

WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

February 2023

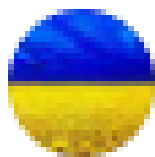
Our Website : www.suffolk-wfa.org

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Tonight's talk

Taff Gillingham : HutVent Live



MESSAGE FROM 'THE COMMITTEE' David Hedges

Starting on a sad note, our speaker for this February meeting, the widely respected historian Rob Thompson, has had to cancel as doctors have advised him to re-start his cancer treatment. We wish Rob all the best and hope to see him with us at a later date

Fortunately Taff has stepped in at short notice and will give a talk with the intriguing title : "HutVent Live"

We have started an email list of regular attendees at the Branch, both WFA members and non-members, and we plan to send a message a week or so before each meeting, including a copy of the last month's Branch Briefing. Please help us to increase the size of the email group by letting me know of attendees who did not receive the February message, or eg a preferred email address for yourself etc. There is a form this evening for email addresses to be added to the list for next month and my email is on the last page of this Briefing.

FUTURE SPEAKERS

Our new speaker-finder Tom Mudd has been hard at work. Here is the plan for 2023 as it stands now

| | | |
|------------|---|----------------------|
| 12/04/2023 | Utterly immoral WW1 Chaplain and author Robert Keable | Simon Keable-Elliott |
| 10/05/2023 | 10 decisions that decided the Battle of the Marne | Ross Beadle |
| 14/06/2023 | Air war on the Western Front 1915 | Peter Hart |
| 12/07/2023 | Brest - Litovsk | John MCarthy |
| 09/08/2023 | To be advised | |
| 13/09/2023 | To be advised | |
| 11/10/2023 | Artillery conquers, Infantry Occupies! A study of the effectiveness of the British Artillery at the 3rd battle of Ypres | Simon Shephard |

Tour Proposal -The Battlefields of Champagne 7-11 September 2023

Julian Whippy and Keith Cooper

This often-overlooked campaign lasted through the Summer of 1918 but commenced on 27 May with the ‘shock and awe’ of the German Blücher offensive, one that almost destroying three British divisions on the Chemin des Dames. The German advance to the Marne, directly threatened Paris but was held at Chateau Thierry by a mixed force of US Infantry and Marines, the first major intervention by the AEF on the Western Front.

What followed saw the ‘Rock of the Marne’ and the Mangin offensive, both of which events were acknowledged by the Germans as the turn of the tide of war, weeks before the 8 August attack to the north by BEF. Our tour will enable us study if that was in fact the case by exploring the British, French, Italian and American contribution to the Allied campaign. Based in Reims, there will also be chance to explore the Champagne Houses and vineyards, many of which had direct links to the Battle of the Marne.

7 September *Travel Day* Pick-up in Suffolk and Ebbsfleet for onward travel to Reims, a stop on-route on the Chemin des Dames to look at the opening phases of the battle and provide some context to the tour. – Overnight Reims

8 September *Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood* - A morning study of the battle for Belleau Wood including the advance into the wood, visits to a number of associated sites and the nearby ABMC and German Cemeteries. After lunch we look at one of the great what ifs of the war, the Battle of Chateau Thierry and the unmanned bridge spanning the town. We also visit the US Memorial and Visitors Centre that stands guard over the river Marne and offer commanding views of the battlefield. We end the day by studying the Rock of the Marne a true symbol of American resistance in 1918

9 September *The British in the Ardre Valley* - The day is spent touring the nearby Ardre Valley where the British fought two actions in the summer of 1918. Firstly, the defensive battle fought by the 19th (Western) Division that slows the German advance as they attempt to encircle Reims. We then consider the offensive actions of the 51st (Highland) and 62nd (West Riding) Divisions over the same ground as they fought their way through the dense forests and rolling vineyards before reaching the commanding Montagne de Bligny at the conclusion of an intense 9-day battle. We end the day in Epernay and tour the Avenue de Champagne, the mile long thoroughfare offers an unbroken boulevard of champagne houses and bars.

10 September *The battlefields of Reims* - We start the day with a visit to the nearby Fort de la Pompelle to consider the French battlefields prior to the British arrival in July 1918, after visiting a number of sites connected to the French fighting between 1915 and 1917, we end with a visit to a Reims Champagne House for a cellar tour & tasting.

11 September 2023 *Travel Day* – after some free-time in Reims to visit its magnificent Cathedral, we head home via Calais and to Suffolk.

Price- £710 per person £180 Single supplement. This includes Coach, Ferry, Guide and 4 nights in Hotel on B&B basis. This is based on minimum of 18 people booking. £100 deposit.

FREDERICK JAMES ADAMS – ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY – 4TH DIV. AMMUNITION COLUMN

Geoffrey Robinson

Minty Farm Cemetery was a completely unplanned stop on our private 2016 Ypres trip. My navigational skills had been left behind in Wipers as we found ourselves somewhere in the midst of the former battlefield of Third Ypres! But we decided to have a brief wander around this small cemetery and, as always, have a quick scan of the Visitor's Book. Someone had written in the comments section that one of the burials, Frederick J. Adams, was "born in Monewden, Suffolk" which seemed like an unusual thing to write. I decided to investigate further and I found that Fred was not mentioned on the Monewden war memorial. After making contact with that family member, determined efforts were made to try to persuade the Monewden hierarchy that Fred's name needed to go onto the memorial but those efforts proved to be fruitless. A great shame. But at least, with the help of Fred's great grandson, I can now tell the full story of another Suffolk boy who served his country.

Frederick James Adams was born in the spring of 1873 in the parish of Monewden, Suffolk. His father Mark was a labourer and he and his family were nomadic, moving from place to place wherever work was to be found. When Fred began school, the family had moved to Brandeston and thence to Burgh where Fred began his own working life as a young labourer on a farm.

Fred was one of many Suffolk agricultural workers who began travelling to Burton upon Trent to work in the malting and brewery industries when the farm work in Suffolk petered out during the winter months. He met his wife Elizabeth Bailey there and they married in 1896. Their eldest son Frederick was born in Burton upon Trent in 1897 but their second child Elizabeth was born in the village of Farcet in Huntingdonshire. In the 1901 census, Fred was described as a brickyard labourer there.

Why did the Adams family move to this tiny parish a mile or two south of Peterborough? We may never know but it was here that Fred picked up an interest in the Salvation Army. A small Salvation Army church still exists in Farcet to this day. After a two year stay in Farcet, the family returned to Burton on Trent where four more children were born. Then Fred moved with his wife and six children to Wakefield where he began working in the local colliery as a coal miner, a reserved occupation.

By 1914, the whole family were involved musically with the Salvation Army. Fred played the clarinet and had become the local bandleader. But, against family wishes, he decided to go to war. Others from the same SA branch joined up as well. Fred joined the Royal Field Artillery possibly because they recruited a battery in Wakefield but also because his uncle was involved with the RFA. His uncle was a sergeant major who served in many places including India and Ireland. Fred rose to become a Corporal, having had a spell with trench mortars. He was a horseman and one of the oldest serving with the 32nd Div. Ammunition Column.



Perhaps he ought to have had a gallantry award because the Salvation Army records tell us that he had given up his horse to another soldier who was wounded and unable to walk. That story is remembered by the family because, after the War when the Salvation Army had one of their New Years Eve parties in the Bull Ring, Wakefield, the fellow he saved came up and told them all about it and they all sang a special hymn in remembrance of Fred. Apparently the two of them were shelled and the other chap's horse was killed. Fred gave him his horse and walked, only to be seriously injured later and sadly he died of his wounds in a field hospital on October 30th 1917. Fred was 44 years old.



As already mentioned, Fred is not remembered in Monewden nor is he listed in Farcet or Burton upon Trent. It was not immediately clear what form any war memorial(s) took in Wakefield but a little extra research revealed that Fred's name was written into the town's Book of Remembrance which serves as one of their war memorials.

And so through an inadvertent drive down a narrow country lane to a rarely-visited CWGC cemetery, we can at least take some satisfaction in recording the story of Corporal Frederick James Adams of the Royal Field Artillery in this briefing and include two images of Fred which was not available during the recent Big Coach Tour visit to Minty Farm Cemetery.

I am indebted to Fred's great grandson Graham for the details of Fred's life and his death in Flanders Fields. In 2016, we said that we would probably never visit Minty Farm again but, thanks to Clive Harris and Julian Whippy, just how wrong would we be. So many thanks, chaps!

3/10210, Private John Desborough, 1st Battalion, Suffolk Regiment Kelvin Dakin

John was born on the 14th September 1886 in Elsworth, Cambridgeshire. He was the son of William and Louisa Desborough – one of 18 children born to the couple.

In 1911 he is single, living with his parents in Bleets Drift, Elsworth and working as a farm labourer. He had married Dorothy Driver in the first quarter of 1914 and they had one child – Beatrice Emily Desborough, born 11th April 1914.

According to his medal records John crossed to France to join the 1st Battalion on the 11th March 1915 – a Red Cross Prisoner of War record, dated 15th May 1915, states he was captured at Ypres and imprisoned at Munster II PoW Camp. A later report states that he had been captured un wounded:

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | 6 | |
|-------------|----|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|--|---|--|---|--|
| Efd. Nr. | a) | Familienname | | Dienst- grad | a) | Truppen- | | a) } Gefangenname b) } (Ort und Tag) c) } vorhergehender Aufenthaltort | a) Geburtstag u. -Ort b) } Adresse des nächsten c) } Verwandten | 11 JUL 1917 P.A. 12642 | |
| | b) | Vorname (nur der Rufname) | | | b) | teil | | | | b) } Adresse des nächsten c) } Verwandten | |
| | c) | nur bei Russen Vorname des Vaters | | | c) | Komp. | | | | | |
| a) | 52 | Desborough | Pte. | 1st. | Ypres | nicht verwundet | | 14.9.86 | Cambridge | | |
| b) | | John | | | Suffolks | | | Mrs J Desborough, COWDELL END, ELSWORTH, Near Cambridge. | | | |
| c) | | | | | | Munster II | | | | | |

A War Office report dated 2nd October 1915 states that he was “Previously reported killed, now reported prisoner of war” although no earlier reports have been found that might confirm exactly when he was captured. *(See footnote)

On the 29th March 1918 the Cambridge Independent Press published the following article:

PTE. JOHN DESBOROUGH.—Mrs. J. Desborough, Elsworth, has been informed, through the Red Cross Society, that the German Red Cross had reported that her husband, Pte. John Desborough, Suffolk Regt., has died in hospital in Germany as the result of a gunshot wound through the lungs on February 19th. Pte. Desborough, who enlisted when war was declared, had been a prisoner for two years and ten months, and had latterly been working in a steel foundry in Germany. He leaves a widow and one little girl, for whom much sympathy is felt. He was a son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Desborough, who have had one son killed in action and another discharged recently. Pte. J. Desborough was 28 years old. Only two days before she received the news of his death his wife had a letter from him reporting that he was in wonderfully good health.

A Red Cross record dated 5th March 1918 confirms the story of him being shot through the lung (*Lungenschuss*) while working at a steel works (*Stahlformgiesserei*):

Desborough, John Sold. 1. Suffolk Rgt. B. Komp.
 Erk. Nr. 10210. - geb. 14.9.86 zu
 Cambridge. - Arbeiter. - verst. 19.
 2.1918 auf der Stahlformgiesserei
 zu Witten im Res. Laz. infolge
 Lungenschuss. - Akts. 18389/W.

Then in May the story changed to say that he had died as the result of an accident:

THE LATE PTE J. DESBOROUGH.—Mrs. Desborough has been officially informed that Pte. J. Desborough has died whilst a prisoner of war in Germany. The commander of the camp in which he was interned has forwarded a report of the circumstances in which he met with his death. He was accidentally injured in a steel foundry at Minden, and died later in hospital. It was at first erroneously reported that he had been shot. All of his comrades were allowed to attend the funeral, and they have sent his widow a lovely worked silk memorial. He was a brother-in-law of Lance-Corpl. H. W. Driver, having married the latter's sister.

However, by the 14th June the story took another twist - as reported in the Cambridge Independent Press:

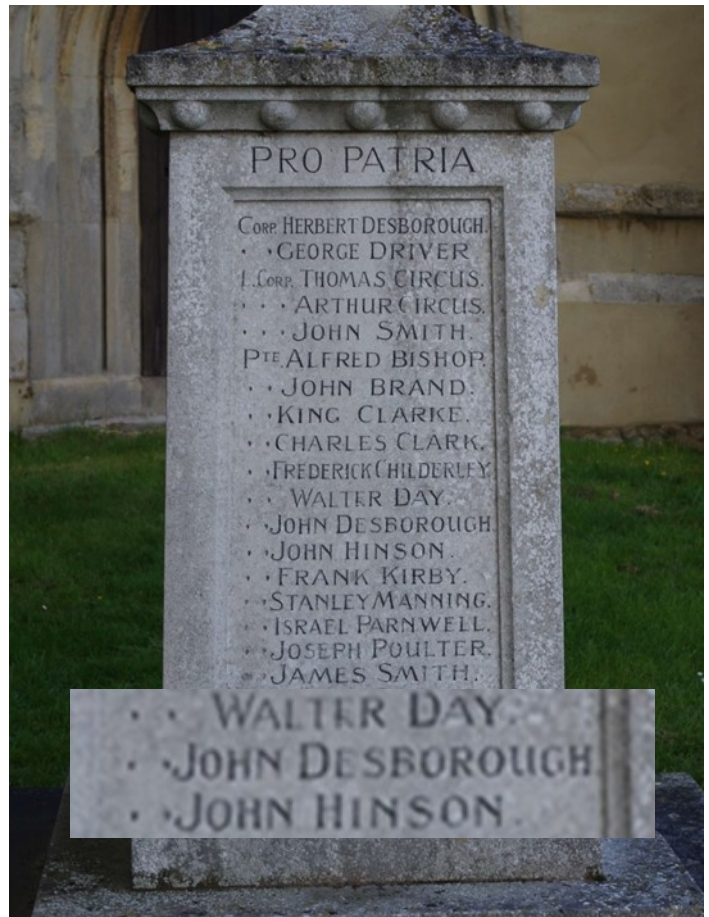
ELSWORTH PRISONER'S DEATH.

Murdered by a Sentry in German Camp.

In the "Tress and News" of 29th March it was announced that Pte. John Desborough, Suffolk Regt., had died in hospital in Germany as the result of a gunshot wound through the lungs on February 18th. On the 24th of last month we announced that Mrs. J. Desborough had subsequently received a report from the German Commander of the camp in which her husband had been interned, that he was accidentally injured in a steel factory at Minden, and had died later in hospital. It was added that all of Pte. Desborough's comrades were allowed to attend the funeral. The Amsterdam correspondent of "The Times," however, tells another tale. He (Pte. J. Desborough) was murdered by a German sentry on or about Feb. 27th, 1918, whilst working on Kommando No. 168, Witten 2, which is based on Minden. This kommando is considered the worst in Westphalia, and men are continually going into hospital at Minden owing to brutal treatment. It appears that on the date mentioned Desborough took the part of a French prisoner who was being bullied by a German civilian. The German sentry ordered him to go away. Desborough obeyed the order immediately. As he walked away the sentry shot him in the back, death being instantaneous. A fortnight later he was officially reported to have "died" in a hospital known as Reserve Lazarett, Witton.



Private John Desborough is buried in Cologne Southern Cemetery.
Picture from www.findagrave.com



Elsworth War Memorial (Photo by Jess Laker via Historic England website)

Footnote:

*A further Red Cross list (24/9/1918) has his date of capture incorrectly as the 19th February 1915 – it seems most likely that he went missing in the fighting during the 2nd Battle of Ypres (22nd April – 25th May 1915)

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

**Talk at the Norwich Branch
Tuesday 7th March**

DARYL LONG. 'NORFOLK TALES FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR

**Our next month's talk
Wednesday 8th March**

Robin Broadhurst : Dover Patrol

Please send any contributions for the *Branch Briefing* to:
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Next Committee meeting: tba
Approach a committee member if you want any issue raised.