



**"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**

**May/June  
2016**

**Next meeting is AGM 2016 at Millers Inn 7 p.m. 15th June**

**Good news for the future.**

I do hope the last Sandbag did not sound too gloomy but we were in the process of accommodating changes within the structure of the committee following several people wishing to move on. It has been very busy over the last month or so and I am happy to say that we now have candidates who have come forward for election to the committee at the June AGM which will fill the potential gaps. Firstly I am extremely pleased to advise that Sam Atherton has agreed to take on the role of Poppy Appeal Organiser. Sam served in the regular army and is currently doing a fantastic job as Wincanton Town Clerk. Sam did ask that my wife Sandra stay on as deputy Poppy Appeal Organiser for her first year - which she has agreed and Sam would also like the working group of helpers to continue their fine work. Adam Brown our county Poppy Appeal representative has visited Wincanton and set in place Sam's official credentials. With Peter Cox our treasure wishing to stand down in June I am also very happy to confirm Andy Chilton has agreed to take over. After a long career in the Royal Navy Andy is currently manager of the South Somerset Community Accessible Transport - the CAT bus scheme we all know. Steve Lee currently our vice president has been taking a very active organising role within the branch of late and has not only attended county conferences but established strong links with other branches and County officials. Steve has now agreed to take over from Arthur Pickup as secretary when he steps down. To ensure we replace Steve as vice president, Dave Roberts has agreed to stand as vice president at the AGM. Dave served a long career in REME, with the Rhine Army and active service in Bosnia and the Gulf, Dave is currently Workshops & Transport Manager with a multi national company. Finally, although I do wish to cut back Steve has asked me to stay on for a while whilst he settles in and I have agreed to stay as long as I am needed. I will continue to chair meetings, write Sandbag, help organise social events and definitely continue to organise our monthly social trips. I am also very keen to ensure our observance of Remembrance is continued and I will help Steve wherever possible.

All the proposed roles are subject to nomination and election at the AGM on 15th June.

**Next meeting is the AGM**

Our next meeting will be the AGM and will be held in the function room of the Millers Inn at 7 p.m. on 15th June. It should not be a long meeting as last years AGM proper was postponed until January due to key committee members attendance. Because it has been winter there is little to discuss but it is important to nominate and vote for prospective committee members (as indicated above). We will then have a social evening where bangers and burgers will be available to purchase. If the weather is good we can also go outside to the beer garden.

**Stan Bargery**

I am very sad to have to say that long standing member Stan Bargery passed away on 4th April. Stan was an accomplished sign writer and assisted with the signs at both the 60th anniversary of Old Faithful and the unveiling of the new War Memorial. Stan attended events Remembrance whenever he could. He will be sadly missed.

**Poppy Appeal now stands at £16,923.25 so far**

## Branch members visit to the Somme area.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July this year is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the infamous Battle of the Somme and Wincanton Royal British Legion members undertook a “pilgrimage” to place wreaths at the graves and memorials of all the six soldiers from Wincanton killed during the battle. Of those six only two have known graves, Walter Humphries and John Goodfellow - the remainder are commemorated on the Thiepval memorial to the missing. One of those present on the visit was member Andy Chilton, Andy’s uncle was killed on the first day of the battle serving with one of the Pal’s battalions, 103<sup>rd</sup> Tyneside Irish Brigade – Northumberland Fusiliers, whose losses were so severe they had to be withdrawn as a fighting force after the battle.

Wincanton Legion group, myself, Andy Chilton and Dave Roberts visited sites of all the local regiments who fought during the battle and it was at a cemetery oddly named the Gordon Dump Cemetery (after an ammunition dump, previously there) that one of the two graves of a Wincanton soldier lies. It is that of

Walter Humphries of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Somerset Light Infantry and with him are buried many of his Somerset comrades. The Somersets also suffered very heavy losses on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 when Walter was killed. He was a farm labourer from Lawrence Hill Wincanton who joined the army when Lord Kitchener asked for volunteers for his “New Army”. The Gordon Dump Cemetery is to my mind amongst the most poignant to me and yet so beautiful- there lies many of the sons of Somerset buried almost where they fell, near Ovillers-La Boisselle . I collect up the wreaths in church on Remembrance Sunday that have been there all the



**Dave, Andy & myself  
at Walter Humphries’s grave**

previous year before replacement at the service, most wreaths have remained in very good condition and I take them to the Somme and Flanders each year, to place on our local soldiers graves and memorials. I always say a few words over Walter’s grave and place a wreath at his headstone, it is to me more significant because Walter worshipped in the church and it is a real piece of his home town. I then placed a wreath at the Cross of Sacrifice for his pals who were killed with him, all Somerset lads. The other Wincanton soldier with a grave is John Goodfellow, who died fighting with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. The King’s (Liverpool) Regiment and is buried two rows away from the son of the then Prime Minister – Herbert Asquith at the Guillemont Road Cemetery. John was killed on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1916, which was known as “a black day for Liverpool” when this Liverpool Pals Battalion was practically wiped out. John Goodfellow was working in Liverpool when he enlisted. Our visit continued with a stop at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. The memorial is covered in scaffolding and not accessible due to making it ready for the 1<sup>st</sup> July commemorations. We placed our wreath at the Cross of Sacrifice. Here are commemorated the other four Wincanton soldiers, George Cash, Walter Talbott, Lewis Vallis and Henry Wadman. George Cash was the son of a prominent Wincanton family who lived in what is now Clementina’s hardware store. It is in Wincanton Parish Church that there is a stained glass window, known as “Cash’s window” which depicts St. George slaying the dragon and the face of St. George is reputed to be that of George Cash ( I did a BBC radio chat about the window for their commemoration of the Great War in 2014 !!). Walter Talbott was born in Wincanton and later became a coal miner in Wales and finally seeking other work in Birmingham enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Royal Warwickshire Regiment. I was privileged to take a wreath from Walter’s family to the Memorial - the Royal Warwicks too were decimated on the first day of the Somme battle when Walter was killed. Walter’s family in Wales cooperated with my book and we were able to piece together his story. By an irony when they visited Wincanton a couple of years ago they were saddened to note that Walter’s surname had been incorrectly spelt (since the 1920s) on the Roll of Honour in Wincanton church. I was able to get a stonemason to correct the error without affecting the memorial. Members of Wincanton branch, Walter’s family and myself ensured the job could be carried out and paid for.

On the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval are two local soldiers who were great friends in life. Both joined the Army together and joined the Bristol Pal's battalion 12<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Gloucestershire Regiment (Bristol's Own). They have almost consecutive army numbers and both were Lance Corporals. By a quirk of listing the missing at the Somme Thiepval memorial each regiment is commemorated separately and names are listed alphabetically in the ranks they attained. With Lewis Vallis and Henry Wadman named in death almost next to each other it seems rather fitting. In my tribute book I have shown them on the same pages too. Lewis Vallis was a bank clerk at Stuckey's Bank in Wincanton and is also commemorated on a plaque in what is now National Westminster Bank in Wincanton. He was captain of Wincanton football team first eleven. Henry Wadman was the son of a "gentleman farmer" from Horsington and they were inseparable friends. The 12<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters had a depressing fate along with many other regiments and suffered appalling casualties during the battles, when the pair were killed within days of each other.

**Memorial at the "Devonshire trench"**



The Wincanton group vowed to visit all the memorials to our local regiments at the Somme and whilst both the Somerset Light Infantry and the Devonshire Regiment have no official memorial they do have poignant cemeteries and as mentioned, in the Gordon Dump lay many Somerset men and a wreath was left for there. The Devonshire Regiment also have a very moving cemetery. At the end of the first day of the Battle of the Somme over 160 of men of the 8th and 9th Bn. Devonshire Regiment were retrieved from where they had fallen in action in No-Mans-Land and the German positions. They were carried back to the British Front Line trench position for the start of the day, and were buried in a section of this trench near a small wood called Mansell Copse. The graves were left in this position when the cemeteries were rebuilt after the war. 163 graves are now contained in the cemetery. Ten are unidentified burials and only two are not men of the Devonshire Regiment. The cemetery is named "Devonshire Cemetery" after the men of this regiment buried there. At the entrance to

the cemetery is a moving stone memorial which says "The Devonshires held this trench and the Devonshires hold it still". It was here that a further wreath was left. What is probably the newest British memorial in the Somme area is that of the Dorsetshire Regiment, which was only unveiled in May 2011. This commemorates the 4500 soldiers of the Regiment who were killed in the Great War and is near the Lonsdale Cemetery and Leipzig Redoubt near Authuille where many of them were killed and buried. This was the final place a wreath was laid to our local regiments. On 1<sup>st</sup> July this year Wincanton Royal British Legion will commemorate all those six soldiers at 11 a.m. around the War Memorial near Memorial Hall Wincanton. I will also be hosting a talk on the lives of the six brave Wincanton men in the evening that day too. See full details next page. I am making a further visit to Loos and Flanders at the end of May to pay our respects there too.



**Dorsetshire Regiment memorial Authuille**

### Some good news and some bad news.

Some of you realise that Steve has been very active recently and has been trying to get an invitation for a tour of Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth. Well he succeeded and a private tour has been now confirmed for Friday 7th October. **BUT** the college can only accommodate 32 people and no more. The visit and tour was announced at the very full trip to Portsmouth a few weeks ago and along with people on a standby list for such a trip all 32 places immediately were taken up. We will however be able to accommodate about twenty more people for a visit to Dartmouth on the day and a list for the town visit only will be announced nearer the time. I am also holding a standby list of those wishing to go in the event of any cancellations. Contact me if you would like to be standing by.

### June trip 18th June

When I announced the trip to Seaton I thought it would be a good idea to stop at Axminster on the way BUT I now find that the coach park for Axminster is by the railway station and quite a long walk into town - so I have arranged that instead of stopping at Axminster for coffee that we go direct to Seaton and after a brief coffee stop members will be offered either to stay and be picked up in Seaton or continue on to Sidmouth for the day. A decision which of the two places you wish to stay at can be made on the day. Cost as usual is £12 adults and £6 children. The list is now open, so please contact me as soon as possible as currently there are seats available. Departure is 9 a.m. from the Memorial Hall on 18th June.

### Future trips

**16th July** is to Weymouth and **20th August** is Taunton and Bishop's Lydeard with the possibility of using the steam train to Minehead (at you expense). As yet I have not had the date for the visit to the Houses of Parliament confirmed by our MP but I will let everyone know when this will be.

### Somme anniversary 1st July 2016

Wincanton branch will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme around the War Memorial at 11 a.m. on Friday 1st July. Assembly is at 10.45 a.m. There is a national observance of the battle and throughout the Country that day a whistle will be blown 3 times to signify "Over the Top", there will be prayers and I will read the names of our six soldiers - the Last Post will be played followed by Reveille. In the evening at 7.30 p.m. at the Balsam Centre I will give a presentation on the lives of our six soldiers and an overview of the battle with photos. There will be tea & biscuits available and tickets will be £5 each. All proceeds will go to Wincanton Poppy Appeal. Tickets will be available at the Town Hall and as the venue only holds 50 people it is recommended that pre booking is a good idea as admission will be by ticket only. I am in the early stages of organising but, a small group from Wincanton Silver Band have offered to play a few pieces of music from the First World War throughout the evening (which will last about two hours) .

### Armed Forces Day - 25th June

This year we will be holding our Armed Forces Day event at King Arthur's School as we have outgrown our previous venues. We have promises of similar military involvement as other years and for the first time we are proud to announce that the HMS Heron Band from RNAS Yeovilton will not only open the event with a marching display but will be playing several slots throughout the afternoon. Our good friends, Wincanton Silver Band will also be present and will share slots with HMS Heron Band to provide live music most of the time. So it should be an excellent event. Our affiliated cadet units will be present and the Air Training Corps will be bringing their Flight Simulator and will allow youngsters to operate it. Both our Sea Cadets and Army Cadets will be there too and will provide some interesting displays alongside the military stands. There will be a licensed bar from noon until the event closes around 4 p.m. food, soft drinks, tea and coffee will be available and the County Poppy Appeal gazebo will be there too. As some members and some of the public may find it difficult to walk to the school we have arranged the CAT bus to run a shuttle from the Memorial Hall to King Arthur's which will be free - as will be the event.