

WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

October 2022

Our Website : www.suffolk-wfa.org

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

WFA Suffolk

Tonight's talk

Philip Stevens : Gallipoli (part 1)

— part 2 in November



DECEMBER MEETING

At our December meetings we traditionally have 'Cameo' talks from our own members, i.e. say 3 talks each of about 15 to 30 minutes duration. If you would like to talk about your research into a subject that interests you then contact Keith Cooper at this or the November meeting, or on email keith-cooper@hotmail.co.uk

BIG BUS TOUR 2022 Keith Cooper

It's three years since we were able to undertake the Big Bus tour so expectations amongst us were high. We were not disappointed. We were joined by two members of the Norfolk branch, somewhat fewer than previous years but we're hoping that it will pick up again. This time we handed guiding over to the professionals in the shape of Battle Honours with Clive Harris and Julian Whippy steering us through the trip which they titled "20 Places not usually visited." It was an excellent decision. They were ably assisted on some stands by our own Viv Whelpton and Geoffrey Robinson. The trip more than lived up to its title.

We were away for four nights and five days from Thursday 8 September to Monday 12 September. Our base was the very satisfactory Hotel Pax in the small town of Diksmuide which is not too far from Ypres. It was as we approached Diksmuide that we learned of the passing of Her Majesty the Queen. We were collectively affected by this news. The next morning Julian signed us into a cemetery with the 'God save the King' message in the book. Seemed appropriate. Our journey to and across the Channel was agreeable and free from the problems that we've heard so much about in recent months.

The number of stands made is open to question but was certainly more than the twenty promised. We were out each morning at 0900 and never back at the hotel before 1700. The stands varied in nature, ranging from a German rest and recuperation area to the Indian and Portuguese cemeteries to the site of the Royal Navy raid on Zeebrugge. Our guides knowledge and insight was always lubricated by Clive's encyclopaedic anecdotes and Julian's hand drawn maps, all laced with good humour. We all had to participate at Zeebrugge when Julian staged a 're-enactment' of the raid with all of us playing the part of a ship or an individual. The school-boy humourists amongst were constantly amused by mention of a voluntary nurse working from nearby Pervyse named Elsie Knocker. I wonder why?

Our packed days did not prevent fellowship and good dining in the evenings. We also developed our taste for Belgium's excellent beers. The down side was that the town closed earlier than we're used to but at least that prevented sore heads the following morning!

Our trip was made possible by the skills and good humour of Mario, our Romanian driver. All of us also wished that David Hedges had been along with his good humour and unmatched skills as 'Chief Whipper In' and Social Secretary.

Space prevents a more comprehensive description of our expedition but Janette Robinson kept a fine diary of the tour which she may well agree to share with you if asked.



Zeebrugge

“IPSWICH CRATER” Kelvin Dakin

A report from the 4th Suffolk War Diary, May 1916

Capture of crater by 1/4th Suffolk Regiment

To:- G.O.C, 98th Infantry Brigade.

The enemy sprung a mine about 6.35 p.p. at A.21.d.67.09. The crater is about 25 yards across, and there is a space of about 10 yards between this crater and NEW CRATER A.21.d.86.13.

A party of the enemy about 20 strong at once rushed to occupy the crater, apparently from the crater at A.21.d.75.08.

They could be seen from the sap to MARCH CRATER, and rapid fire was immediately opened on them.

At this time and during subsequent operations at least 12 of the enemy were killed or wounded (including an Officer) by rifle fire.

A party of these succeeded in getting into the crater and occupied the western lip, from which they threw bombs at our front line. All their bombs fell a few yards short.

At the same time an artillery barrage was placed along HIGH STREET, BACK STREET, AND TOWER RESERVE TRENCH. We asked for artillery retaliation, which was given at once and was very effective. When the enemy fire quietened down our artillery also ceased.

Immediately it was seen that the enemy had occupied the crater snipers were posted at all points of vantage, notably at the junction of the sap to NEW CRATER with the main sap. These snipers very successfully kept down all sniping from the crater.

Stokes T.M.B. also fired on the crater. Several Mills Grenades were also thrown in by the best long-range thrower in the Battalion.

At dusk, after rapid fire by the Stokes Mortar, and a few rounds by the 2” Mortar X.33 T.M.B., a party consisting of 1 Officer, 5 Bombers and 6 Bayonet men with shovels rushed the near lip of the crater from a sap leading to New Crater, but found that the enemy had fled leaving one very badly wounded man. It was thought that the enemy could be heard on their lip of the crater, notwithstanding this L/Cpl. Webb at once went into the crater and with help brought the German out.

Work was at once commenced on sapping as per attached plan.

The crater was thoroughly examined later, and it was found that the enemy had cut 7 small one-man platforms into the western lip. Several spades and bags of bombs were brought back, and the wounded man’s rifle.

A plan for attacking the enemy on his lip of the crater was formed, but an Officer’s Patrol which worked round inside the lip of the crater discovered that the enemy had abandoned the eastern lip also, and no signs of sapping could be seen.

The enemy was very much alert, and spotting the patrol as soon as their heads were raised above the lip of the crater, and opened rifle and M.G. fire.

The personal effects of the wounded German are sent herewith.

There is no chance of his recovery.

The board with the paper on it was stuck in the western lip of the crater, so that the side on which the paper was faced enemy line. It was obviously a guide for enemy artillery and trench mortar fire.

With reference to the work in progress on attached sketch. All saps shown have been dug sufficiently deep to afford cover.

Wire had been put out to the south of the new sap as shown, but it was found impossible, owing to enemy fire and bombs to carry out wiring in front of the T head that covers the gap between New Crater and the Crater of 14/5/16. Wire balls will be prepared and put out.

The following telegram has been received:-

“Corps and Divisional Commanders wire congratulations for prompt action at new crater, especially in view of opposition.”

15/5/16.

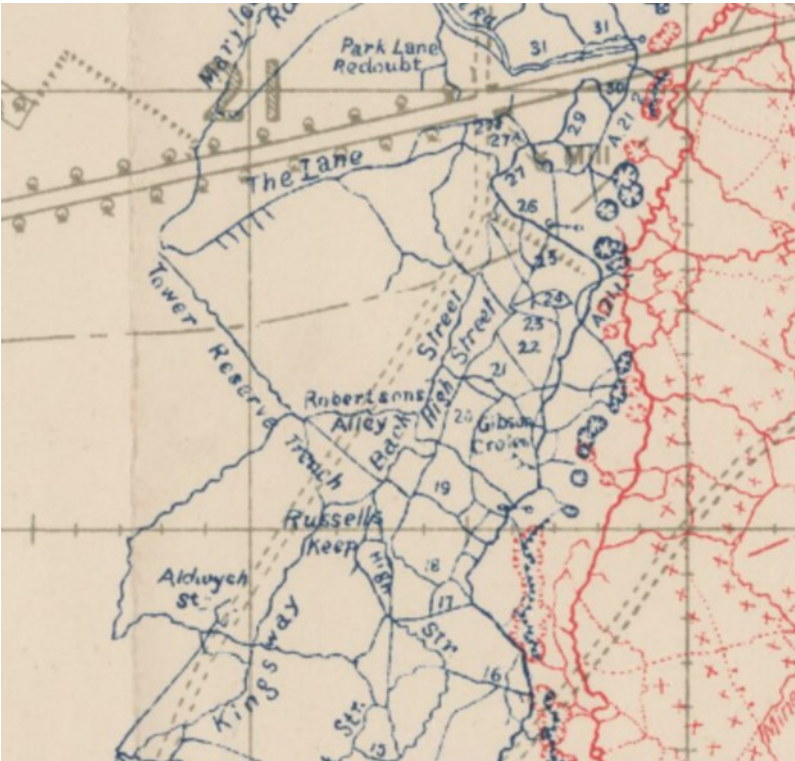
(sd) F.W.Turner, Lieut. Col.
Commdg. 1/4th Suffolk Regt.

NB: No sketch plan of the sap survives in the War Diary as published on *Ancestry*

Battalion War Diary extract for May 15th:

“In the trenches

A quiet day in trenches. Work carried on by night improving the approaches to (14/5/16) Crater. This was officially named IPSWICH CRATER”



Trench map detail from May 1917 showing the trench systems mentioned in the report.

The position of “Ipswich Crater” via *Trench Mapper* with modern overlay

Name: La Bassee Sheet: 36C NW Scale: 1:20,000 Edition: 7A 1916 Trenches corrected to 12/6/1916. Printed 12/06/1916



**3627 (later 201104) Private Harry Mower, 8th Battalion Suffolk Regiment, (formerly 4th Battalion)
Killed in action 12th October 1917**

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission database has no record of Harry's age, where he came from or who his relatives were.

According to the "Soldiers Died in the Great War" records he enlisted in Ipswich.

The 39th Casualty Clearing Station lists Pte Mower as having treatment for a self-inflicted gun-shot wound to his left hand in August/September 1916. This record states that he was 20 years old, had served 1 year and 1 month in total with 6 months with the field force. (Nat Arch MH106/808) At this time, he was with the 4th Battalion and, presumably after treatment, transferred to the 8th Battalion. According to this record his next of kin's residence was in Fulham.

Initially posted missing (War Office Daily list 27/11/1917) after the Battalion's part in the First Battle of Passchendaele (12/10/1917) Harry was later declared killed in action. The Battalion suffered 232 casualties on that day.

In the "Soldiers Effects" records his sole legatee was his sister Rosa.

Harry is buried in Poelcapelle British Cemetery.

Fortunately, the following research has been found on the Halesworth Museum website and reproduced here in part:

"Harry Arthur Mower was born in the nearby village of Huntingfield during the third quarter of 1893. He and his younger sister Rosa had, from their birth, experienced a very unhappy childhood. Their father, Arthur Mower, had enlisted in one of the British Army's premier regiments, the Grenadier Guards, at the age of twenty-two in June 1886, but after two years of service he had been medically discharged, when he was found to be suffering from chronic pleurisy.

He then returned to his family home in Huntingfield, where he resumed his previous occupation as a farm labourer. During the first quarter of 1893 Arthur married Laura Leech who hailed from Wangford, another of the local villages close to Halesworth. Within a short time of their marriage Harry was born, during the same year. In 1895 it appears that Arthur and Laura had settled in Blyford for it was here that their second child, Rosa, was born in the early months of that year. Almost exactly two years later Arthur died at the age of thirty-one years. After her husband's death it appears that Laura abandoned her children as, within six months, she married a Herbert Stammers, with Harry and Rosa now in the care of the Guardians of the Blything Union who then found them homes. The census for 1901 lists Harry living with Charles Bailey and his wife Priscilla at 31 Wissett Road, Halesworth with Rosa described as a pauper child living with a family in Peasenhall. By the time of the next census in 1911 Harry remained living with the Baileys. Having left school, he had found work in one of the towns' grocer's shops, while Rosa remained in Peasenhall training to be a dressmaker. Very little information is available regarding Harry's life leading up to and immediately after the start of the Great War, but it appears that he travelled to Ipswich at some time in the later months of 1915 to enlist in the army, perhaps he had volunteered prior to conscription, which was due to commence in January 1916.

His original regimental number of 3627 shows he had joined the local Territorial 4th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment. After training he would have eventually crossed to France. On his arrival he would have served with the 4th Suffolks for some time, as from 1st March 1917 all soldiers serving under the old Territorial four-digit numbering system were issued with a new six figure number, Harry receiving his new regimental number of 201104, which fell within the block of numbers issued to the 4th Suffolks. At some time after this, possibly recovering from wounds or sickness, he may have been sent on his return to one of the Infantry Base Depots located on the French coast. He would then have been despatched to join the 8th (Service) Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, possibly as a casualty replacement. His new battalion had been raised to serve in one of Lord Kitchener's new armies, first formed at Bury St Edmunds in September 1914. After training they eventually joined the field army serving in France during July 1915.

As with several others of the Halesworth war dead, much information is speculative as, with no copies of official enlistment papers having survived the London Blitz, and with very minimal amounts of detail to be found on those records that do remain, it is almost impossible to be totally accurate regarding their service. Another source that can fill in some of the details of a particular soldier's service is the Halesworth Times newspaper when it reports the loss of some of the residents by their loved ones. Regrettably there is no mention of Harry at all."

The full article can be read here:

<http://halesworthmuseum.org.uk/wppress/men-of-halesworth-who-gave-their-lives-in-the-great-war-1914-18-harry-mower/>



Image: www.tracesofwar.com/sights/20922/War-Memorial-Halesworth.htm

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

**Talk at the Norwich Branch
Tuesday 1st November**

Steve Warburton 'Arras, Passchendaele and Cambrai - the same but different'

**Our next month's talk
Wednesday 9th November**

Philip Stevens : Gallipoli (part 2)

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.