted with a level of clarity and analysis that escaped the masses that joined up to fight. Be they cowards or heroes, these men refused to fight, influenced by their religion, their morals, their fear, societal progression or their revulsion to government-induced patriotism. They refused to fight because they had could not support something they did not believe in, and that is why these pioneers of conscientious objection shall always be remembered for fighting their own personal war.

1,540 words

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Branch Talk – 16 May 2009
Ian Cull on the Last Cruise of the Emden

Ian Cull provided a very good talk with the assistance of a very helpful powerpoint presentation showing good photos of ships and locations as well as some very helpful maps. His charts to show the details of ships captured by SMS Emden were a good way of conveying information about name, tonnage, cargo, and fate. He summarised the fighting potential of the various warships nicely so that the audience could easily appreciate the balance of power in the Indian Ocean. He stressed the humanity of the Emden's captain, Karl von Muller, pointing out the way in which he dealt with everybody from the ships which he captured as well as making clear that he abided strictly by the rules of cruiser warfare as laid down in the 1909 Declaration of London. Ian explained clearly the various actions which Emden fought at Madras, Penang, and finally the Cocos Islands, using maps effectively to aid clarity. An interesting sidelight on the Emden story was revealed through Ian's interest in the 1st Royal Berkshires when he cited their war diary for 11/11/14: "Heard of capture of EMDEN". It would be interesting to know how many other units were similarly impressed by this news. Ian brought charts from the Official History for members to peruse and Kevin Patience brought his very fine large scale model of SMS Konigsberg, a slightly smaller and earlier vessel than the Emden but essentially similar in its main characteristics. All in all a very interesting afternoon.

Anyone inspired to go into the story of the Emden in more depth might like to read: J. S. Corbett, *History of the Great War – Naval Operations*, Vol 1, London, 1920; Edwin P Hoyt, *The Last Cruise of the Emden*, London, 1967; R. K. Lochner, *The Last Gentleman of War*, Annapolis, 1988.

David Seymour

Rhetorical Perspective
or One Man's Word

A statement made by a military historian led me to consider the validity of the assertions he made. "Oral Records" carry little weight. The caveat was, that time and recollections could have coloured an individual's perspective. The speaker suggested "War Diaries" are not to be trusted at all, as these are made up to suit the expectations of the reader for whom they are intended.

What he was seeking was the *truth*. What is truth? The dictionary gives a very vague interpretation of the truth. If 90% of the people have a belief in the content of the statement, is that truth?

The strength of any report lies not in itself but in the use of multi-record linkage and corroboration affording perspicacity. The stated facts then come within the bounds of probability, and plausibility.

The veracity of the reporter may be coloured by the individual's experience, prejudice, ability of recall, etcetera, and equally the receiver of information will have his own agenda which will to some extent distort the information he receives. Some individuals may be prone to "embellishment" in a sense of duty to others who were present at the time.

The information given will depend upon how the teller perceives the enquirer as to what story line is given, as in the case of the "Good Guy, Bad Guy" technique often used in forensic interrogation.

Members of the Branch posed for a photograph in front of a remnant of a weapon of mass destruction destined for Saddam Hussein's regime at Woolwich Arsenal. Where does this place the so-called "Dodgy Document" used in justifying the Iraq War? Inaccurate or partially accurate give or take the odd faults in interpretation of the true facts.

The richness of literature, be it fact or fiction is at the heart of intellectual understanding and interpretation, therefore do not believe all that you hear, and take what you read with a pinch of salt!

Alan Marsh

A twelve-year-old boy sat down in front
of an elderly man one day,
"Tell me stories Tommy from the world of yesterday,
of things you've done and places seen and stories of the war,
of teenage years and schoolboy days
one hundred years before".
Old Tommy smiled and said to him,
"What would you like to hear?
Because my life's been full of pain,
and happiness, and fear.
This world's a very different place from the one that I first saw,
because that was so long ago,
over one hundred years before".

And so he talked at some great length, about his times and life,
how he'd outlived all his children,
and his darling of a wife.
The thing he next said took me back,
"Tommy's not my name",
"My name is Henry really, but to me it's all the same.
I've been called Tommy ever since I reached age one one five,
and of the men from World War One
there's only me alive.
So call me what you like young friend,
it matters not one jot,
just make sure that the boys, who died will never be forgot.

But this man <u>was</u> a Tommy in the trenches of the Somme,
and ninety years have passed away since his fighting days were done.
He now sits here before me aged one hundred years and more,
and his eyes are filled with sadness at the sights he's seen before;
men blown to bits by shrapnel,
or a bullet from a gun,
on the killing fields of Belgium,
from the slaughter of Verdun.
Blind and mad from poison gas or sick with dysentery
from the killing fields of Flanders and shores of Gallipoli.
Millions killed in battle, the rest sent raving mad,
the misery caused by World War One was incalculably sad,
and mankind really needs to love,
and stop this thing called war,
and remember all the millions dead,
and the slaughter gone before.

But the saddest day of all will come,
when the world's last Tommy dies,
and the memories start to disappear,
when the dimming of his eyes,
the world should not forget the sights he saw in tragedy.
We must make good their sacrifice,
and live in harmony,
they died for us in millions,
and yet the world forgets,
don't let the last one slip away,
with any more regrets,
for the pipers called the last post out,
and our Tommy he must go,
let's hope we never see the sights,
that only he will know.

Farewell, old lad, its very sad, that you must go away
and all of us salute you all,
for the life we have today.

By Alan Leeson

An extra date for your diary:

'Aspects of the Great War'

Saturday, 12 June 2010
09.00 to 16.30

Venue: Tank Museum

Cost £27.50
includes Morning Coffee, Lunch and Afternoon Tea

Speakers:
Martin Middlebrook, Prof Peter Simkins, David Fletcher and Taff Gillingham