



WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

March 2023

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WFASuffolk



Tonight's talk

Geoff Caulton : Munition Girls



MESSAGE FROM 'THE COMMITTEE' David Hedges

Firstly I'd like to thank Taff for stepping in with an excellent talk last month.

It is with regret that I have to say our planned speaker for this March meeting, Robin Broadhurst, has died. Our condolences go to his family and friends. Our speaker-finder Tom Mudd has brought forward a talk by Geoff Caulton on the subject of Munition Girls. This was well received by the Norfolk Branch in January so we anticipate an interesting evening

To repeat the message from last month, we have started an email list of regular attendees at the Branch, both WFA members and non-members. It has grown to 41 addresses. Please help us to increase the size of the list by letting me know of attendees who did not receive this, or eg a preferred email address for yourself etc. My email is on the last page and here will be a form for email addresses to be added to the list on the table by the door

On the next page we have details of the **Big Coach Trip**. Last year BattleHonours delivered a great tour and this year's proposal looks just as exciting, featuring our very own Julian Whippy. I hope you will want to attend and your friends and relatives would be made very welcome.

Copied from this month's Norfolk WFA newsletter, The Poppy. With kind permission from Jackie Berry.

EDWARD STARLING, SUFFOLK REGIMENT Jackie Berry

The family of Great Yarmouth born **Edward Starling** who served with the Suffolk Regiment have been traced by Adam Simpson-York who goes by the Facebook name Medals Going Home after he acquired a photo and some dominoes made by Edward whilst in the trenches.

Now living in Ipswich, John Starling, grandson of Edward had never seen a photo of his Grandfather who was killed in Belgium in October 1917, with no known grave. He is listed on the Tyne Cot Memorial. His daughter was able to give them to her father John, at Christmas. Having looked into his Grandfather's history, this was a final piece in the jigsaw for John and the whole family.

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.

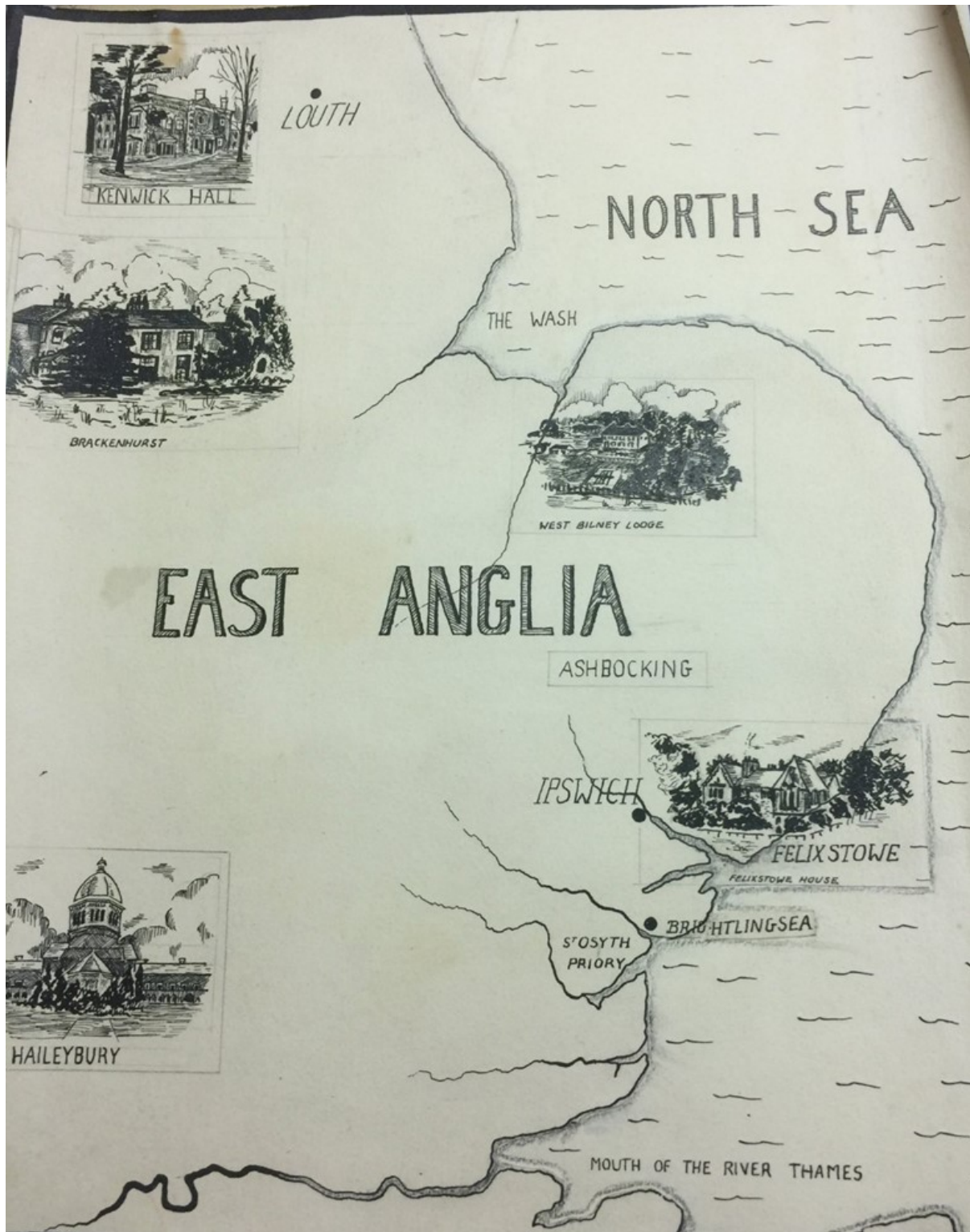
11 September 2023 *Travel Day* – after some free-time in Reims to visit its magnificent Cathedral, we head home via Calais and to Suffolk.

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.

To register your interest please email Keith Cooper keith-cooper@hotmail.co.uk

Field Marshal Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby, 1st Viscount Allenby of Megiddo and Felixstowe Kelvin Dakin

Many will, of course, be familiar with this Great War general's military career and even his connection to Felixstowe, but amongst his personal papers in the Liddell Hart Archive* is this sketch map of places significant to his private life:



Illustrated are his parent's homes at West Bilney and Felixstowe (the family's summer residence), Brackenhurst, Nottinghamshire (where he was born), Kenwick Hall, Lincolnshire – (the ancestral home of the Allenbys), and Haileybury School which he joined in 1875, age 14.

So why does the tiny village of Ashbocking, Suffolk, feature on the map?

The answer can be found in the 1871 Census when Edmund, age 9, is listed as a Scholar living at the Vicarage in Ashbocking. The Vicar at the time was Maurice Byles Cowell, age 36, with his wife Anna. The Cowells were an Ipswich family and in the household at the time was Maurice's brother Edward Byles Cowell – a Professor of Sanskrit based at Cambridge University (one of his students was Edward Fitzgerald the poet and writer).

Whether Professor Cowell played any part in the education of the students in his time at the vicarage is not known.

There were three other scholars at the Vicarage – Arthur Charlesworth (15), with twins Charles and Frank Weldon (10). It's likely then that Edmund Allenby spent a few years here completing his early education before going to Haileybury** and later to Sandhurst.

We can only wonder what influence this Suffolk country parson's school had on the Field Marshal's upbringing, but it obviously had memories enough for him to include it in his map.

*This was posted on *Twitter* by Andy Lock and reproduced here with his kind permission.

**Link:

<https://www.haileybury.com/100-years-ago-today/>

In support of Kelvin's article above here is a contribution from Derek Pheasant reproduced from the August 2013 Suffolk Branch Briefing

THE NACTON WAR MEMORIAL Derek Pheasant



On 21st September 1919 Field Marshal Viscount Allenby of Megiddo and Felixstowe (Commander of the BEF Cavalry Division in 1914, Army Commander during the First Somme and Arras battles and later Commander of the EEF (Egyptian Expeditionary Force) unveiled the war memorial in the village of Nacton. This flourishing village lies some four miles east of Ipswich in the direction of Felixstowe and was home in earlier times to the famous naval admirals Broke and Vernon.

The memorial is in the form of a stone column topped with a Latin cross standing on a brick and stone plinth which is engraved with the names of eighteen men from the parish who gave their lives in the Great War. At the base of the plinth is a small brass plaque "*Unveiled by Field Marshal Viscount Allenby Sept. 21st 1919*". Only four of the men named served with the Suffolk Regiment, they were.....

Pte John Isaac Barnes enlisted in the 8th Battalion and was killed in action at the Battle of Boom Ravine on 17th February 1917 when the Suffolks were part of a concentrated effort to take the village of Mirau-mont and force the Germans back along the Ancre Valley. The battalion suffered 25 ORs killed (SDGW) of which 23 are buried in Regina Trench CWGC Cemetery, including John Barnes.

Pte James Button served with the 9th Battalion and fell on the 16th September 1916 during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette on the Somme. *“On leaving the trenches the troops came under a withering machine gun fire from the Quadrilateral against which it was impossible to make any headway whatsoever.”* (Regt. History). The Quadrilateral was a formidable German redoubt which commanded the dead flat ground east of the village of Ginchy and the battalion suffered devastating losses in the assault including their commanding officer Lieut-Colonel Mack. Pte Button is commemorated at Thiepval.

Pte Harry Arbin was 18 years old when he died of wounds serving with the 5th Battalion in Palestine on the 17th February 1917 as the Allenby’s troops pushed north from Gaza in pursuit of the retreating Turks. The 5th, a territorial battalion had seen action at Gallipoli and taken part in the infamous “charge” with the Sandringham Company and the 5th Norfolks at Suvla Bay but Harry had missed this, arriving with a draft in Egypt in 1917. He was buried at Ramleh CWGC War Cemetery, just south of modern Tel Aviv and I wonder what Harry might have thought had he but known that General Allenby, commander of the EEF in which he served and died would one day unveil a memorial to him.

Lieut. Alfred Edgar Moorsom was a private in the 1/East Anglian Field Ambulance before being commissioned into the 4th Suffolks. On the 15th July 1916 they supported 1st Middlesex in a dawn attack on Switch Trench north of Bazentin-le-Petit on the Somme battlefield. *“After severe fighting, a line immediately in front of the village was taken up and held for the rest of the day.”* (Regt. History). This brief sentence hides the fact that over 200 casualties were recorded including Lieut. Moorsom who was severely wounded and died some three weeks later on August 3rd at a base hospital in Abbeville and buried in the communal cemetery there.

Of the fourteen remaining names on the memorial four would serve in the Royal Navy during the war – perhaps not surprising with the River Orwell and HMS Ganges nearby and the strong naval history in the village.

Able Seaman Arthur Cowie and **Petty Officer Albert Pipe** were lost when their ship HMS Formidable was sunk off Portland Bill in the English Channel in the early hours of New Years Day 1915. A 15,000 ton pre Dreadnought battleship she was on gunnery exercises with other vessels from the 5th Battle Squadron based in Sheerness when in heavy weather she was hit by two torpedoes from the German submarine U24. In the darkness and worsening weather it was difficult to get the boats away and out of a compliment of 780, 35 officers and 512 men were lost including Captain Loxley who calmly remained on the bridge with his foxhound Bruce as the ship went down. The wreck rests in 180 feet of water, completely upside down and is an official war grave. Both AB Cowie and PO Pipe are commemorated on the Chatham War Memorial.

Ordinary Seaman Frederick Octavious Kettle died when his ship HMS Natal mysteriously blew up and sank in the Cromarty Firth on 30th December 1915. She was an armoured cruiser of 14,500 tons with the 2nd Cruiser Squadron of the Grand Fleet and on that fateful day the captain was holding a Christmas party aboard ship. He had invited the officer’s wives, their children and nurses from a nearby hospital ship to join him when at 3.25 pm a massive internal explosion caused the ship to capsize in five minutes. At the Admiralty court martial it was concluded that faulty cordite in a magazine was the most likely cause of the disaster and total losses including the civilians on board were put at 421. Frederick’s body was recovered from the sea and buried in the local Cromarty cemetery.

Stoker 1st Class Arthur Miller served on HMS Cressy when she was torpedoed in the North Sea along with her sister ships Aboukir and Hogue on the 22nd September 1914. He is commemorated on the Chatham War Memorial.

Also named on the memorial is **Pte Charles Cook** of the 14th (Reserve) Battalion Essex Regiment who died “at home” on 5th November 1918 and is buried in St. Martin’s churchyard. St Martins, the parish church of Nacton is in the grounds of Orwell Park, formerly the home of the Vernon family and now a private school and is steeped in the history of both the Vernon and Broke families and their naval exploits. I was moved by the beautiful three light stain glass window, the centre honouring Herbert Pretymann, a lieutenant in the Grenadier Guards who died in 1891 and the two outer lights *“In Praise and Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the safe return from the Great War of George and Herbert Pretymanngiven by their parents AD 1920”*.

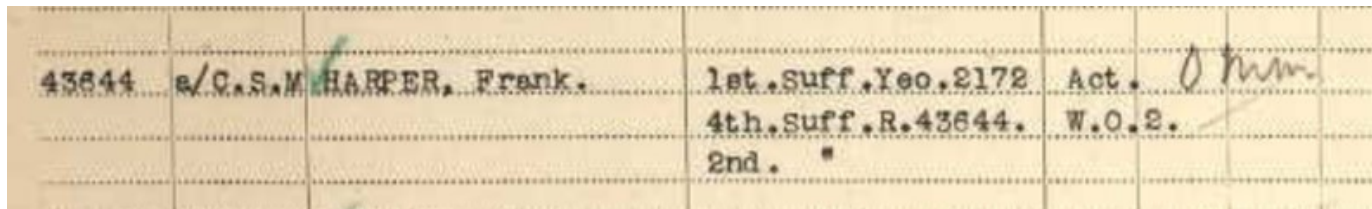
THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD.....

43644, Acting Company Sergeant Major Frank Harper, 2nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment

Kelvin Dakin

Frank was born in 1896 in Orford. He was the son of Stephen and Jane Harper and in 1911 the family was living in Front Street, Orford. Stephen worked as an Ostler at a hotel. Frank was at school.

He enlisted in the 1st Suffolk Yeomanry at Culford, transferred to the 4th Battalion and again later to the 2nd Battalion.



(Detail from Frank Harper's Medal Records)

Frank died of wounds on the 29th March 1918 and is buried in Doullens Communal Cemetery Extension No 1.

He is commemorated on the Orford War Memorial in St Bartholomews Churchyard.

Orford War Memorial –
picture from Historic
England website, taken
by David Lovell



THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

**Talk at the Norwich Branch
Tuesday 4th April
John McCarthy: *'Karl The Last Emperor -
Karl I and the Fate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire 1916 to 1922'***

**Our next month's talk
Wednesday 12th April
Simon Keable-Elliott
Utterly immoral WW1 Chaplain
and author Robert Keable**

Please send any contributions for the *Branch Briefing* to:
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telephone: 01394 272677 and email: david.j.hedges@btopenworld.com
Next Committee meeting: tba
Approach a committee member if you want any issue raised.