

# Visit to Salisbury and The Fovant Badges

A small party of Branch members visited the Salisbury area in July. The first stop was the Rifles Museum close to Salisbury Cathedral, which was followed by a visit to the Cloisters of the Cathedral, where there are about half a dozen original wooden grave markers. Dale Hjort was able to provide some historical information on these.

The principal visit of the day was to the village of Fovant, which is overlooked by a chalk escarpment, known as Fovant Down, on which are carved eight regimental badges. After an enjoyable lunch in the Emblems Restaurant, which overlooks the Down, over coffee we were treated to an illustrated talk given by Tony Phillips, a member of The Fovant Badges Society ([www.fovantbadges.com](http://www.fovantbadges.com)).

From March 1915 until the end of the Great War the Fovant area was a vast military camp, containing barracks, parade and training areas, rifle ranges, a 600 bed military hospital and various recreational facilities. In 1916 men of the London Rifle Brigade decided to carve their badge on the hillside and this was followed by other units until twenty badges were spread over Compton, Fovant and Sutton Downs, including one showing the outline of Australia.

In the interwar years efforts were made by local workers to maintain the badges, often funded by regimental associations and in the case of the AIF badge, the Australian Government. At the outbreak of the Second World War quite a number of the badges had disappeared due to neglect and the remainder were allowed to overgrow, so as not to become a landmark for enemy aircraft.

After the war, the local Home Guard Old Comrades Association did work to revive some of the badges and a few new ones replaced the originals. This rather ad hoc arrangement was formalised in 1961 by The Fovant Badges Society, which encouraged wider membership from the local community and this evolved into a charitable organisation in 1994, with the specific aim of preserving and maintaining the badges.

By the year 2000 twelve badges remained in varying stages of decay. A full professional survey was undertaken, which indicated that expenditure of £300,000 would be required to fully restore them. Reluctantly it was decided to concentrate resources on the preservation of the eight regimental badges on Fovant Down, as these were the most prominent. A national appeal for £200,000 was launched, funds were provided from a variety of sources and the target reached in eighteen months. At about this time the badges were scheduled as Ancient Monuments, which now affords them an important level of protection.



Restoration work commenced in 2002 and gradually the eight designated badges were restored to an acceptable condition, using professional contractors. Ongoing maintenance is of course necessary and this is currently funded by donations from such as the Daily Mail, the Australian Government and from the Society's own fundraising events. Tony provided details of the type of work undertaken and the problems that have to be overcome to ensure the badges look their best.

After thanking Tony for a most informative talk, opportunity was taken to visit Fovant (St George) Churchyard, where there are sixty three graves from the time of the Great War, forty four of these being Australians.

Thanks are due to Bob Brunsdon for arranging the day.

**Graham Adams**



*The Cloisters of Salisbury Cathedral where original wooden grave markers are on view*