



WFA SUFFOLK BRANCH

Branch Briefing

September 2023

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

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



Tonight's talk



Steve Smith : Zeppelins over Norfolk and the East Coast

THE ROB THOMPSON MEMORIAL CONFERENCE 22 JULY Terry Lock

This conference was organised by the WFA and the Great War Group as a tribute to Rob and was attended by about 80 people. Many fulsome tributes were paid to him as a man, his contributions to military history and his development of our understanding of the story of logistics. He clearly was an inspiration to many students and made what initially might seem a dull subject centre stage in our understanding of WW1.

There were four sessions. The first, led by Dr Chris Phillips was entitled "Logistics overshadowed the Calais Conference of 1917" and talked about the poor relationship between Lloyd-George, Haig and Nivelle and the tensions between them but also the work done by Sir Eric Geddes. This talk was followed by Roy Larkin who spoke on the Army Service Corps, particularly the importance of motorised transport. Their huge problems in trying to keep lorries moving when up to 40 per cent were unserviceable and there were worries about petrol supplies.

The afternoon belonged initially to Peter Hart, who was Peter Hart. The talk was titled "Beasts of Burden, The British Soldier in 1918" but it was difficult to know really what it was about, there were many extracts read and several laughs had.

The final session was a double act between Alex Churchill and Andrew Lock talking on "Railways in the Great War" with Alex looking at Africa and the Hejaz railway and Andrew dealing with Western Front. Alex is a founder and Andrew a Trustee of the Great War Group which claims a fresher look at WW1 but is a very worthwhile organisation.

All in all it was a great success and a fitting tribute to Rob, with his wife and daughter present. I was hoping to see Peter Simkins but he has a bad back and finds travelling difficult.

BIG BUS 2024 Keith Cooper

We were disappointed that our near-annual tour to the battlefields did not take place this year. There were just too many date clashes, not the least of which was the Rugby World Cup, which put pressure on hotel cost and availability in the area we needed to stay.

We're already planning the 2024 trip with Battle Honours who did us so well in 2022. The location will be Picardy and our likely base will be in Amiens. Clive Harris and Julian Whippy are working on the itinerary and pricing. We'll bring these to branch members as soon as they become available.

Many of this year's disappointed have left their deposits with Battle Honours in anticipation of 2024 and we're already up to 15 participants.

The dates of the trip will be from **Saturday 29 June returning 2 July 2024**

If you're interested in joining us please talk to me or David Hedges.

A SUFFOLK ESCAPEE Kelvin Dakin

6878, Private George Cox MM, 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment

George Cox was born at Burnt Fen, Cambridgeshire (between Littleport and Mildenhall) in 1889¹. Some records put his birth around 1887 but this may be due to him giving a false age on enlisting. He enlisted in the 4th Suffolks on the 14th March 1904 at Ely stating his age to be 17 years and 6 months. His 4th Battalion record indicates his service with them until the 4th June 1904 but contains no information after this date.

He later enlisted as a Regular soldier and by the 1911 Census he is with the 1st Battalion in Egypt aged 24. In 1912 he married Sarah Nellie Lewin in West Ham – they lived at 51 Usher Road, Bow and later at 29 Parnell Road, Bow, East London.

He crossed to France with the 2nd Battalion on the 15th August 1914, was captured at Le Cateau (26th August 1914) and went to Sennelager PoW camp in Germany. At some point he escaped² and returned to the UK on 31st May 1917. On the 7th August 1918 George was discharged on medical grounds (Debility) - his Silver War Badge record states that he enlisted on the 8th December 1904.

George was “Gazetted” for the award of a Military Medal in 1920 (London Gazette Issue 31759, page 1231) for his escape.

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the undermentioned rewards in recognition of gallant conduct and determination displayed in escaping or attempting to escape from captivity, which services have been brought to notice in accordance with the terms of Army Order 193 of 1919. To be dated 5th May, 1919:—

SUFFOLK REGIMENT.

7789 Sjt. Bloomfield, T. A., 1st Bn. (Felixstowe).

6878 Pte. Cox, G., 3rd Bn. (Bow).

8386 Pte. Rudd, L., 3rd Bn. (Norwich).

41727 Pte. Waller, R. C., 2nd Bn. (Chelmsford).

In 1921 the couple are living at 29 Parnell Road, Bow with a son, George Jnr. George Snr is working as a Labourer at the British Oil Cake Mills, Limehouse.

George died on the 4th April 1925 from Pulmonary Tuberculosis.³

References:

1 A birth in that name was registered in the Ely Registration District in the last quarter of 1889.

2 As reported in a Princess Mary's Gift Box POW list.

3 WFA Pension Card

Sennelager

“During World War I a POW camp here housed British and French soldiers as well as, in a distinct section, various civilians. These were merchant seamen, including many British trawlermen taken prisoner after German raiders sank their ships in the North Sea, especially in the first days of the war. Many of the fishermen came from Boston or from Grimsby in Lincolnshire. Many were later transferred to Ruhleben internment camp near Berlin, where many remained for the duration of the war.” (Wikipedia)

The following article about the PoW camp at Sennelager was published in *The Graphic* on the 23rd June 1917:

PENALISING WAR PRISONERS

The Man who has Degraded the great name of Bach
GERMANY'S BLACK RECORD AT SENNELAGER



GERMANY'S INHERENT BELIEF IN THE VALUE OF DEMORALISING HER ENEMIES BY EVERY MEANS AVAILABLE HAS NEVER BEEN MORE BRUTALLY EXHIBITED THAN IN HER TREATMENT OF PRISONERS OF WAR, BECAUSE NOT ONLY HAVE THESE PRISONERS ALREADY PAID THE PRICE OF WAR, BUT PRISONERS ARE HELPLESS BY THE VERY NATURE OF THE CASE

THE Germans themselves are now ashamed of their proceedings at Sennelager; they are even thoroughly ashamed of them. They know that Major Bach, the commandant of that internment camp, behaved as the very type of the Unspeakable Hun. The major himself knew it also; and there came a time when he realised that his name was in danger of becoming a byword, even in his own country, for bestial abuse of power. So when men began to be released from the camp, and allowed to return to their homes in Germany, he adopted measures which he hoped might shield his reputation. To some of the departing prisoners he offered his hand, genially asking them to make allowances for his difficulties and inexperience. Others he dismissed with the threat that, if they went about complaining of his treatment of them, they would be brought back and given another dose of it.

and the feeling was doubtless general among them that the inquiry had better be postponed until the British Government was able to take charge of it, and insist that their persecutors should really be treated in accordance with their deserts. Consequently the proceedings of the court were a complete fiasco; and its report, if it should issue one, will be valueless, because it had no opportunity of hearing the essential witnesses. For a long time, I believe, great care was taken that none of the essential witnesses should be allowed to return to England; but we have one with us now in the person of Mr. Henry C. Mahoney, who tells the whole Sennelager story in a book entitled "Sixteen Months in Four German Prisons," recently issued by Sampson Low.

It is so outrageous a story that it may be felt to need some confirmation. Did not Mr. Mahoney dream these things? Has

OUR men at Sennelager were deliberately starved at a time when food was plentiful in Germany. They were vexed with innumerable parades, and kept standing at attention for hours. While thus paraded they were insulted by Major Bach as "pig-dogs," told that Germany would "feed them from the pig-tub," while she proceeded to "swing England to her knees." They were not only forced to work in barefaced defiance of The Hague Convention, but set to the most disgusting tasks and compelled to execute them under the whip of the slave-driver.

FOR the most trivial breaches of discipline they were punished by being tied to a post—a torture in comparison with which the infliction of the "double buckle" on Captain Dreyfus, in Devil's Island, was mild; and Major Bach not only stood by, jeering at the helpless victims of his ferocity, but encouraged

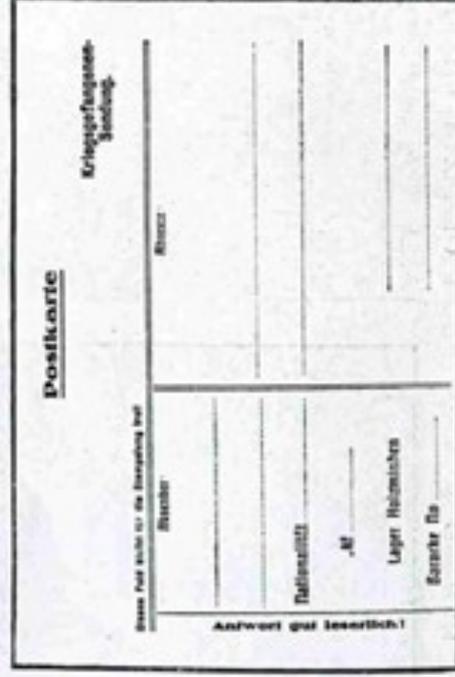
which he hoped might shield his reputation. To some of the departing prisoners he offered his hand, genially asking them to make allowances for his difficulties and inexperience. Others he dismissed with the threat that, if they went about complaining of his treatment of them, they would be brought back and given another dose of it.

TO a certain extent, and for a certain time, the device succeeded. The American Ambassador does not seem to have known what was happening at Sennelager. Many of the British residents in Germany who did not happen to be taken there did not know. The vast majority of the German people did not know. But this general ignorance was gradually dissipated. The Sennelager men were eventually brought to Rubleben, and told their stories to their fellow-prisoners there. It may very well be that some of the German officers and soldiers—not all of whom were enthusiastic admirers of Major Bach—talked also.

AT any rate, the thing gradually became a scandal, at which even a section of German opinion was shocked—either on moral grounds or because it feared reprisals on German civilians interned in England. "I never heard of these things," said a German reserve officer, to whom some of the stories were related within the barbed wire of Rubleben. "I find it difficult to believe them; but, if they are true, they are a disgrace to Germany." And so it came about that the German authori-

now in the person of Mr. Henry C. Mahoney, who tells the whole Sennelager story in a book entitled "Sixteen Months in Four German Prisons," recently issued by Sampson Low.

IT is so outrageous a story that it may be felt to need some confirmation. Did not Mr. Mahoney dream these things? Has he not unduly exaggerated trivial annoyances? Such questions will inevitably occur to the more cynical of his readers; and I am happily in a position to answer



POSTCARD USED BY BRITISH PRISONERS IN GERMANY

them. In so far as Mr. Mahoney relates purely personal adventures, I have no means of checking his statements. I was not present, for instance, when he engaged himself as a barber, though he had never previously shaved anyone but himself, in a Cologne shop, and so inadvertently shed German blood in torrents. I can only say that I have heard him tell that story before.

FOR the most trivial breaches of discipline they were punished by being tied to a post—a torture in comparison with which the infliction of the "double buckle" on Captain Dreyfus, in Devil's Island, was mild; and Major Bach not only stood by, jeering at the helpless victims of his ferocity, but encouraged women to walk over from the neighbouring town of Paderborn to share his enjoyment of the spectacle. He supplemented the torture by taking off the victims' hats, so that the fierce August sun might beat on their bare heads. On another occasion—on what Mr. Mahoney calls "the bloody night of September 11"—he drove the men out of their barrack, and forced them to spend the night in a drenching rain-storm in an open field.

AMONG the prisoners were included some Grimsby fishermen whom the High Canal Fleet had gathered in in default of any more valuable capture. Major Bach refused to believe that they had been on the North Sea merely for the innocent purpose of fishing. He insisted that they had been mine-laying, and he inflicted a punishment which, in England, would not be imposed even on a convicted criminal.

MR. MAHONEY is speaking of things which he saw with his eyes: He (the Major) decided to mark these unfortunate hardened sea-salts in a distinguishing manner which was peculiarly his own, thereby rendering them conspicuous and possible of instant recognition, while, in the event of an escape being attempted, no difficulty would be experienced in identifying and catching the

civilians interned in England. "I never heard of these things," said a German reserve officer, to whom some of the stories were related within the barbed wire of Ruhleben. "I find it difficult to believe them; but, if they are true, they are a disgrace to Germany." And so it came about that the German authorities at last set up a Court of Inquiry to investigate the matter.

WHETHER their object was to punish the offenders or to whitewash them I have no means of knowing. The commissioners were certainly suave in their manner towards prisoners whom they invited to unfold their complaints and formulate their grievances. But the prisoners did not trust them, and begged to be excused from giving evidence. Presumably they feared that clever cross-examination would lure them into contradicting each other;

means of checking his statements. I was not present, for instance, when he engaged himself as a barber, though he had never previously shaved anyone but himself, in a Cologne shop, and so inadvertently shed German blood in torrents. I can only say that I have heard him tell that story before.

NOR was I one of those who shared his experiences at Sennelager. But I have conversed with dozens of men who did share them; and I know that the most sensational statements which he makes are supported by their unanimous testimony. Not a man among them would dispute the propriety of his description of the place as Germany's Black Hole; and they were all agreed that Ruhleben at its worst — and Ruhleben at its worst was very bad — was a paradise in comparison with Sennelager.

MR. MAHONEY is speaking of things which he saw with his eyes:

He (the Major) decided to mark these unfortunate hardened sea-salts in a distinguishing manner which was peculiarly his own, thereby rendering them conspicuous and possible of instant recognition, while, in the event of an escape being attempted, no difficulty would be experienced in identifying and catching the runaways. Each man was submitted to the indignity of having one half of his head shaved clean, one half of his moustache removed, or one half of his beard cut away. The men branded in this manner presented a strange spectacle, and one which afforded Major Bach endless amusement.

Whether Major Bach committed the outrage on his own responsibility or in compliance with instructions from a higher quarter is a question to be investigated in due course. It is an outrage which must on no account be slurred over because the victims were men of humble station. They were Englishmen, and that suffices. FRANCIS GRIBBIE.

FOUR ON TOUR Brian Davies

It was Sunday morning when David Hedges, Annie & Keith Cooper and myself set off from Felixstowe for a four day visit to France. The main objective for me was to visit the graves and pay my respects to two Great Uncles. I remember my Father telling me that two of his Mother's brothers had been killed in WW1 but he had no further information. The Covid lockdown enabled me to find time to research my family history and identify two Great Uncles who lost their lives in France in WW1.

We arrived in France early afternoon and made our way to Bethune to visit the grave of my Great Uncle James Cook. James was one of five brothers. He joined the 11th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, which was raised at Mill Hill, London in August 1914. The Battalion joined 36th Brigade, 12th Division and trained at Colchester and arrived in France in May/June 1915. He took part in actions at Ploegsteert Wood, the Battle of Loos and Hohenzollern Redoubt. It is likely he died of wounds in the 33rd Casualty Clearing Station in St Vaast College in Bethune on the 28th March 1916. He is buried in Bethune Town cemetery. The War Diary for the clearing station shows the numbers of cases admitted but no details of individuals. Over 250 casualties were admitted between the 26th and 28th March. Having paid our respects we travelled to our accommodation at Avril Williams in "Ocean Villas".



At Avril's we met Lesley, a well travelled Canadian lady who was also researching relatives. She showed us some amazing images of sketches of WW1 aircraft drawn by her relative and a picture of a crest that he removed from a German vehicle. Dave invited her to join us the following morning for a visit to the Maison Blanche souterraine that the Durand Group had organised for a group of Vimy Ridge guides. She was also able to meet one of the Durand members, Matt Leonard, who is also the Stand To! Editor - he was very interested in her story for the magazine.

After some lunch in Arras on our way to the 'Glory Hole' at La Boiselle we took the opportunity to visit the recently restored Theipval memorial. Then on to La Boiselle to meet two Durand Group members and Claudie Llewelyn, the current owner. The purpose of the meeting was to inspect the deteriorating state of the supporting infrastructure on the incline from the surface.

The following day we travelled to Flesquieres to visit the grave of my second Great Uncle William Henry Cook. He joined A Company, 13th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment which was raised at Mill Hill, London in August 1914. The Battalion joined 73rd Brigade, 24th Division and trained on the South Downs, Shoreham and Pirbright arriving in France in September 1915. He saw action in Loos, suffered a gas attack at Wulverghem, then onto the Somme at Delville Wood and the Battle of Guillemont. In 1917 he was in action at Vimy Ridge, the Battle of Messine and Third Battle of Ypres before moving south where he was in action during the German counter attack at Cambrai. In 1918 he was in action on the Somme and the Battle of Cambrai where he died on the 8th October. He is buried in the Flesquieres Hill British cemetery, which is next to the tank museum, unfortunately the museum was closed on our visit.

The Battalion War Diary for 8th October states: *'Remained in camp completing equipment and ammunition. Several casualties were caused by shell fire. At 1700 hours marched to ROMILLY area and remained in old trenches during the night.'*

From the Burial Return I was able to obtain the map reference where his body was found. Using the WFA Trench Mapper and a GPS app on Dave's phone we were able to locate and find the spot in a sunken lane very close to the cemetery.



We then travelled to Vimy to meet up with Durand Group members and we were privileged to gain access to the woods which still contain a significant amount of unexploded munitions. Of particular interest was the only know surviving "Wombat trench". This was constructed using a Wombat drilling machine to bore holes which were filled with explosives, then detonated to form a trench. To end the day we travelled to Amiens for refreshments and a visit to the spectacular Gothic Cathedral.

On our last day we spent the morning at the Loos battlefield then in the afternoon we continued into Belgium to visit Barry and Debs Bromley. We visited them on our branch tour in 2019 and at that time they were setting up their café - the business is now established. The main reason for the visit was to explore Barry's classic firearms museum which is extensive and many of the items in the collection have great provenance – such as the air rifle that Barnes Wallace used for his bouncing bomb experiments. Then it was time to make the journey back to Blighty. We arrived back in Felixstowe on the Wednesday evening – mission accomplished.

LEST WE FORGET Kelvin Dakin

49992, Pte [Robert] William Crick, Machine Gun Corps formerly 3/7970 Suffolk Regt.

Born in 1892 in Offton, he was the son of William and Kate Crick. In 1911 the family was living in Great Bricett.

Known as *William* on military records he enlisted in the 3rd Suffolk (Special Reserve) Battalion in 1910 as Private No 3/7970.

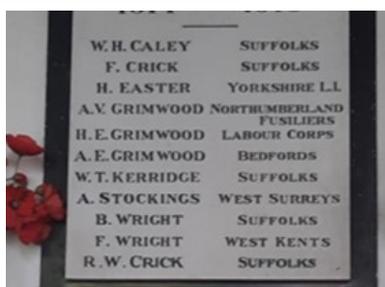
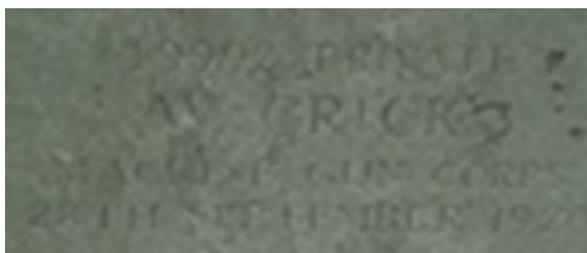
He crossed to France on the 11th November 1914 – probably as part of a draft of 89 NCO's and men, under Captain Cautley - they joined the battalion at Douve River (Douvebeek) near Dranouter on the 26th November (from 2nd Battalion War Diary)

In early 1915 William was treated for pneumonia and at some point he transferred to the 78th Machine Gun Company (26th Division) which went to Salonika in November 1915.

William, like many others serving in Salonika, contracted malaria and received treatment for recurring bouts in June 1917, March 1918 and September 1918. The last record noted that he was attached to the 7th Royal Berks.

William was discharged “Class Z – Army Reserve” on the 17th March 1919.

He died on the 28th September 1920 of pulmonary tuberculosis and is buried in Great Bricett churchyard. He is commemorated on the village memorial with his younger brother, 23507, Private Frederick George Crick, 7th Suffolk, who died of wounds on the 7th August 1917.



THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

Talk at the Norwich Branch
Tuesday 3rd October

TBA

**Our next month's talk
Wednesday 11th October**

**Simon Shephard Artillery conquers, Infantry Occupies :
A study of the effectiveness of the British Artillery at the 3rd battle of Ypres**

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.