



THE DUGOUT

Branch Patron: *The
Lord Lieutenant of
Dorset -
Angus Campbell*

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESSEX BRANCH OF THE WESTERN
FRONT ASSOCIATION

Your Local WW1 Historical Society

(Registered Charity : 1142787)

www.wessexwfa.org.uk

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Martin Willoughby

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MEETINGS 2015

January 10th - Lives
of Service & Sacrifice
Frank & Kate Laud,
John & Angela Tozer

February 7th - The NZ
Rifle Brigade ,
Stephen Dean and
AGM (starting 2pm)

March 7th - The
Canadian First Nation
in the Great War, Liza
Sentence

April 11th - Railway
Guns in the Great
War, Bill Fulton

At Pimperne Village Hall,
Newfield Road,
Pimperne nr Blandford
Forum. DT11 8UZ- 2pm
for 2.30pm start.

FIELD TRIPS:

March 28th - *Imperial
War Museum—New
FWW Exhibition*

BATTLEFIELD TOURS:
8th-11th May - *Battle
of Aubers Ridge
Centenary*

May 18th-24th -
Gallipoli

Sept 11th-14th - *The
Somme - Line Albert
to Bellecourt*

ISSUE 11

DECEMBER 2014

Chairman's Chat

It gives me great pleasure to provide this 'Chairmans Chat' for the first edition of the revamped Wessex Branch newsletter 'The Dugout'. Our much missed journal now under new management from Sandra will I am sure be a great success and I am grateful to Sandra for taking on the role of 'Dugout' editor after the departure of Helen to pastures new. The newsletter will continue to be an important and complimentary element in our communications with you all.

Many of you will I am sure have scanned the pages of the WFA Bulletin 100 for some trenchant words from the Wessex branch. The Branch contribution to 'Branchlines' submitted at the Bulletin editor's request on 16th October has not made it into print. Needless to say I am very disappointed that our article has been omitted from this 'special' edition of the Bulletin and I await an explanation from the Bulletin editor.

Unsurprisingly the branch has had a very busy year in 2014 and I wish thank all our branch trustees, members, guests, supporters and friends for their support in this busy period. Our monthly meetings continue to attract sizable audiences with the quality of presentation and variety of topics maintaining the high standards our audience has come to expect. Again it would be unfair to single out particular speakers but all have delivered highly professional, informative and fascinating talks on topics ranging from the work of the *La Boisselle Study Group*, the *Origins of the Dreadnought*, the generation of WW1 commanders mentored by Field Marshall Roberts, *The Labour Corps*, *Development of Artillery in the Great War*, *The Ashcroft VC Collection* and the *Mobilisation of*

Nurses in WW1. The penultimate talk of the year gave us a professional divers view of the *Salvage of German Navy ships at Scapa Flow* and our final talk of the year: *Tolerating Mysteries – Fromelles- A Case History* was enthralling to say the least. The range and variety of topics continues to captivate our audiences and our thanks go to the speakers for their outstanding efforts to entertain the branch with their erudition. In February the branch visited the Keep Military Museum Dorchester a trip much enjoyed by all followed in March by a successful visit to the National Army Museum in London. The branch also supported commemorative events at Sherbourne Abbey arranged by Dorset County Council, the Hampshire



"Ere, has anyone seen my tank?"

.... a very
busy year
for the
branch...

Chairman's Chat continued....

Regiment Museum, Winchester and Wiltshire County Council Commemoration at Tidworth. We also had a presence at Dorset Family History Society WW1 day on March 15th, at Tank Fest at the end of June and on the 4th August at the Tank Museums Great War Commemorative Event.

Other highlights included supporting the WFA Commemoration of the Arrival of the BEF in France at events and services at Amiens and Arras in August, where our young members, Sam and Zac Willoughby, Thomas Bristow and Thomas Saunders accomplished their parts with great maturity and professionalism. The branch chairman presented them with a book each containing a branch certificate of thanks which provides them with a memento of a great occasion. Thanks also go to the 31 branch members attending both events for their support and encouragement. Certificates of Appreciation for both our young members and the adult branch members distributed by the WFA are also a notable memento of the occasion. The branch extends its gratitude to Graham Parker and Joanna Legg for their hard work in organising the event and the members of the WFA Executive Committee and WFA Volunteers who so ably supported the commemorative occasion thus ensuring its success. For branch members a light touch was provided by a visit to L'Petit Train de Haut Somme, a museum and train ride greatly enjoyed by all. We should not forget those branch members unable to travel to France who attended the WFA commemorative events at Netheravon and Bulford.

The branch Battlefield Tour in September 2014 "St Quentin to the Marne" was a fantastic success and my thanks go to our superb guides and helpers; Mike Adams,

Nige Plumb and Rod Arnold for their matchless knowledge. We must also mention our branch secretary whose organisational skills made the whole thing possible and the enduring support of our branch members who play a not insignificant part in making the tour such a success. A full report on the September 2014 tour written by Roger G Coleman is available on the branch website www.wessexwfa.org. A visit to the Great War Museum at Meaux is a must and our visit to the Guards Grave Villers-Cotteret Forest where we held a very atmospheric commemoration was especially poignant.

In this amazing year the branch held its third battlefield tour during the 10th to 12th of October marking the arrival of the BEF in what was to become the Ypres Salient. Staying in Kortrijk we visited the sites of 1914 minor (by later standards) actions at Cassel, Wytschaete and Passendale. The stands being adeptly presented by branch member Philip Ventham and the Branch Chairman. Attending the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate the branch were honoured to be able to lay a wreath with Branch Secretary Judy Willoughby and Branch members Amanda Bristow and Viv Dickenson forming our wreath laying party. Notably Wessex was the only WFA presence. Another successful tour concluded with a visit to Talbot House where members enjoyed a guided tour and marvellous film based on Great War concerts followed by Tea/Coffee and cake.

Martin Willoughby
Branch Chairman



University College London Lectures on YouTube

Lectures held during June 2014 by the University College London can be watched online at YouTube channel www.youtube.com/UCLLHL

- **Sex and the Somme, Dr Clare Makepeace, UCL History.**

Tommies queued in their hundreds to visit brothels in the First World War. Dr Clare Makepeace explores this little-discussed aspect of the war. She uncovers soldiers' reasons for visiting brothels, their reactions to them and the prostitutes, and how they dealt with the potential consequences: venereal disease. The findings give us fresh insight into what it meant to be a British man at war.

- **Investigative conservation and the archaeology of the Western Front, Renata Peters, UCL Institute of Archaeology.**

Staff and students at the UCL Institute of Archaeology have been involved in the investigative Conservation of objects excavated from Western Front trenches. Some of these objects were associated with unidentified human remains thought to be of soldiers killed in battles between 1914 and 1918, and provided Important information for their identification. Others provided more questions than answers, but also shed light on the reality of life and death in the trenches.

- **Reconstructing Broken Bodies: From Industrial Warfare to Industrial Engineered Tissues Prof Robert Brown, UCL Surgical Science & Mr Colin Hopper, UCL Eastman Dental Institute.**

Trench warfare protected combatants from many injuries, but left the head exposed, producing a massive demand for experimental facial reconstructive surgery. WW1 is acknowledged as the first 'industrial scale' war, but it has taken a century to stumble upon the concept of industrial scale tissue production. This very 21st century idea can be traced back to WW1 and the clinical pressures produced by Industrial scale, non-lethal trauma.

- **Science and the First World War, Prof Jon Agar, UCL Science and Technology Studies.**

This year is the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. By examining the lives of figures such as Henry Gwyn Jeffreys Moseley and Fritz Haber, this talk will show how scientists on all sides were swept up in the tide of patriotism, militarism and nationalism, making contributions, some tragically brief, some devastatingly effective, to the waging of war. And what of the long-lasting effects? While some saw the Great War as an irreparable crisis of modern civilisation, with science as a symbol of inhumanity, others saw science as an internationalist project capable of healing wounds.



The 18 - Pounder Shrapnel Shell

Visitors to the battlefield often find pieces of shrapnel shell - the empty casing, the small shrapnel balls, even a nose cap if you are lucky.

A shrapnel shell can be described as an artillery projectile provided with a bursting charge and filled with lead balls, exploded in flight by a bursting charge detonated with a time fuse. A British artillery officer, General Henry Shrapnel, invented the shell in the 19th Century.

Big contracts for shrapnel shells were given out in 1915 and they became available in large numbers for the Battle of the Somme in 1916, nearly all being fired by the standard British field gun, the Quick Firing 18-pounder. Approximately 800 18-pounders took part in the opening bombardment at the end of June out of a total of 1500 guns of all types, firing about three million shells, most of them shrapnel.

CONSTRUCTION

The shell case is made of forged or cast steel just thick enough to withstand the pressure of discharge, thus allowing the maximum number of balls. The bursting charge - gunpowder in a tin cup - is just large enough to blow off the head and push out the balls. Above the tin cup is a steel disc that separates the bursting charge from the shrapnel balls.

A metal central tube screws into the steel disc and fits tightly into the neck of the tin cup; the top end is soldered onto the bottom of the nose cap. The fuse is fitted inside the nose cone.

The shrapnel balls are made of an alloy of seven parts lead and one part antimony to provide the hardening effect. After the lower parts of the shells have been put in, the remainder of the shell case is filled with shrapnel balls. Molten wax is then poured in to hold the balls in place; the wax turns into smoke when the shell bursts in the air and this helps an artillery observer to know whether the time setting on the fuse is correct. A Shallon disc (is then fitted to keep the shrapnel balls separated from the fuse in the nose cap. Finally, the nose cap is screwed down into the top of the shell case.

FIRING THE SHELL

The number of seconds or part seconds calculated for the flight of the shell before bursting is set on the time rings of the nose cap. The shell is fired from the gun by the detonation with a firing pin of the cordite in the cartridge. The gas produced by the flash burn of the cordite pushes the shrapnel shell violently up the barrel of the gun (all this is the normal procedure for firing any shell or bullet). After the set interval in the air, the fuse sends a small flash of fire down the central tube. This ignites the bursting charge and the steel disc above it forces out the shrapnel balls and blows off the nose cap at the same time. The balls plunge to the ground with the initial velocity of the falling shell added to by the impetus of the bursting charge. A properly set fuse would result in an area of ground 30 metres wide and 45 metres long being swept by balls. The ideal targets were men in the open; one ball could easily kill a man.

Unfortunately, shrapnel was not a good weapon for cutting barbed wire or destroying trenches, which was a major reason for the British failure and their heavy casualties on the first day of the 1916 battle. Later in the war, a much higher proportion of high explosive shells were used for the cutting of barbed wire, the jagged edges of the thicker shell casings slashing through the wire.

MARTIN MIDDLEBROOK

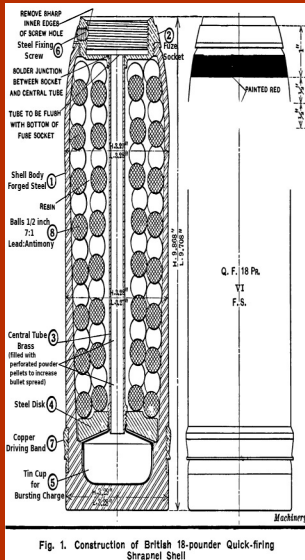


Fig. 1. Construction of British 18-pounder Quick-firing Shrapnel Shell

The shrapnel balls are made of an alloy of seven parts lead and one part antimony to provide the hardening effect.



LE CATELET - GERMAN FIRING SQUAD

There are many cases of soldiers being left behind in the retreat from Mons and being sheltered by the French until denounced to the Germans who promptly shot them and sometimes those sheltering them. (Two such men lie in the cemetery in St. Quentin having been sheltered by civilians in the town and then denounced for the reward by a young woman, who after the war was sentenced to death.)

Another case concerns 4 men who were left behind during the retreat from Mons and who are buried in Le Catelet Churchyard.

Privates Martin and Donohoe of the 1st Royal Irish Rifles, Private William Thorpe of the 1st King's Own and Private Robert Digby of the Hampshire Regiment were living in Villeret not far from Riqueval when they were denounced. All four were eventually taken to Le Catelet and stood against a rock face at the end of a field and shot. They were later buried in the village churchyard not far from the field

in which they were killed. Three of them were executed on the 27th May 1916. Private Digby surrendered a few days later believing that his life would be spared. But he was shot on the 30th May 1916.

Some years ago a ceremony was held in Le Catelet when a memorial to the men was dedicated. Wilfred's poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth" was recited at the ceremony.

An interesting aside occurred at the time insofar as it was understood by many in the village that Private Digby had been a Corporal or even a Sergeant, in which case appropriate amendment to his headstone in the local cemetery would have been necessary.

Naturally steps were taken to have this anomaly corrected by those who knew the procedures to follow. Alas, the CWGC and the Ministry of Defence confirmed that Digby had not been either a Corporal or a Sergeant but always a Private.

No doubt Digby had sought to impress his French family by his self-promotion.

Philip Guest

Robert Digby
Hampshire Regiment



Interesting book
relating to this story -
'A Foreign Field' by
Ben MacIntyre

BULLECOURT

It was recorded that the state of Bullecourt after the 17th May 1917 was quite deplorable, insofar as many dead animals remained unburied, in particular 5 dead mules. An officer and 20 men of the Post Office Rifles were detailed to deal with the matter in any way they chose.

Their report to Brigade was as follows -

"The five dead mules are no longer offensive. The site of their grave is marked with an empty rum jar the contents of which assisted in the operation."

Philip Guest

Man reunited with war hero father's WWI medal

A MAN has been reunited with his father's First World War medal – 77 years after he accidentally dropped it on a beach as a child.

Devastated Ben Eggleston was on a day-trip to Brighton in August 1939 when his war hero father's medal fell out of his pocket.

His dad – Sergeant Stephen Eggleston – died of lung disease due to gas in the trenches.

The war medal was given to his son Ben, then just five-years-old, to help him remember his father by.

Now at the age of 82 – Mr Eggleston's lifelong search has come to a happy end.

He said: "After all these years of wondering what had happened to it, we just sat there in amazement looking at the screen, hardly daring to believe what we were seeing."

Mr Eggleston was left speechless when he discovered the lost Mons Star medal for sale on eBay.

After a tense bidding war for the medal – which is engraved with his father's name and rank – he was reunited with the treasured possession.

Mr Eggleston added: "I am delighted it is now back with our family as it serves as an emblem of my father's heroism, and of the many hundreds of thousands of men who lost their lives or were injured in this terrible conflict."

What happened to Sergeant Stephen Eggleston's Mons Star medal after it fell into the

pebbles on Brighton beach had had the medal for the last 30 years.

Now the Mons Star has joined Sgt Eggleston's Meritorious Service Medal and his Military Medal, awarded for bravery during the first day of the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916.

Jane Bulmer, 55, daughter of Mr Eggleston, has lived in Kent for much of her youth.

She said: "We had some lovely daytrips there but you always had one eye on the beach, just in case."

Mrs Bulmer, who would not reveal the price the medal was bought for on eBay, said: "To my father, it was priceless.

"The important thing is he has been reunited with it."



"After all these years of wondering what had happened to it, we just sat there in amazement"

Ben Eggleston



The inscription on Sergeant Stephen Eggleston's treasured medal



The Mons Star medal left, and Sgt Stephen Eggleston in 1917, right

Wessex Branch Schools' Competition 2014

The November 2014 Branch meeting included the awarding of prizes in the Branch's Sixth annual research competition for schools. The theme of the 2014 competition was Family and Community History, to encourage the interest in family and local history research which the centenary of the Great War has sparked. The winner of the first prize for 2014 was Sophie Holland from Parkstone Grammar School. Runner-up was Alistair Rayner from Poole Grammar School.



Sophie Holland, now a Year 11 pupil, was inspired to begin researching the story of her great-great uncle, John James Fogg, following a visit to Ypres with her school. She discovered that John

Fogg, who was born in Heanor, joined the Sherwood

Foresters, aged 24, in September 1914. Arriving in France in February 1915 he took part in the second battle of Ypres before being killed on July 31st 1915. He is remembered on the Menin Gate memorial, which Sophie visited with her school. As winner of the first prize, Sophie was awarded £50 and a copy of *Private 12768, Memoir of a Tommy*.



Alistair Rayner, now a pupil in Year 9, submitted his research into his great, great grandfather, Harold Albert Leach. Before the war Harold Leach had worked on the trams in Brighton. He joined up in October 1915 and was killed by a shell whilst resting after carrying out his duties as a stretcher-bearer with the 10th Field Ambulance in April 1917, leaving a wife and three children. Alistair was awarded £25 as well as a copy of *Private 12768, Memoir of a Tommy*.

Sophie and Alistair both combined their well-organised written research with copies of relevant family and military documents, including letters, newspaper reports and service records, as well as photos.

Branch members were pleased to welcome the prize winners and their families to the meeting and would like to thank Clive Ellerby and Simon Powell, Heads of History at Parkstone and Poole Grammar Schools, for encouraging their pupils to get involved in this competition.

The prizes were presented by the Branch's November speaker and noted historian, Peter Barton.

DAVID SEYMOUR
(Branch Education Trustee)



Prizes
were
presented
by noted
Historian,
Peter
Barton

Sainsbury's Christmas truce advert 'confuses understanding' of the First World War –

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

It has fiercely divided public opinion, being branded 'dangerous and disrespectful' by the *Guardian*, and hailed by others as a beautiful tribute to soldiers. But for First World War expert Professor Mark Connelly, the biggest problem with the latest Sainsbury's advert, which depicts the 1914 Christmas truce, is that it perpetuates myths about the conflict



Christmas Truce ?

Connelly, a professor of modern British military history at the University of Kent, told *History Extra* the advert "confuses people about why the war carried on", and spreads the overly-simplistic idea that young men were forced to fight. Discussing the television advert, which has been **viewed more than 12 million times on YouTube** and has split public opinion, Connelly said: "The advert does not help people to understand what really happened – it confuses people about why the war carried on.

"Too much emphasis has been placed on the Christmas truce. If there was so much love in 1914, then why did the war drag on for four more years? We have overlaid the truce with sentimentality, but in reality it was just a day off [for troops].

"In the days after the truce you saw troops furiously working on their defences. They took advantage of the few rain-free days over Christmas to move equipment, and unload rail wagons. You wouldn't have known there was a truce.

"So the advert is accurate, but for very few soldiers. It is a snapshot presented as a panorama. In reality, the truce can be localized to just one or two battalions.

"There is still an incredibly moving story there – people *did* truce and fraternize. But this advert perpetuates the idea that that was the whole story, and any professional historian would tell you it wasn't.

"The advert also perpetuates the idea that young men were forced to fight – that is too simplistic."

Discussing the truce, which saw both British and German troops engage in a temporary ceasefire lasting from Christmas Eve through to Christmas Day, Connelly said: "What's interesting is how often the truce is presented as something that the Germans started – this has become the entrenched view. It's thought that if snobby, upper class British officers had their way, no one would have come out of the trenches. But in the advert, it's the *British* soldier who first goes out. So it's a slight variant on the usual perception of the truce.

“And of course, the advert *had* to feature the football match! There is no categorical evidence

“There was a flurry of activity about the truce in the immediate aftermath, but by the spring of 1915 it had drifted out of the public consciousness, and stayed out for quite a long time. Few post-war books talk about it, and you have to work hard to find reference to it in the 1920s and 30s.

“It wasn’t until the late 1950s/early 60s that it was really talked about again. There was a shift in perception in the 60s towards thinking that it would be apocalyptic if war happened again.

“Meanwhile, the rehabilitation of West Germany as part of a bulwark against Communism lent itself to idealizing a moment when young Germans and young Brits forgot their differences. Britain started to ‘like’ West Germans again – after all, Germans were not Nazis in 1914 – and we started to perceive them as more gentle and genial – more like *us*. We were therefore able to think more sentimentally.

“As shown in *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) the focus moved to the futility of war – a belief that the wrong sorts of people were forced to kill each other. The Christmas truce lends itself to that agenda.

“Wilfred Owen was incorporated into the O level English syllabus in the 1960s – this helped to buttress the sentiments behind the popular understanding of the Christmas truce emerging in that decade. This meant that by 1981, when Malcolm Brown produced *Peace in No Man’s Land* for the BBC – a remarkable piece of television in which he interviewed veterans who witnessed the Christmas truce – there was a real dominance of the idea of ‘lions led by donkeys’, and of the innocence of the men at the front.

“And in the 1970s came a slew of books about peoples responses to the First World War, many of which perpetuated myths of the conflict. So by the 1980s there had emerged a new perception of the First World War – that it was a war in which young men were forced into conflict.”

Connelly added: “It would frustrate me if the Sainsbury’s advert confirms to people what they *think* they know about the First World War. But if it helps people to get interested in the conflict, and encourages people to find out more, that’s wonderful.”

On its website, Sainsbury’s says: “While our ad is a fictionalized version of the events that took place, we’ve made every effort to ensure that the details are as authentic as possible.

“We’ve worked closely with the Imperial War Museum archives, with the [Royal British] Legion and with military historian Taff Gillingham throughout. Every aspect of the production, everything from the depth of the trenches to the insignia on the uniforms is historically accurate. Even the hard biscuit we see the British soldier eating was baked to the original recipe.

“The ad launched on November 12th and we hope it will help raise further funds for The Royal British Legion.”

by Emma McFarnon



Great War Quiz



1. What was the nickname of British Army Chaplain Geoffrey Studdart Kennedy?
2. The German defensive line at Vimy Ridge was successfully stormed by Canadian troops during which 1917 battle?
3. Who was appointed C-in-C of the French Army late in 1916?
4. Who commanded the German battlecruiser force from 1914 until August 1918 when he took over command of the full High Seas Fleet?
5. At which battle on the Italian Front in October 1917 did Austro-German forces enjoy a spectacular success?
6. What was a "Gotha"?
7. In proportion to men committed, French Army losses in 1914 ran at what percentage of the rate in later years – 75% / 150% / 300%?
8. What was General Allenby's "Christmas present to the British People" in 1917?
9. When was bread and flour rationing introduced in Germany?
10. Which British civilian railway manager held the honorary ranks of major-general and vice-admiral at different times during the war?



(Answers on back cover)

BRITISH ARMY CAP BADGES

The Worcestershire Regiment

An all brass badge based on a Garter Star with Garter and motto with a central Royal Lion and the regimental motto 'Firm' below, all above a scroll inscribed 'Worcestershire'.

Some 22 battalions of the regiment served during the war and eight soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross.

A total of 72 battle honours were granted to the regiment including Mons, Ypres 1914 '15 '17 '18, Gheluvelt, Neuve Chapelle, Somme 1916 '18, Cambrai, Lys, Italy 1917-1918, Gallipoli 1915-1916, Baghdad.

Estimated casualties (died): 9,460.



POPPY GHOSTS AT THE TOWER OF LONDON

What a surprise when I checked out my photographs of the poppies and saw this
.... haunting



Important information

Meetings are held at:

**Pimperne Village
Hall,
Newfield Road,
Pimperne**



Branch Executive Committee and Trustees

Martin Willoughby
Chairman /Trustee

Rod Arnold
Vice-Chairman /Trustee

Judy Willoughby
Secretary /Trustee

Marc Thompson
Treasurer /Trustee

David Seymour
Branch Education Officer/Trustee

Katherine Seymour
Branch Memorials Officer/Trustee

Sandra Twyford
Newsletter Editor/Trustee

And finally.... (Quiz Answers)

[1] Woodbine Willie; [2] Battle of Arras; [3] General Robert Nivelle; [4] Admiral Franz von Hipper; [5] Caporetto; [6] German long range bomber; [7] 300%; [8] Capture of Jerusalem; [9] 1st February 1915; [10] Sir Eric Geddes.