



Quarter Three – September 2015

**William Samuel Fisher
(1890 - 1987)**

Experience with
Hertfordshire Yeomanry,
WW1, Mesopotamia
Interview recorded 1984



Service No. 105775

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

**UP NEXT: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND MEMBERS' EVENING
FEATURING A DVD RECORDING OF THE EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL MAN,
WILIAM SAMUEL FISHER, BEFORE AND DURING THE GREAT WAR.
VENUE: ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL, SUN LANE (SPORTS HALL ROOM SP101),
HARPENDEN AL5 4TD
DATE AND TIME: FRIDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 8:00PM**

Following the Annual General Meeting, we shall be showing a recording of reminiscences of Private William Fisher which was produced as a talk to the St. Albans College of Further Education in 1984 shortly before he died at the age of 97 years. We will hear about his Hertfordshire upbringing at the turn of the 20th century and how he came to join and to serve in the Hertfordshire Yeomanry in Mesopotamia during the Great War.

DONATION AT THE DOOR £3.50

www.westernfrontassociation.com



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



A warm welcome to you all and I hope you all found some well-earned rest and relaxation (and good weather!) during the now passing months of summer.

The first Branch meeting following the summer break sees us holding our Annual General Meeting which will be followed by a showing of a unique DVD recording of the thoughts and anecdotes of Private William Fisher who served as a private soldier in Mesopotamia during the First World War. Our evening will run as follows:

Time	Event
20:00	Introduction and Annual General Meeting Agenda: (1) Minutes of 2014 AGM (2) Matters Arising (3) Chairman's Report (4) Treasurer's Report (5) Election of Officers: Chairman Treasurer Secretary Committee Members (6) Any Other Business
20:15	William Samuel Fisher DVD (Part One)
20:45	Break for refreshments
21:00	William Samuel Fisher DVD (Part Two)
21:30	DVD concludes; Q&A
21:35	If time allows: 'Dazzle Ships' – a collection images as a follow-up to the 'Art of Dazzle Painting' presentation from January 2015
21:45	What's Up Next for 2015
21:50	Meeting closes

Please participate and ask questions; this is your Branch and your meeting. As you many of you will be aware, attendance at Branch events is declining and we shall have to husband our resources in the short to medium term if we wish to continue as we are. Remember: the Branch is always looking for members to serve on the Committee. If you would like to contribute to the running of the Branch, maybe helping out in sourcing the speakers or perhaps lending a hand with the catering arrangements, then please let me know. You don't have to be on the Committee in order to help.

Some sad news: we have been advised of the death of Harry Canvin on Monday 24 August. Harry was a former Branch member and a regular attendee from a few years' ago. Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this time.

Thank you for your support and I look forward to seeing you at a Branch meeting very soon.

STOP PRESS – SAVE THE DATE

**Joint Branch Seminar with Milton Keynes
23 October 2016**

**The Cruck Barn, Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre
Alston Drive, Bradwell Abbey MK13 9AP**

Previously at Herts & Beds 26 June 2015 “The Austro-Hungarian Army 1914-1918” - Alan Wakefield



Branch Committee Member, Simon Goodwin writes:

Alan Wakefield, of the Photographic Section of the Imperial War Museum, very kindly stepped into the breach at short notice, on Friday 26th June, to give us a talk on the Austro-Hungarian Army, following the last minute cancellation of Diane Atkinson's planned talk on the 'Angels of Pervyse'.

Alan explained that while Austro-Hungarian forces fought in my many theatres of war, Italy and the Eastern Front were their main areas of operation. Alan highlighted a couple of notable Austro Hungarian references including Captain Von Trapp, of "Sound Of Music" fame, who was a WW1 Submarine Ace, and Jaroslav Hasek who, based upon his experiences as batman to an officer, wrote a comedic book about the stereotypes in the Austro-Hungarian Army called "The Good Soldier Svejk".

At the outbreak of the War the Hapsburg's had been ruling for a few hundred years and the Empire covered a huge area, as demonstrated by a handout map that Alan gave out before the talk began, but their military spending had lagged behind their European neighbours ...

1910 Defence Spending (as a % of national Income)

15.5%	Austro Hungary
20%	Russia
28%	France
29%	United Kingdom

Indeed, in 1914 they could field just 49 Infantry Divisions and 11 Cavalry Divisions against, for example, 100 Infantry Divisions and 35 Cavalry Divisions from the Russians alone. So, clearly, in any central European conflict they needed Allies.

Furthermore, the Austro- Hungarian Empire has fought in no major conflict, with the exception of the Boxer Rebellion in China, since 1867 and so its experience of modern warfare was severely restricted. The Empire didn't even have one consolidated Army, its forces being split between the Common (or old) Army, the Austrian Landwehr and the Hungarian Honved. But a lack of a single identity and cohesion weren't its only problems – it was fundamentally under resourced in money and equipment. Indeed, in 1914 there were 3.3 million men who could be conscripted but the Army could only afford to pay 136,000 of these men at any one time. That said, at the outbreak of War the Army totalled some 450,000 men but even these were under resourced and whole units had to be trained in capturing and using enemy weapons.

To add to problems of supply, the military determined in 1914 that the best way to manage the Railways was to take them into Military control – this went so badly wrong that by 1915 civilian authorities were once more in control and levels of performance increased again.

Given its huge land mass the Empire always had a large number of different nationalities within its borders and pressure to at least be seen to be even handed with all these groups. All officers in the Army actually swore allegiance to the Emperor rather than to the country to avoid any problems like this. There were a total of ten different languages spoken within the Army (German, Hungarian, Czech, Italian, Polish, Rumanian, Ruthenian, Serbo-Croat, Slovak and Slovenian) and officers had to learn at least two of these to be able to lead their men. Fortunately, eighteen basic commands were always spoken in German.

Tactics were very dated in 1914 and officers were expected to lead their men into battle with their NCOs carrying the Battle Flag of their unit. This was not helped by the relatively small size of the peace time Army which resulted in little chance for promotion for good men and the creation of a commanding elite who were quite old and therefore only knew old tactics. That said, many officers were promoted based upon their abilities, however, there were eighteen Archdukes within the Hapsburg family and each of these had to be given a senior role in the Army, irrelevant of their particular abilities.

For a variety of historic reasons it seems that everyone in the Austro-Hungarian military hated the Italians and sending men to fight them was nowhere near as hard as sending them to the Eastern Front where many deserted. Indeed, desertion was such a big problem that at one stage there were estimated to be 400,000 armed deserters in groups throughout the Empire and these men had to be policed, effectively tying up more men away from the War effort.

By the end of the War national tensions within the Empire had increased and many were thinking of their own interests before those of the Empire. In 1918, following the death of Archduke Franz Joseph, the Hungarians and the Czechs sought independence. The Federation of Independent States was formed in October 1918 and the members started to call men of their own nationalities back home from the war despite there being no end to the overall conflict.

During the course of the War 8 million men (a third of the male population of the Empire) served 1 million men were killed and 1.9 million were badly wounded or disabled. 3.7 million men were hospitalised and 1.7 million became Prisoners Of War (of whom 480,000 died in captivity, mainly in Russia). This was a very interesting talk which, with the help of cartoons from the book "The Good Soldier Svejk", was told in a light hearted way and educated us all in the unique problems of the Austro-Hungarian Army. We thank Alan once again for stepping into the breach at such short notice and educating us in an area of the conflict seldom explored in this country.

Simon Goodwin, July 2015

Coming-Up at Herts & Beds 9 October 2015 A Change to the Scheduled Programme: “Cycling in the Great War” and “St. John Ambulance in the Great War”

The scheduled talk, ‘Public Schools and the Great War’ by David Walsh has been postponed until next year. Branch regular, **Charles Harvey**, is stepping into the breach and will offer us a unique double-bill of presentations: ‘Cycling in the Great War’ and ‘St. John Ambulance in the Great War’

Charles will initially cover the development of the safety bicycle in the 1880s and its adoption by the military. He will give an account of the formation of the London Cyclist Battalion and the Army Cyclists Corps and their role until the disbandment of cycle units in the early 1920s. He will then go on to describe the role of St. John Ambulance [SJA] before and during the First World War. In particular he will cover the enormous SJA supplies organisation and the hospital it ran in Etaples.



Charles Harvey became interested in the Western Front after coming across "Where Endeavours Fade" by Rose Coombs while browsing in Foyles bookshop. This led to a cycling trip from Ostend to the Ypres Salient in 1980. This in turn led to him to meeting Bill Hay, a veteran, who suggested he joined the then newly formed WFA. His military experience has been limited to a spell as a driver in the Territorial Army in the Royal Corps of Transport and being in the wrong place at the wrong time in Cyprus in 1974. He was Co-Chairman of the WFA London Branch and was previously its first Treasurer. He has spent most of his working life in the Careers Service but has also worked as teacher, a training officer and a school librarian.



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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.

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 underpin aerial campaigns today.



The Broadside – 2016

Future presentations at St. George's School, Sun Lane (Sports Hall Room Sp101), Harpenden AL5 4TD

All meetings start @ 20:00. Tea, Coffee and Biscuits included. Donation at the door: £3.50 minimum.

15 January

'Goodbye Old Man' – The Artist Fortunino Matania's Vision of the Great War

Lucinda Gosling will present a survey of the body of work painted by Italian artist, Fortunino Matania, for *The Sphere* magazine – his techniques, working methods and anecdotes from his time spent at the Front as an intrepid 'special artist'. Lucinda Gosling studied history at the University of Liverpool and has worked in the picture library industry since 1993. She managed the magazine archive of the Illustrated London News before moving to work for historical specialist, Mary Evans Picture Library in 2007. With a wide interest in a number of historical subjects including royalty, costume, illustration and the Great War, Luci has contributed to variety of publications including History Today, Majesty and Illustration magazine.

19 February

Letter to an Unknown Soldier

On Platform One of Paddington Station in London, there is a statue of an unknown soldier; he's reading a letter. On the hundredth anniversary of the declaration of war everyone in the country was invited to take a moment and write that letter. **Angela McSherry**, the project's producer, will tell the story of this fascinating enterprise and will tell us how a selection of those letters contributed to a new kind of war memorial – one made only of words.



18 March

The Battle of Arras 1917 – 'Visiting the Fallen'

Peter Hughes has recently written three books under the generic title: "Visiting the Fallen". All three books are on Arras - 'Arras North', 'Arras South' and 'Arras Memorials'. There is a website to complement the publication of these books: <http://visitingthefallen.co.uk>. The site gives a good idea of what the books are about and these will form the basis of Peter's presentation which will comprise an overview of the Battle of Arras in 1917 coupled with a sort of 'Who's Who' of those buried in the CWGC cemeteries in and around Arras, or commemorated on the four main memorials in that area.

22 April

'Keep the Home Fires Burning'

Valerie Fry from *Wind & Words* will present a clarinet and poetry programme based on the First World War, being a recital of World War 1 poetry interspersed with music from the time played on clarinet – a combination of classic well-known poems and original verse.

20 May

To be confirmed.

24 June

Those Who Served: Remembering First World War Nurses

Dianne Yarwood will describe how the personal letters, documents and reports collected for a 2015 exhibition at the Royal College of Nursing in London tell a story of dedication and loyalty to nursing in the Great War. Whilst the desire to serve is complex and driven by many different causes, the stories of RCN members illustrate a strong, personal commitment to professional nursing. A commitment that, according to the British Journal of Nursing in 1921, lost 150 nurses their lives. Read more:

https://www.rcn.org.uk/development/library_and.../those-who-served

Dianne Yarwood is a retired nurse educationalist; most recently associate dean at City University London in the then St Bartholomew School of Nursing & Midwifery. Dianne has been an RCN member since she was a student during the 1960s and has been a member of the RCN History of Nursing Society since its inception. She is currently secretary of the London & South East history of nursing group and is actively involved in an oral history project for the Charing Cross Hospital Nurses League.

16 September

Members' Evening and Annual General Meeting

14 October

The Angels of Pervyse: Elsie and Mairi Go To War

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. 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.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of 22nd of November 2014, a life-size bronze sculpture of Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm, and their little dog Shot, was unveiled in the garden of the Hotel Ariane in Ypres, a hundred years to the day since they started giving 'golden hour' treatment to Belgian soldiers in their dug-out in Pervyse ten miles away. Read more: <http://www.dianeatkinson.co.uk/>

11 November

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.

16 December

To be confirmed.

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

BLETCHLEY PARK

Roadshow: Centre for Everyday Lives in the First World War Friday 11 September 2015, 2-4pm

Discover more about any photos, artefacts or memorabilia that you have from the First World War or the years immediately following.

This is an opportunity to show your objects to a panel of experts – they cannot offer advice on the monetary value but will be able to shed light on their historical value, and the contribution they make to our understanding of everyday life at the time. Your memories and family stories about the items are all part of the picture – together, we can make windows into the past. For those interested in creating a 3-D scan of their memorabilia and sharing a digital image online, assistance and equipment will also be available.

You are welcome to bring along your own objects to show to the experts or just come and hear the stories attached to items which have survived the past 100 years. Bletchley Park normally charges for admission, but entrance will be free for those bringing material to the Roadshow. Please email Bletchley Park at info@bletchleypark.org.uk if you plan to bring material and wish to book free entrance to the event (complimentary admission for two people per email).

Bletchley Park's new exhibition, 'The Road to Bletchley Park' tells the story of Codebreaking and Codebreakers in World War One and how their work paved the way for Bletchley Park to 'hit the ground running' in World War Two.

The Road to Bletchley Park the first major exhibition to explore codebreaking in World War One celebrates the pioneering achievements of those who waged a secret war – and how they paved the way for the Codebreakers of World War Two.

The story of signals intelligence in WW1 is an untold but crucial one, because a large number of those involved went on to work with the newly formed Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) in 1919, which then relocated to Bletchley Park in 1939.

For further information https://www.bletchleypark.org.uk/news/v.rhtm/The_Road_to_Bletchley_Park-903110.html

For information about visiting Bletchley Park please go to <http://www.bletchleypark.org.uk/>

Everyday Lives in War is based at the University of Hertfordshire: <https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/>

Everyday Lives in War:
experience and memory of
the First World War