



WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

March 2024

Our Website :<https://suffolk-wfa.org.uk>

Our Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/WFASuffolk>



Tonight's talk

Change of speaker !

Taff Gillingham: And the subject is ' A Surprise !'



TONIGHT'S SPEAKER

Our speaker tonight was scheduled to be **Phil Sutcliffe : A foot soldiers memoir of WW1 1918 –1919 Spring Offensive and POW**

Unfortunately Phil has had to cancel as his wife has contracted Covid and he felt he did not want to potentially infect us.

Instead we are very pleased that Taff Gillingham has agreed to take his place. Taff's subject is '**a Surprise ?' !!!**

BOOKS Colin Woods

A thank you to Barrie Thorpe's widow, Maggie, for the donation of his collection of books to the Branch.

Some of you might remember Barrie, who died 10 years ago.

We can put his books to good use as draw prizes.

The following books are available for a small donation to Branch funds as they are in sets

War Memories of Lloyd George 1-6 - hardback

The Great World War - 1-9 but minus number 3 - hardback

The Great War - 1-2

The Great World War [A History] 1-15

Stand To [Bound in Folders] 1-96 in five folders

The Great War [Churchill] 1-2 hardback

The Great War by Winston Churchill 1-26 softback but same as above

Please contact me colin2weys@hotmail.com

First come first served.

SUFFOLK BRANCH BIG COACH TOUR 2024 Keith Cooper and David Hedges

It is very encouraging that we are approaching a full coach for this trip so I hope you will join us. Please contact Keith on keith-cooper@hotmail.co.uk or David Hedges on david.j.hedges@btopenworld.com.



Suffolk WFA – Twenty things you haven't seen in Picardy

Saturday 29 June to Tuesday 2 July

Limited to 20 Spaces

£710:00 - £150 Single Supplement

Tour inclusive of

- 29 seat coach & driver throughout
- Return channel crossing
- Clive Harris as guide
- 3 nights Amiens Centre Hotel Moxy B&B
- All museum and fort entry fees

Saturday 29 June – Collect from Suffolk 29 seat coach and driver – Crossing to Calais, stop at Flixecourt on route to Amiens to visit the site of the BEF Camouflage Factory and the location of the Fourth Army Battle School as mentioned by Siegfried Sassoon in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*
Overnight Hotel Moxy Central Amiens

Sunday 30 June – 1916 Day – passing the RFC base for Somme Operations at Longeau and General Rawlinson's HQ at Querrieu, we then visit the site of the Grandstand where the general staff watched the attack go in on the 1st July, we will follow the Suffolk Regiment attacks at Orvillers (2nd July), Guedecourt (October) & Boom Ravine (February 1917) before ending with a visit to the Thiepval Memorial to hear of a couple of lesser known stories of individuals commemorated on its walls.
Overnight Hotel Moxy Central Amiens

Monday 1 July – 1918 Day - Morning visit to Villers Bretonneux to study the British & Australian defence in April 1918, then we follow the incredible journey whippet tank 'Musical Box' in August 1918 before ending the day with a visit to the Cantigny Battlefield, 28 May 1918 and the US 1st Divisions first offensive of the war. A walk around Amiens town that evening including a visit to the famous Salon Godbert ends our day.
Overnight Hotel Moxy Central Amiens

Tuesday 2 July – Depart Amiens for Calais via a relaxed visit to explore Montreuil, GHQ for the BEF and the recently restored equestrian statue of Sir Douglas Haig as well as his forward Headquarters at Beauquesne



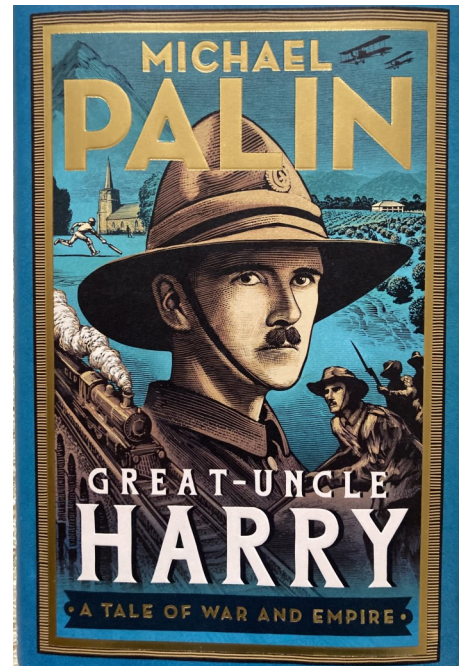
A VERY PERSONAL RIPPING YARN

Kim Smith follows in the footsteps of the World War One soldier Michael Palin has brought to book

Back in the 1970s a stash of family records was handed to Michael Palin as he visited his parents' retirement cottage in Reydon, near Southwold. Included were photographs of an enigmatic young man in army uniform, as well as five battered volumes of his diary. This, he learned, was his Great-Uncle Harry, born in 1884, died in 1916.

Previously, the *Monty Python* and *Ripping Yarns* star turned intrepid explorer had no idea that he had a Great-Uncle Harry, much less that his life was cut short at the age of 32, when he was killed in the Battle of the Somme. This discovery shocked him and made him want to know more.

However, work got in the way and he didn't get a chance to revisit the memorabilia until, making a renowned BBC *Time-watch* documentary about the last day of the Great War, he found the name H W B Palin on a memorial to the missing at Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, near the village of Longueval. It spurred him on to finally do some serious research. The result is an absorbing book called, not surprisingly, *Great-Uncle Harry: A Tale of War and Empire*.

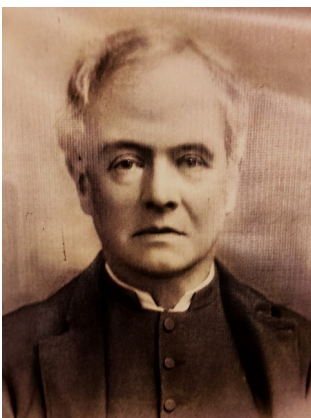


As Michael says: *“I’ve always been fascinated by the First World War: why it was fought, why the slaughter of so many was allowed to continue for so long. Now, through a diary kept by a member of my own family, I have been able to gain a personal insight into what it was like to fight for king and country in one of history’s most devastating conflicts.”*

It turns out Harry was an everyman, not a star pupil at school, nor hugely successful at work on the railways and tea plantations of India and as a farmhand in New Zealand. Nor was he a hero.

“Therefore, it wasn’t easy to trace each step of a life that began amid the comfort and security of a Victorian vicarage and ended in the mud of northern France,” continues Michael. *“Yet, as I proceeded on my quest, I uncovered many tantalising fragments and details, while also learning more about the family I was born into and the country in which I was raised.”*

Henry William Bourne Palin, known as Harry, grew up in Linton, Gloucestershire, the seventh and final child of curate Edward Palin and his Irish wife Brita. She had been orphaned in the potato famine and adopted by a wealthy American. That lady came to live with the couple and financed the building of their very grand home, a rectory that resembled a French chateau.



Harry’s father and Michael’s great-grandfather, Edward Palin senior

The French chateau-inspired vicarage where Harry grew up in Linton, Gloucester-



When Edward died in 1903, Harry seemed directionless. He was persuaded to seek work in India and took jobs on the bottom rung of the ladder in both the railways and on a tea plantation. He did not make much of an impact and returned to England after six years only to leave again, this time to work on a farm in New Zealand. He was still there when war was declared and immediately signed up to fight with the Kiwis in the Canterbury Infantry Battalion of the 12th Nelson Regiment.

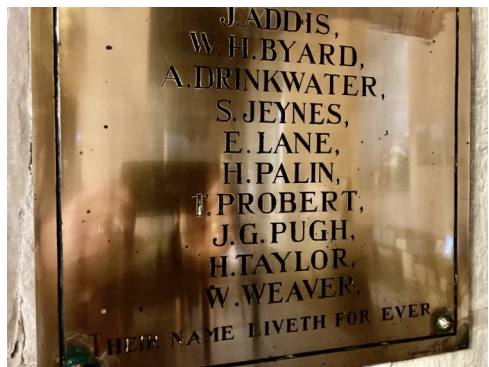
On 25 April 1915, Harry landed on Turkish soil to take part in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign. His diary records the deaths of comrades and the stench of the fallen, plus a close shave when a tin of corned beef in his backpack stopped a piece of shrapnel that could have claimed his life. Harry was evacuated in December after the Allies admitted defeat, leaving behind 2,515 New Zealanders killed in action. He was extremely fortunate, but his luck was to run out the next year.

The Canterbury Battalion arrived in France in April 1916, but before Harry went over the top he was granted leave. He headed for England and made a special trip to Norfolk to visit his elder brother, Edward Palin junior, Michael's grandfather. Edward was a doctor treating the wounded at Norfolk and Norwich Hospital and would spend the rest of his career as a GP in Fakenham, where Michael's father Ted grew up.

Back on the Western Front, the Germans waved a placard over their trenches which said: "Welcome New Zealand." They were markedly less friendly when Harry met his demise on 27 September 1916, shortly after being promoted to the rank of lance corporal. The official report states Harry was shot through the head, but as no remains have ever been found, Michael suspects his forebear may have been obliterated by a shell.



Michael finds his great-uncle's name on the memorial wall at Caterpillar Valley Cemetery



A brass plaque records the fallen of Linton inside the church

Harry is also remembered on a wreath on the village war memorial



"I would have liked him to be a war hero, to have won a VC... at the very least I would like him to lie in a grave with his name on the headstone," admits Michael. *"But he was just another human being at a time when men far more distinguished than himself decided that there were things worth killing each other for."*

In writing the book, Michael has taken the name of one of the missing off a wall and made him flesh again, something I too feel passionate about. Because of this, I couldn't resist following in the author's footsteps and travelling to Linton. It was gratifying to see that Harry is still remembered in his father's church and on the war memorial. Most poignant of all, though, his mother's grave bears the inscription: *"Henry William Bourne Palin. Killed in action on the Somme 27 Sept 1916."*

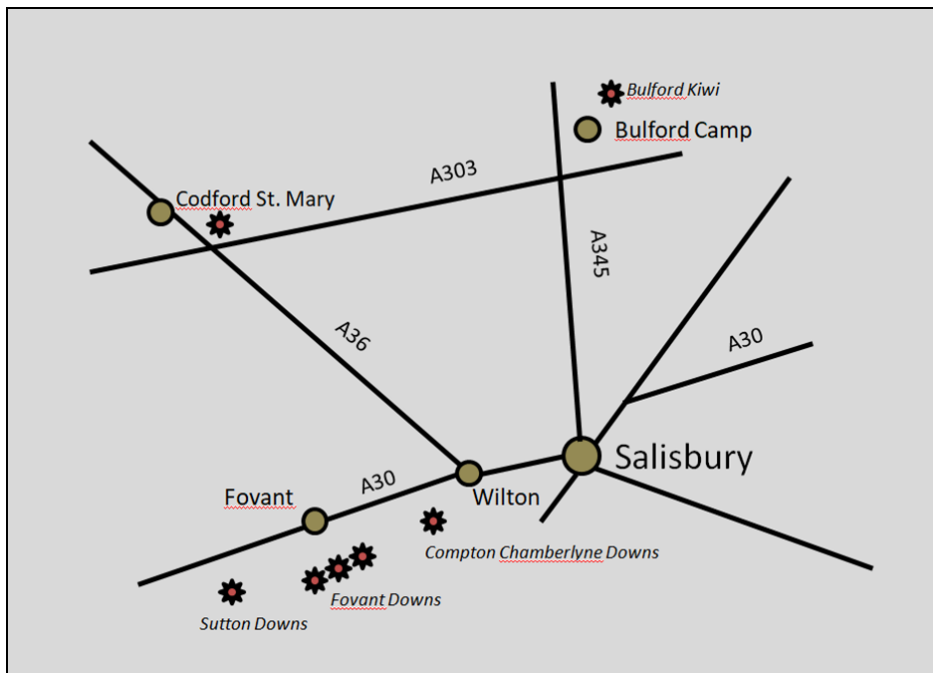
He is gone, but is definitely not forgotten.

**Great-Uncle Harry: A Tale of War and Empire* is available in hardback from Hutchinson Heinemann, RRP £22. It will be published in paperback in May.

GREAT WAR CAP BADGES CARVED IN CHALK John McCarthy

Last June my wife and I went down to the West Country to attend a memorial celebration for a relation. Due to heavy weekend traffic we took a rather circuitous route via Salisbury. We stopped for a quick sandwich at a lay-by, on the A30, near the village of Fovant. Our lunch spot sported an impressive view of an array of regimental cap badges, dating back to the Great War, carved into the chalk of the Downs rising to the south. As we were running late we did not hang around for long (much to Sue's relief!). A few days later, having consulted the internet, on our return journey we did a car tour of all the surviving cap badges, all located in the Salisbury region.

Figures have been carved into the chalk for millennia. Among the more famous examples are the White Horse at Uffington in Oxfordshire, the Rude Man of Cerne at Cerne Abbas in Dorset and the Long Man of Wilmington on the South Downs in Sussex. The military tradition of carving cap badges in chalk began in 1916 as vast military encampments grew around Salisbury to house troops being trained for combat in France. Whilst in training the soldiers built their regimental insignia into the hillside above their camps. They dug shallow trenches and filled them with crushed chalk. The white of the chalk contrasted well with the green of the grass. Some were crudely done and others built to last.



Map showing the location of the chalk insignia carvings



Our first stop was opposite Sutton Downs where the restored badge of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment can be seen. A couple of other badges remain un-restored on the Down including that of 7th Battalion, City of London Regiment.

Our next stop was the Fovant Down viewing point where the greatest concentration of badge carvings can be seen. Ten can currently be seen of which five were constructed during the Great War. A similar number have been



The oldest badge is believed to be that of 5th (City of London) Battalion, London Regiment, London Rifle Brigade created in 1916.



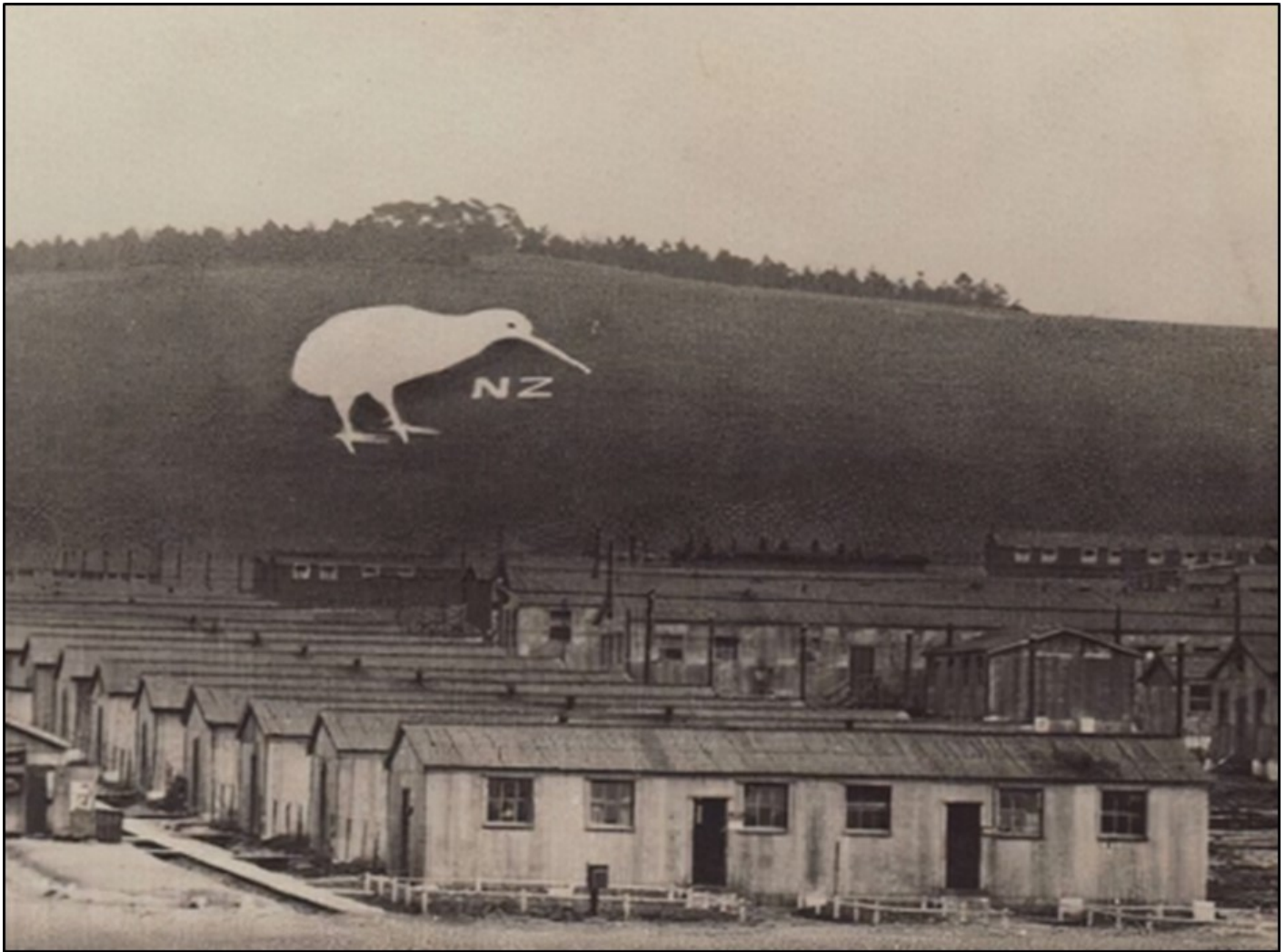
Other badges commemorate the Australian Imperial Forces (1917) (above right), 6th (City of London) Battalion, London Regiment, City of London Rifles (1916) (above left), 8th (City of London) Battalion, London Regiment, The Post Office Rifles (1916) and the Devonshire Regiment (1916). Among the badges that have been lost are those of the Queen Victoria Rifles and the Machine Gun Corps.



The next stop was to view the map of Australia carved by Australian soldiers on the northern slope of Compton Chamberlyne Downs just outside Wilton. The figure is known to date from 1917.



Our penultimate stop was on the hard shoulder of the busy A36 just north of the A303 to view a rather crudely cut version of the Australian Imperial Force cap badge on Lamb Down near Codford St. Mary. This badge was carved in 1916 or 1917.



Our last stop was at Bulford Camp just off the A303. The Bulford Kiwi is the most difficult to view and is best seen from within the camp. We were able to reach the figure but not able to view it from a distance. It was created by New Zealand troops in 1919 whilst awaiting repatriation.

LEST WE FORGET Kelvin Dakin

3/7957, Lance Corporal Charles Risby, 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment

Born 1891 in Sudbury, Charles was the son of Alfred and Mary Risby of 70 Cross Street, Sudbury.

He had enlisted, about 1909, in the Special Reserve and was called up on the outbreak of war. He crossed to France on the 10th October 1914 to join the 2nd Battalion.

Charles was treated for rheumatism in December 1914, returning to duty after 8 days.

He was listed as entitled to wear a wound stripe in a War Office Casualty List dated the 6th March 1915.

Listed as “missing” in a War Office list published 11th January 1917, he had been taken as a prisoner of war in the battalion’s attack at Serre on the 13th November 1916*.

Charles died on the 18th March 1917 in a hospital at Ludwiglust, Germany – cause of death not recorded and he appears to have been buried in the local churchyard. His body was later moved to Hamburg Cemetery.

Kirchlich Begrabene im Kirchenjahre 1917.

Nr.	Monat und Tag		Name des Bestatteten.	Geburtsort.	Alter.	Eltern (bei unehelich Geborenen Mutter) des Bestatteten.
	des Todes.	der Be- erdigung.				
1.	1917 März 18.	20.	Charles Risby, in der 1. Division des 2. Bataillon Regiment Suffolk, Geburtsort unbekannt 9957	unbekannt	26 Jahre	Charles Risby, Sudbury, Graffschaft Suffolk.

The Suffolk and Essex Free Press – (Wednesday 18 April 1917) published a report on local casualties:

“Lance-Corpl. Chas. Risby, of the Suffolks, who is also in the roll of honour, was, before he was called in the early stages of the war, in the employ Messrs Mauldon and Sutton. The Lance-Corporal had altogether a rough time. He was wounded three times, once painfully and severely in the stomach. The first time was in March 1915; he stayed in France some time and then was invalided home to Bury. Finally he was taken prisoner on the 13th Nov. last. He died on the 18th of last month, the cause of death not being stated. He has a brother**, also in the Suffolks, who was taken prisoner in the retreat from Mons, and remains in the hand of the Huns.”*

*Battle of The Ancre 13-18 November 1916

**His brother was 6250, Private George Risby

A transcript of the report by the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion following the attack:

Appendix A

Report on Operations 13th November 1916

Nov 12th

The last company reached the trench area at 11pm and companies holding the outpost line were relieved and got into assembly positions without difficulty.

All movement was done over the top owing to the state of the ROB ROY TRENCH. The night was very quiet.

Hot tea was not ready for Companies on reaching the trenches but was eventually made and issued with rum before 4am. During the night there were a few casualties in the outpost line from our own shrapnel and machine gun fire. I visited Battalion HQ on my left (13th East Yorks Regt) and my left and right company commanders reported they were in touch on their respective flanks.

At 5am 1st wave advanced from outpost line about 40 yards in front. Some rifle fire was opened on them but not sufficient to prevent them getting into position. It appears possible the Germans may have got some idea as to an attack. At 2.am a bell was heard tolling in PUSIEUX.

At zero hour (5.45am) the companies advanced. The mist, increased by the smoke, appears to have made the lines lose direction and become mixed. The ground in no man's land is reported as good on our side but near German wire as being very broken up. Crater "B" was full of water and appears to have broken up the attack on the left.

At 6.20am I heard a rumour the Companies had fallen back and at 6.35am the Company Sergeant Major of the Company in support on the right came back to report the situation. All officers of the two right companies except one had fallen and the men were held up in front of the German 1st line. Some had fallen back to the old outpost line. All men questioned speak of the German wire of concertina type being a considerable obstacle and the front Companies were held up on it and bombed from German 1st line as well as being fired on with rifle fire.

6.45am. I had no news from the left Companies. I sent my Intelligence Officer to the 1st Line and went myself along ROB ROY where I was told some men had returned to. I found no men in ROB ROY and my Intelligence Officer (2nd Lt VINDEN) reported on the left at JOHN COPSE he could find no men but some 50 were being reorganised by Capt NICHOLLS (Commanding leading Company on right) in the outpost line to the right.

The left company 8/KORL who moved up in support was held up by heavy rifle fire and machine gun fire and could not advance.

As there are no officers remaining from the front Companies it is impossible to arrive at any definite view of the situation.

I attribute cause of failure of the attack:

- 1 To loss of direction and mixture of lines owing to the mist.
- 2 To officers falling early in the advance.
- 3 The broken and muddy state of the ground especially near German trenches.
- 4 To a certain amount of wire of the concertina type perhaps put out the same night.
- 5 Invisibility of barrage in mist.
- 6 Strength of Germans in 2nd line and Machine gun fire.
- 7 Our rifles becoming caked in the mud.

Casualties	Killed	Wounded	Missing	
Officers	3	4	4	11
OR	14	90	157	261

G C Stubbs, Lt Col, Commanding 2/Suffolk Regiment

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

**Talk at the Norwich Branch
Tuesday 2nd April**

Jeremy Gorden-Smith: 'Ypres – ruin to restoration'

**Our next month's talk
Wednesday 10th April**

Clive Harris : Daring Deeds of the Dardanelles

Please send any contributions for the *Branch Briefing* to:
David Hedges, 99 Cliff Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk, IP11 9SA
telephone: 01394 272677 and email:david.j.hedges@btopenworld.com
Next Committee meeting: tba
Approach a committee member if you want any issue raised.