

"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Branch secretary Arthur Pickup 01963-32952

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Next branch meeting 19th May at 7 p.m.

"Old Faithful" leading the squadron for take off from Bassingbourn



"Old Faithful" 70th anniversary commemoration

Plans are firming up well and many loose ends have been tidied up during the last month, both our cadet units confirmed they are attending the commemoration on Sunday 22nd June and will be providing an Honour Guard for the Union Flag and American flag. A group from King Arthur's School will be also be there and I have written to the primary schools too. There will also be a group from Bourton School. King's School Bruton Combined Cadet Force Band will lead the parade, which leaves Carrington Way at 2 p.m.

I am very pleased to let you know that Mrs. Anne Funk, the sister of Peter Mikonis - the pilot and her daughter Tara will be attending from the United States, staying in Wincanton for a few days. It is hoped they will be able to attend events both on Sunday 22nd June and on the actual anniversary day, 25th June.

Wincanton Silver Band will play the hymns and lead the Service of Remembrance around the War Memorial after the Sunday parade. They will then go into the Memorial Hall for the concert they will be holding at 3 p.m. (ticket fee applicable).

On 25th June events are confirmed as follows :-

11 a.m. Prayers and Thanksgiving will take place at the memorial on Bayford Hill led by the rector Rev. Nigel Feaver. Last Post will be played.

At 3 p.m. we will attend the new memorial at Snag Farm by arrangement with the owners, again prayers will be led by Nigel.

Wreaths will be laid at both sites.

After our ceremony at Snag Farm, Richard and Jayne Cummins of the Unicorn Inn, Bayford have invited us to a buffet in the grounds of the Unicorn. Because space this is strictly limited to 50 members/partners. This will be by invitation card only and the first 50 people on the list will get an invitation, a list will be started at the branch April meeting on 14th April. Please understand that the limitation is due to space and the ability of Richard and Jill to cater for 50 people. I apologise in advance if you are unable to receive an invite. I am in dialogue with the owners at Snag Farm to allow us to provide tea and biscuits after the ceremony at the farm.

Edward Kiddle 1st/5th Somerset Light Infantry

Many of us rightly think of the horrors of the Great War in the context of the Western Front of France and Belgium but an equally unpleasant war was being fought in the Holy Land against the Turkish and The Ottoman Empire. Perhaps this theatre of the war was somewhat neglected in a similar way as the war against the Japanese was in World War Two. Nevertheless many lads from Somerset were fighting and dying there a long way from home under extremely nasty circumstances.

I found one such story whilst adding finishing touches to my forthcoming book when I investigated the two Kiddle cousins, Edwin and Edward both of whom were killed with the Somerset Light Infantry in the Middle East. Sadly Edwin's story is not so complete as Edward's but I have found a lot on both these soldiers and the fact that Edward Kiddle's story has greatly moved me I feel I want to share it with you, the smiling photo of a young and handsome country boy has stuck in my mind and left a lump in my throat.

Edward enlisted in the Territorial Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry - the 1st/5th Battalion, at Castle Cary in 1915. The Battalion had been sent to India in November 1914 to enable the release of the Regular soldiers for the Western Front. After training in England Edward found himself part of

a large draft of soldiers dispatched to reinforce the Battalion, arriving in Bombay on 5th May 1916. After spending time acclimatizing in Poona they were then moved as part of the 223rd Brigade on 25th April, destination Suez and Palestine. The Battalion had to wait for the Divisional Artillery of the 75th Division to arrive and by October 1917 were in position for the forthcoming battles of Gaza and Jerusalem. On 5th November Edward writes to his brother William, in what was to be his last letter, that there had been terrible storms in the area on 27th October with hail "as large as marbles". The troops had to stay out all night and he was miserably cold and soaking wet - Edward's brother William was serving as a seaman in the Royal Navy. During this period 1st/5th Somersets were in reserve awaiting the main assault on Jerusalem. On 7th November the Battalion moved forward after a heavy artillery barrage on positions around Gaza, resistance was light and very few casualties were suffered. Upon assaulting Gaza they found it deserted by the enemy and they entered an empty town. Advancing toward El Mughar the British found the main body of the Turks in full retreat but offering spasmodic resistance which saw the Somersets along with the Wilts and Gurkha Rifles making successful attacks on ridges around El Mughar. The British had advanced 60 miles in 15 days and were preparing to assault Jerusalem. On 21st November at 10.30 a.m. the 1st/5th Somersets set out along the old Roman road which went over rocky hills, so rough and steep they could use no transport other than mules and camels. Only light mountain guns were able to accompany the infantry as the terrain was too difficult to get heavy artillery forward. This meant they were unable to reply to the heavily defended lines of the Turks outside Jerusalem. The 1st/5th Somersets led the advance, the country was rocky and precipitous in the extreme and the men were encumbered with full fighting equipment. Their boots became torn by the sharp stones and they had to scramble down a rough hillside, a deep valley and then out again at the far end. Their objective was a village called El Jib which lay to the east, but their commanding officer ordered an advance in open order in a northerly direction and had mistakenly ordered them on a more distant village to the north. Unsupported by their own artillery (which could not negotiate the hill paths) the troops came under intense fire from the Turks in the hills. But the Somersets were able to reach a ridge and engaged the enemy with the Lewis guns and their Vickers machine guns and made slow progress under very difficult conditions taking casualties all the time, but were pinned down. Reinforcements were requested but they could make little progress and headquarters realizing the attack was moving in the wrong direction could not correct the



situation without sending fresh troops into an already dire situation without taking unwarrantable casualties. A further advance was impossible and it was equally impossible to withdraw the Somersets in daylight without cover. Orders were sent for the 1st/5th Somersets to “hold their ground” until dusk and then withdraw their wounded to a nearby village. To ease the situation two companies of 1st/4th Wilts – which were held in reserve were sent to a nearby hill on the other side

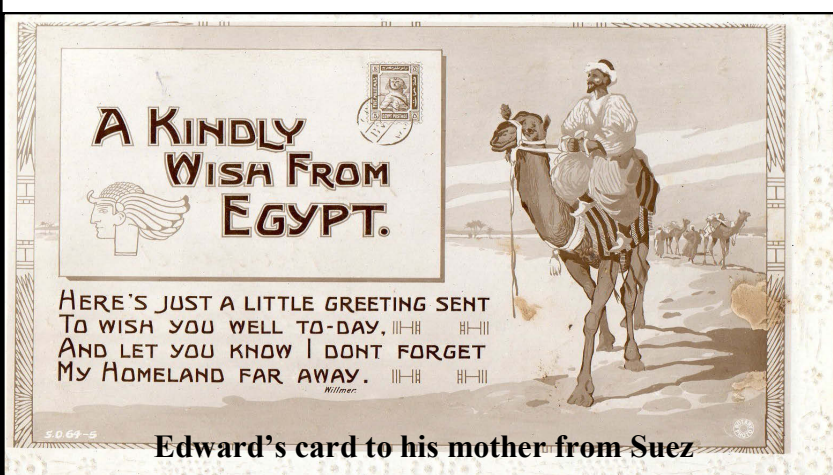


Edward (2nd from right back row) and comrades 1st/5th Somerset Light Infantry all of whom would have served in Palestine

of the valley to cover them and a withdrawal of the 1st/5th Somersets was ordered to a nearby bivouac. It was a bitterly cold night on 22nd November and the men had to lay out in the open wearing only their tropical drill shorts and tunics with no blankets or greatcoats to keep them warm. The cost of the fruitless exercise was 11 killed or missing and 23 wounded. But the fighting was not over as the Somersets then had to attack the correct location – El Jib, which was a natural stronghold geographically and was well defended. At dawn the Somersets were ordered to attack and El Jib was seen to be a formidable objective and natural stronghold which was through a valley only 700 yards wide. A mosque dominated the slopes and had to be taken by vicious hand to hand fighting performed with intense bravery by 3rd/3rd Gurkha Rifles who had to do so in almost medieval fashion, with the defenders hurling rocks at them from above. At 8 a.m. the Battalion set out and immediately came under intense heavy artillery fire of shrapnel and high explosive from the defending Turks. They had to attack without the benefit of support from their own artillery which could not reach them through the rough terrain. Machine gun fire was coming in from El Jib and they were also caught in cross fire from the slopes opposite. Three companies of Somersets moved forward with great coolness and precision and when they came within range were hit by heavy machine gun fire. No attack could go on long under this and one officer described it as “every other man seemed to be falling..... it was terrible the lines just melted away”. A fourth company, which was held in reserve, moved forward and somehow managed to get three Lewis gun teams to scale the terraces and opened fire on the enemy. This enabled small parties of men to actually reach the village of El Jib enabling the main body of the 74th Division to capture the position. 27 of the Somersets alone were recovered from the slopes and sadly all of the Lewis gunners were killed in that amazing act of bravery.

Amongst those killed that day, 23rd November 1917, was Edward Kiddle, his body was amongst those found on the rocky slopes. A brave son of Somerset.

It was a tragic day for the Battalion whose casualties were 68 killed and over 400 wounded. The Battalion did



Edward's card to his mother from Suez

not take part in any serious fighting again until April 1918.

The Battle of Jerusalem took place over Christmas 1917 during which other Battalions of the Somerset Light Infantry took part and Jerusalem fell to the British on 9th December 1917.

Edward is buried at the Jerusalem War Cemetery Row G Grave 5

May trip

We will be going to Chichester for our trip on 24th May, as well as being a fascinating town to visit Chichester is only 8 miles from Bognor and the seaside. Bring your bus passes (those that have them !!) as there is lots to see and do in that lovely part of West Sussex. We will stop on the way for a brief "comfort stop", so as to enable another full day we will leave Wincanton at 8.30 a.m. List is now open, tickets £12 adults and juniors £6

Coffee Morning 26th April

Our first Coffee Morning this year will take place on 26th April at 10 a.m. until noon.

Lecture on the Great War

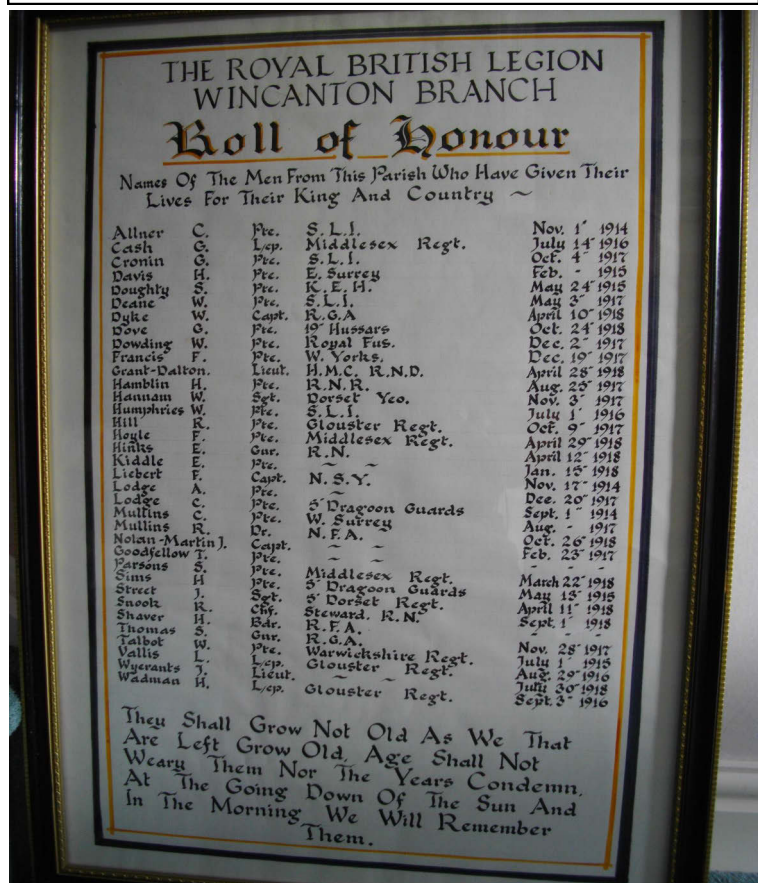
I mentioned last month that I have agreed to start off the commemoration of the start of the Great War with a lecture on behalf of Wincanton Historical Society. It will now take place on **29th May at 7.30 p.m.** in the Memorial Hall and not as previously stated, due to a commitment on my part on the original date. The lecture will be entitled "It'll all be over by Christmas - Wincanton goes to war 1914". I will focus on events here during the late summer and winter of 1914 considering the happenings in the town and the first town casualties of that war. The Historical Society will make a donation Poppy Appeal. I will have photos and artefacts of the period too.

Annual Dinner Guest of Honour 10th October 2014

I am very pleased to be able to say that it is now confirmed that our Guest of Honour this year at the Annual Dinner will be Major Christopher Adams OC 3 Regiment Royal School of Military Engineering, Camberley. Chris will give us a presentation of his career and his present role. I know this will be very interesting.

Poppy Appeal 2013/14

Arthur tells me the total for Poppy Appeal 2013/14 now stands at £13909. This is a record but we know it will increase not only from Gift Aid but from other amounts before the end of the accounting year which are still outstanding. The proceeds of the forthcoming book on our War Dead of the Great War will be included in next years Poppy Appeal once the book is on sale.



Wincanton RBL Roll of Honour

This generation of Legion members were unaware that the branch compiled a Roll of Honour of those who gave their lives during the Great War. It appears it was held in safe keeping by Wincanton Museum, who thought it was a proper and fitting time to hand back the Roll to our branch. It probably dates from the 1960s and possibly was made for the 50th anniversary of the war, judging from its condition and the fact that it mentions "Royal" British Legion. I will approach the mayor in the hope it can form part of the commemoration of the start of war. We hope that the Town Council will permanently display it in the Town Hall.