

ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY
MINUTES OF MEETING 14th NOVEMBER 2018

MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

Those Present:

Ray Franklin Chairman	Chris Bush	David Verlander
Heather Salvidge	Mike Rea	Margaret Rea
Diane Bush	Roger Kendrick	Tim Snow
Roger Clark	Phyllis Clark	Carol Wylde
Jean Beeston	Ian Beeston	Anne Player
Keith Merrifield	Valerie Austin	Tony Eatson
Gill Hathaway	Tony Bailey	Jackie Bailey
Tony White	Anne White	Jill Hunt
Keith Hunt	Graham Morland	Trevor Hackett
Ray Gaubert	Nina Gaubert	Sue Beeston
Ian Jackson	Moyra Jackson	John Beeston
Peter Clear	Therese Clear	

Apologies:

Paul Salvidge	Helen Mudge	Jill French
Colin Smith	Teri Williams	Sue Johnson
Pam Merrifield	Caryl Benner	Jean Platt

We welcome Therese Clear and Gill Hathaway as new members.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present and Mr Alan Taylor, our guest speaker for the evening. Before continuing with the meeting, the Chairman passed on a message from our President Gordon Barker.

“He was sorry that he wasn’t able to attend the meeting tonight but I told him how pleased we were that he was able to attend the Memorial Service and lay our wreath on behalf of the Society. It was good that he felt well enough to attend the service and, like our Chairman, was very impressed by the turn out.”

Secretary’s Note: Some three hundred people are estimated to have attended the service on 10th November.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting 12th September 2018**

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

After the last meeting, Anne White volunteered to join the Committee and having been to a meeting of the Committee, has been co-opted to serve.

4. Guest Speaker Mr Alan Taylor

The Chairman introduced Alan Taylor, a noted local amateur WW1 historian and battlefield guide. This was Alan's third talk to EVHS about the Great War, this one entitled "The Last Battle – November 2018 and Beyond".

Alan started by noting the vast amount of information available to historians albeit not always accurate. A quick Google search on WW1 for example produces 2716 million hits. At a minute a hit, it would take over 5000 years to read all of it!

So to the talk....

Part 1 - The last 100 Days

In March of 1918 following the Bolshevik Revolution, an armistice was agreed by the Russians and they left the war freeing the German troops from the Eastern Front. The Germans knew they had to break through the Western front quickly as the Americans were about to join the war bringing thousands of men over to secure the lines. Back home, the blockades meant that the German people were starving and food riots were rife. The German High command knew they had to act quickly and decided that a heavy strike against the English and French would succeed. In late March early April a huge offensive took place near Amiens to split the French and English forces, the Germans broke through and rapidly advanced to the Somme. This rapid advance however collapsed as the supply lines couldn't keep up. However, by May 1918 the Germans were within 40 miles of Paris. At this point the Americans came into the war and fought a number of so-called "minor" battles. By the start of July the German advance had stalled and the Kaiser held the first Spa conference where it was decided they should mediate a withdrawal to their own borders whilst retaining Belgium.

In August however, the Canadians broke through the Hindenburg Line at Vimy Ridge at which point, the Austrians decided they wanted to sue for a separate peace. The politicians in the Reichstag were getting anxious and in September demanded to know what the military options were to win the war. At the start of the third Spa conference General Ludendorff, the Quartermaster General and leader of the German Forces collapsed. When he recovered, he and Hindenburg tried to work out a plan for an orderly withdrawal. Meanwhile the Kaiser decided to go for an armistice agreement using the Woodrow Wilson 14 point

peace plan as a basis for negotiation, all the time clinging to the idea of an undefeated Germany.

Ludendorff however, wanted to fight on however the German Navy mutinied refusing to put to sea and the politicians who decided they didn't want to fight, fired Ludendorff. At this point the terms of the armistice were agreed including Clause 19 calling for reparations from an impoverished Germany; thus were the seeds of WW2 planted.

Part 2 - 11th November – Day of Days

The war ended at 11.00am on 11th November 1918 and even though the time of the armistice had been communicated to the trenches beforehand, men were being killed less than twenty minutes before the ceasefire. As the guns fell silent for the first time in four years of war the men in the trenches were unbelieving that peace had finally come.

There was a great deal to be said for life in the trenches, you were sure of your next meal – if you lived to eat it; the shells fell on good and bad alike producing a great sense of camaraderie. There was no poverty and in the future many men would look back on trench life with affection.

Suddenly, these men realised with some shock that they could live to be old men with all that implied for having to fend for themselves as the support from the army ceased. Today we would recognise these feelings as symptoms of PTSD or battlefield fatigue.

Part 3 - Aftermath

The war ended quickly, even as the armistice was being negotiated, plans were in hand for the 1919 campaign. The Germans were given three months to withdraw behind their borders – they didn't get to keep Belgium! At the same time the Austro - Hungarian Empire dissolved and the Balkan Empire collapsed. Alsace-Lorraine became part of France as mandated by the Treaty of Versailles. It was also noted that destroying German industry was counter-productive as it made it all but impossible for them to pay reparations; but it happened anyway, thus were the seeds of WW2 sown.

After the war General Haig, the leader of the British campaign was reviled and belittled by the British politicians and ended up giving his time and energy to the newly formed British Legion. He died in 1928.

Were lessons learnt? Probably, but not quick enough. In 1928 ten years after the end of the war, the army bill for horse fodder was £300,000, that for petrol £72,000. In 1933 there were only four tank regiments and even in 1940 an officer selection panel asked three questions; What school, Fathers income and do you ride?!

Part 4 – A Lost Generation

There are nineteen “thankful” villages in the UK. Nineteen villages where all the men who left to go to war came back.

In the UK one in sixty-five of the men who served died, in France one in twenty-eight and in Germany one in thirty-seven.

If one looks at the schools, 20% of the men from Eton, Tonbridge, Oxford and Cambridge died. In Elsenham we lost 23% of those that served.

Part 5 – The Great Pilgrimage

In 1928 the British Legion led the Great Pilgrimage whereby 11,000 men, women and children made their way to the battlefields and the newly created war cemeteries to pay their respects to the fallen. The exercise was repeated in 2018 on the 90th anniversary of the original pilgrimage when over a thousand, by now Royal British Legion branches sent members to lay wreaths at the Menin Gate as part of the Great pilgrimage 90 or GP90.

Part 6 – Walter Turner

When *For The Duration* was published in 2014, Walter Turner was the missing man, there being no information about him available at that time. In 2016 his Grandson was found and the editors gained a great deal of information about Walter that was subsequently posted to the EVHS website. Last year the speaker took Walters Grandson and family to Passchendaele and his grave in the New Irish Farm Cemetery. Whilst paying their respects a motorcade turned up carrying Theresa May who was doing a little sightseeing on her way to a meeting and she came over and spoke to the group. It is rather ironic that 100 years after his death, there were three generations of his family talking to the British Prime Minister at his graveside.

Following this, it has come to light that Walter had died with an Australian serviceman (by name of Kelly) while they were trying to retrieve a field gun from the shell hole it had fallen into. Australian records having survived better than those in the UK, it is hoped that the additional detail will better explain exactly where Walter died (this update will be added to our website as and when available).

A final thought; the poppies we see everywhere at this time of year have come to symbolise remembrance of the fallen not just in the UK but across Europe as well. Thus do they symbolise unity also.

5. Open Forum and Any Other Business

5.1 St Mary's Christmas Tree Festival

The Society will be exhibiting a tree at this year's festival at St Mary's on 1st and 2nd December. The theme will be celebrating 70 years of the NHS and the pioneers of medicine through the ages. Our thanks go to Jean Beeston and her helpers Anne Player and Jackie Bailey for their hard work.

5.2 Clavering Study Day 2018

This year's Study Day will deal with the art of WW1 and will feature works by Sir George Clausen, Paul and John Nash, Wyndham Lewis and Stanley Spencer amongst others. Unusually this year, there have been no takers from members so I have had to send our apologies.

Secretary's Note: My apologies to Carol Wylde who I managed to overlook when taking bookings; sorry carol!

5.3 Telephone Box Display

Our thanks go to our Chairman, Ray Franklin who has put together a display to commemorate the fallen of the Village in the redundant 'phone box in New Road. A team of volunteers cleaned the floor and windows to make them presentable and we thank them for their efforts. The idea is that the box will be formally adopted from BT by the Parish Council but in the short term BT has given us permission to mount the display with the proviso we do not in any way structurally change the existing box and remove the display after a few days.

The original idea came from member Teri Williams who had seen something similar whilst on holiday.

Secretary's Note: BT has advised the Parish Clerk that BT only permit the classic red boxes to be sold / adopted. Also, Uttlesford DC are opposed to BT disposing of this particular box even though it is financially unviable. It is hoped that an informal arrangement can be entered into to allow ad hoc displays from time to time.

5.4 Tommy Silhouette

The Parish Council has raised enough money from donations to pay for the erection of a "Tommy Silhouette" in the Memorial Garden in time for the Remembrance service. Moyra Jackson said that enough has been collected for a second silhouette to be placed in the garden.

5.5 Web Site

Chris Bush announced that photo galleries had been added to the website of the visit to Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome and the recent Art Sale at St Mary's Church.

6. Thank You

Thanks go to Jean and Ian Beeston for preparing and serving the teas and coffees this evening.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on March 13th 2019 and will include our AGM. Our speaker will be Roger Barrett from the Stansted History Group who will be speaking about "The Fuller-Maitlands at Stansted Hall".

ENDS