



Quarter One –February 2015



*Creeping
Barrage*
News & Notes
from the Herts &
Beds Branch

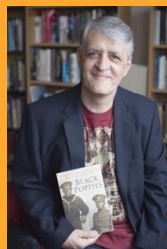
NEXT PRESENTATION:

“BLACK POPPIES: BRITAIN’S BLACK COMMUNITY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR”

**AN ILLUSTRATED TALK BY AUTHOR, STEPHEN BOURNE AT
ST. GEORGE’S SCHOOL, SUN LANE (SPORTS HALL ROOM SP101),
HARPENDEN AL5 4TD**

FRIDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2015 AT 8:00PM

Author **Stephen Bourne** lectures about the black soldiers who fought in the Great War based on his successful book of the same name.



DONATION AT THE DOOR £3.50

www.westernfrontassociation.com

Zone Call - Notes from Geoff Cunnington, Acting Chairman and Branch Secretary



A very warm welcome to the February Q1 2015 edition of 'Creeping Barrage'.

I don't know about you, but after the flurry of national commemorations, exhibitions and media coverage of the latter part of last year, my feeling is that we seem to have entered a period of less visible activity on the Centenary Front. I imagine that things will pick up later in the year once we reach the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign, particularly as far as those with ANZAC connections are concerned. This will provide an opportunity to view once again the 1981 film of that name by Peter Weir and which starred Mark Lee and a very youthful Mel Gibson. This has to be one of the saddest films that I have ever seen - compulsive viewing even though we all know the ending. As a film critic observed, "rarely has the futility of war been so brilliantly presented".



This month we welcome author **Stephen Bourne** who will tell us about the black soldiers who fought in the Great War. Footballer, Walter Tull, who was commissioned as a second lieutenant, is sure to be included in what promises to be a most interesting presentation. <http://www.stephenbourne.co.uk>

And picking up on last month's excellent presentation by Robert Hewison on "The Art of Dazzle Painting" (see Simon Goodwin's report below), I have put together a very short sequence of images for next Friday which should provide some further illumination on that subject – you have been warned.

Travel safely and I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Geoff Cunnington, February 2015

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Previously at Herts & Beds 9 January 2015 “The Art of Dazzle Painting” - Robert Hewison



Committee Member, Simon Goodwin writes:

On the 9th January the Branch welcomed Professor Robert Hewison who came along to give us a fascinating talk on “The Art of Dazzle Painting”, exploring the history of World War One naval camouflage and its connections to avant-garde art.

Professor Hewison is a cultural historian, a writer on the Arts for The Sunday Times and the Art Newspaper, and a cultural consultant working as an Associate at the “think tank” Demos. His principal occupation, however, is writing books and he has so far published about twenty, mainly in the fields of the work of John Ruskin and post 1939 cultural history. He also works in Journalism, Broadcasting, Curating, Teaching and Consulting.

His talk began by looking at some of the work of Edward Wadsworth (1889 – 1949) who joined a group of avant-garde artists prior to the War who were following the example of work created by George De Forrest Brush and Abbott H Thayer in the United States. One of the concepts that Brush and Thayer explored was that of shadow concealment in their nature paintings and how this might be achieved by painting dark outlines light and light outlines dark. Wadsworth’s group, led by Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882 – 1957), was known as the “Rebel Art Centre” and produced a magazine called “Blast” to exhibit their work. By 1915 Wadsworth had joined the Royal Navy as an Information Officer in the Eastern Mediterranean, based on Lemnos, but by 1918 he became responsible for British Naval “dazzle painting” designs and his ideas can be seen in a number of his pictures such as “Liverpool Shipping 1918” and works he was commissioned to paint for the Canadian War Memorials Fund.

Work had been done early in the War by the British Navy to try and use similar techniques to confuse the lines of ships to make it harder for U Boat Captains to identify the type, direction of travel and speed of a target when looked at through a periscope. It was recognised by the Admiralty that a U Boat only became vulnerable to attack when it

came up to periscope depth so any “tricks” that would cause delay and keep it there longer increased its chances of detection and attack. Sadly, the early work was unsuccessful and later design work, carried out by the Canadian artist Percyval Tudor-Hart in 1916, was also abandoned.

The actual breakthrough came in 1917 when the British marine artist, and designer of railway posters, Norman Wilkinson (1878 – 1971) became involved. As an aside, Wilkinson actually has a local link as he was educated at Berkhamstead School. He is said to have had the idea for his design while on a railway journey but he was no doubt aided by his previous experience in charge of a motor launch at the Gallipoli landings. At this time an average of sixty ships a week were being sunk by U Boats so a solution had to be found. The new designs included blues, greens, greys, pinks and purples and saw the replacement of many curve “dazzle” designs with straight lines. Up to 100 Naval Officers were sent to various ports to oversee the painting of Wilkinson’s designs on ships.

It is difficult to be precise about the positive effects of “Dazzle Painting” British and American ships during the War but one effect was certainly that US Insurance companies reduced premiums for those painted in this way. This suggest that they certainly could (or could not ☺) see the benefit of this.

“Dazzle Painting” was also used to some extent during World War Two but the advent of radar at sea greatly reduced its effectiveness.

The legacy of these artists can actually be seen today on the River Thames where “HMS President” (1918) was painted in a “dazzle design” back in July 2014. Of course the modern artist who created the particular design just happens to be German!

Simon Goodwin, January 2015



Coming-Up at Herts & Beds 20th March 2015 “Espionage during the First World War”

Secret intelligence was a growth industry during the Great War, in Britain and other countries. Between 1914 and 1918 both military and civil authorities deployed agents throughout the world to gather information (and spread disinformation) that might help to win the war. Some of these are famous, like Mata Hari or Lawrence of Arabia, some less so; sometimes it was the less famous who were most effective. In addition, thousands of civilians put their lives at risk in order to collect intelligence for the war effort. Former Chief Historian of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, **Gill Bennett's** talk will cover both the major organisational and technical developments that took place during the war, and some of the extraordinary personal stories of spies professional and amateur, invaluable and inept, working alone or together; as well as their portrayal in literature by the many writers, from **John Buchan** (see above) to Somerset Maugham, who were involved in secret intelligence themselves.

Gill Bennett MA OBE is an Associate Fellow, RUSI, formerly Chief Historian of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Senior Editor of the FCO's official history of post-war foreign policy, Documents on British Policy Overseas, 1995-2005. She was a Visiting Fellow at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 2002-03 and formerly Assistant Editor of Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939.

Publications include 'Declassification and release policies of the UK's Intelligence Agencies', in *Intelligence and National Security*, Spring 2002; *A most extraordinary and mysterious business: the Zinoviev Letter of 1924* (FCO, 1999); *Nazi Gold I and II* (FCO, 1996 and 1997); and *The End of the War in Europe 1945* (ed), 1998. Gill Bennett's biography of Desmond Morton, Churchill's Intelligence adviser, was published in October 2006 as part of the Cabinet Official History series, entitled, *Churchill's Man of Mystery: Desmond Morton and the World of Intelligence* (Routledge, 2006).

Gill Bennett was the 2006/7 Distinguished Visiting Fellow lecturer at the Joint Services Command Staff College.

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Gill-Bennett/e/B001HOHIKS>

THE BIG PUSH 2015 – ON THE HORIZON

FUTURE BRANCH PRESENTATIONS AT ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL, SUN LANE (SPORTS HALL ROOM SP101), HARPENDEN AL5 4TD. ALL MEETINGS START AT 8.00PM. TEA, COFFEE & BISCUITS INCLUDED IN £3.50 MINIMUM DONATION ON THE DOOR.



24 April

Domestic Women on the Home Front

Professor **Maggie Andrews** will focus on how the war caused shifts in the role of women looking at changes in domestic responsibilities, the impact of food shortages, letter writing, gardening and charity work which facilitated the more well-known areas of women's wartime contribution such as nursing and working in munitions.

22 May

The Camps at Cannock Chase

Stephen Dean is a Principal Archaeologist at Staffordshire County Council. His presentation will review the two divisional-sized Great War camps constructed on Cannock Chase during late 1914/early 1915, their infrastructure and the range of services provided by the camps. Discussion will also focus on the recent excavation of

the Messines terrain model, built by the New Zealand Rifle Brigade with the assistance of German PoWs in early 1918. This model is thought to be unique to the United Kingdom for this period and is one of only a handful known from the Western Front.

26 June

The Angels of Pervyse: Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm

Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm spent most of the War saving hundreds of soldiers' lives by giving basic first aid just a hundred yards from the German trenches at Pervyse. They received 17 medals for their bravery and became known as the 'Madonnas' and 'Angels of Pervyse': they are two of the iconic women of the Great War in the company of Edith Cavell and Mata Hari. A project is underway with the aim to unveil a statue to mark the centenary of the arrival of the women in the village. This talk by **Diane Atkinson** will describe their lives, their works and the project to commemorate them. Diane taught history at secondary schools in London before moving to the Museum of London, where she worked as a lecturer and curator, specialising in women's history.

9 October

Public Schools and the Great War

David Walsh will analyse the contribution of British public schools and their alumni to the war effort and examine the effect of the war on those institutions during the war itself and subsequently. David Walsh taught history at Tonbridge School in Kent, retiring as Deputy Head in 2009. He has subsequently written two books - 'A Duty to Serve: Tonbridge School and the 1939-45 War' (TMI 2011) and 'Public Schools and the Great War: A Generation Lost' (Pen and Sword 2013) with Anthony Seldon. He is a member of the WFA and occasionally takes groups of friends on battlefield trips.

13 November

The Battle Bus Project

A 100-year-old London bus has been converted into a First World War 'battle bus' for a commemorative tour of Western Front locations in Belgium and France. During the Great War, more than 1,000 London buses played a vital role transporting troops to and from the front lines, removing the wounded and those due rest periods, and bringing in new soldiers. They would often travel at night, in convoys of more than 70 vehicles, and many of the drivers were the same men who had driven them in London. Before the breakout of war, the 'battle bus' served on route nine from Mortlake garage in south west London, and took passengers from Barnes to Liverpool Street. **Tim Shields**, project manager of the restoration project, will describe the conversion of the bus which was made possible by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant; additional funding was provided by the London Transport Museum Friends and public donations.

11 December

'Suicide Club' to 'Butchers': The Palestine Brigade RFC/RAF 1917-18

Stuart Hadaway will describe how from 1914 until the summer of 1917, the RFC in Egypt and Palestine had struggled with outdated aircraft and inadequate resources against a German force that was smaller but much better equipped. In the summer of 1917 this all changed, as an infusion of modern aircraft allowed them to turn the tables on the German Air Forces even as they too were reinforced. The RFC would play an important role in the 3rd Battle of Gaza from October to December 1917, and would then grow over the following year until it was able to become a decisive element in the Battle of Megiddo in September 1918. In the process, they developed principles and techniques that still under-pin aerial campaigns today.

Tail Spin - You Might be Interested In.....

More about being dazzled.....

<http://www.1418now.org.uk/commissions/dazzle-ferry-mersey>

