



## CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

Number 120

October 2016

### A Terrific Ten!

Tonight we proudly celebrate ten years of the Cheltenham and Gloucester Branch of the WFA. It is an achievement that we should all take credit for - anyone who has attended a meeting, or has given a presentation, or donated a raffle prize or some books to sell, or has written an article for *The Sentinel* or the newsletter, or has donated their time to publicise the branch or has served on our committee. It is the cumulative effect of everyone's interest in the branch that has made it the success that it is and we should all feel very proud. Over the years certain individuals have (and continue to do so) given of themselves exceptionally for the branch's interests - I am not going to name them for fear of missing someone out, but many still hold positions on the committee. To them I offer a personal thank you on behalf of the branch.

However, if there is one person for whom we should all give special thanks it is to Hilary. Hilary has been our secretary, newsletter and *Sentinel* editor and compiler, and treasurer from day one. Without her offer to help me set up the branch all those years ago it would never have succeeded - certainly not in the professional manner which we enjoy. Hilary is the glue that holds the branch together. So tonight, as we raise a glass to the branch and to each other, let's raise a special glass of thanks to our wonderful co-founder. **Peter**

It is both an official and a huge personal pleasure for me to offer my warmest congratulations to the Cheltenham and Gloucester Branch of the Western Front Association on celebrating its tenth anniversary. It seems particularly fitting that we should reach

this landmark during the Centenary of the Great War. My move to Cheltenham from Suffolk a decade ago occurred at the same time as the Cheltenham and Gloucester Branch was founded and I was honoured and delighted when Peter Gill invited me to become the Branch's President. A few years later, in 2011, I was fortunate enough to succeed Correlli Barnett as the Honorary President of the entire WFA - so I now have a double interest in the welfare of our organisation.

In my double presidential capacity I have been enormously impressed by the continuing strength of the C and G Branch, which hit the ground running from the start and has enjoyed healthy attendances at meetings ever since. Having 'transferred' from the Suffolk Branch, which has always drawn large audiences, I was in no way disappointed by my new branch, which has consistently combined high historical standards with a warm and friendly atmosphere. Much of the credit for this is down to our long-serving Chairman, Peter Gill, whose enthusiasm, friendliness and relaxed charm have set a welcoming tone from the very beginning, but he has been superbly supported by the likes of Bob, Graham, Hilary and, not least, the speaker finders, as well as many others. Thanks to their collective efforts, we have been treated to a succession of splendid lecturers and leading historians, including Martin Middlebrook, Peter Hart, John Bourne and the late Richard Holmes. To Peter and all those who have worked so hard to make the Branch such a success, may I add my personal thanks and say a hearty 'Well Done'. Here's to the next ten years ! **Peter Simkins**

### Future events

**Tuesday, 8 November**

*Digging the Trenches* Dr David Kenyon

**National Star College at 7:30pm**

An account of over ten years of battlefield archaeology in France and Flanders, including material on identifying excavated casualties, and on producing archaeological TV programmes. David is one of the UK's leading experts on archaeology of the First World War.

**Sunday, 16 October at 2pm**

**Gloucester Military Heritage Walk**

Please see overleaf for details.

**Monday, 21 November at 7.30pm**

Our AGM this year will be on 21 November and everyone is welcome. If you would like to attend, please let Peter know. We do need to have an idea of numbers to book a suitable venue.

**Tuesday, 13 December**

*Members' Meeting*

**National Star College at 7:30pm**

For this meeting we will draw on the expertise and knowledge of our members. We aim to have five ten-minute presentations and if you would like to take part, please let Peter know as soon as possible.

## 40549 Sergeant Leslie Howard Surman MM & Bar 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment

Leslie Surman was born in Birmingham on 7 March 1897. He was educated at Cromwell Street PE School, Birmingham, Bishops Cleeve PE School and Cheltenham Grammar School between 1908 and 1912, after which he was employed as a clerk in the office of the Medical Officer for Health in the Borough. He enlisted as No 1997 in E Coy of the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment in Cheltenham, but was later transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment.

He served in France and was awarded the Military Medal for his part in the Battle of Cambrai, where the battalion played a major part in November, advancing from Villers Plouich to Masnieres, a distance of some four miles, but losing their Colonel, shot dead by a sniper, in the process. Sergeant Surman gained a bar to his Military Medal for his leadership on 7 August 1918 in the valley of the



River Lys, when a daylight patrol encountered a German platoon, attacking them hand to hand, killing two and taking two prisoners. He was in the same area in October 1918 during the advance towards Courtrai and was killed during the taking of the village of Ledeghem, where the 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters advanced to capture this strongpoint through thick mist, which had been turned into dense fog by a barrage of high explosive mixed with smoke shells.

Sergeant Leslie Surman was one of only two Cheltonians who gained a second award bar to the Military Medal for bravery in the field. He is buried at Ledeghem Military Cemetery and commemorated on War memorials at Bishops Cleeve, Southam and Pate's Grammar School.

*(Taken from Leaving All that was Dear - Cheltenham and the Great War by J Devereux and G Sacker)*

### Gloucester Military Heritage Walk Sunday 16 October at 2pm

Bob Brunsdon has kindly agreed to conduct a Gloucester Military Heritage Walk which will start at the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars' memorial at the Cathedral (in front of the West Door), move through to St Mary de Lode and thence up Westgate Street to the Cross, down Southgate Street and finish at the docks where we can dive into a local hostelry. It will encompass Gloucester's military origins with the arrival of the Romans, through the siege and the castle, and encompass both the First and Second World Wars. We will look at the names on various memorials, buildings associated with people who fought in the wars, and include a

brief look at the city's war poets, the hospitals and filling factory etc, and touch on the bombing raids on the city, fire-watching, the development of the jet and a few general bits and pieces (not necessarily war-related but pertinent to the city's history). It will last between an hour and 90 minutes.

There will be a nominal charge of £3 per person, payable on the day, which will go directly to Branch funds. All are welcome.

If you're interested in joining the walk please notify Peter, Bob or Hilary as soon as possible - there are no limitations to numbers attending.

#### Contact details



**The Western Front Association**  
BM Box 1914  
London  
WC1N 3XX

0207 118 1914

[office@westernfrontassociation.com](mailto:office@westernfrontassociation.com)

[www.westernfrontassociation.com](http://www.westernfrontassociation.com)

#### Cheltenham & Gloucester Branch President

Professor Peter Simkins MBE FRHistS

#### Branch Chairman

Peter Gill

2 Queensholme, Pittville Circus Road, Cheltenham GL52 2QE

01242 691 422 • [chairman@cgwfa.org.uk](mailto:chairman@cgwfa.org.uk)

#### Branch Treasurer & Newsletter Editor

Hilary Jennings

4 St Stephen's Road, Cheltenham GL51 3AA

01242 243 927 • [newsletter@cgwfa.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@cgwfa.org.uk)

#### Branch Website

[www.cgwfa.org.uk](http://www.cgwfa.org.uk)

*"When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today."*