



## CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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### Welcome!

Next week I'm hoping that you might be able to join me at the Cheltenham Playhouse when I present a play that I have written and am currently touring. The play is entitled *Meet Tommy Atkins* and it aims to portray the experiences of a typical 'Tommy' both during the Great War and after. I can assure you that my call for support is purely on behalf of the branch - all profits from the performance (ie after the theatre's deductions) are going to branch funds. This amounts to over half of the ticket price and therefore the possibility of securing the viability of the branch in the mid term is very strong. Of course everyone is welcome so please do spread the word - I regularly perform the play in schools as part of their curriculum, so it is suitable for younger members of your family as well. If anyone would like to assist on the evening by handing out branch calendars and membership forms please let me know - you would be most welcome!

Thank you to all those who purchased the Christmas quiz sheets - again valuable funds

have been raised. I shall be announcing the winner this evening!

The Centre for War Studies, Department of History, University of Birmingham is presenting a prestigious series of lectures to commemorate the anniversary of the First World War.

#### **Tuesday 7 March**

*100 Years of Shell Shock: Gone but not forgotten* by Professor Sir Simon Wessely (Regius Professor of Psychiatry, King's College London)

#### **Tuesday 14 March**

*A Religious War?* by Professor Adrian Gregory (University of Oxford)

#### **Tuesday 21 March**

*1917 Revisited* by Professor David Stevenson (London School of Economics and Political Science)

The lectures will run from 5.30pm to 7pm, in the Arts Building Lecture Theatre 1 (first floor). All are welcome and admission is free. Please contact Jonathan Boff on [j.f.boff@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.f.boff@bham.ac.uk) with any queries.

**Peter**

### Future events

#### **Tuesday, 21 February**

*Meet Tommy Atkins*

**Cheltenham Playhouse**

**Bath Road, Cheltenham GL53 7HG**

**at 7:45pm**

*On August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914, with the declaration of war between Britain and Germany, reservist Tommy Atkins is immediately called up to serve his country. Within weeks he sees his first action in the fields of France and subsequently experiences the full scale of life in the Western Front trenches of the First World War - the horror, the pain, the misery, the boredom and even the moments of joy.*

This play, written and performed by Peter, details through the eyes of a simple 'Tommy' the reality of war. From the beginning of the war to the end, Private Tommy Atkins was there. This is his story.

The tickets are £10 and can be obtained from the Playhouse Box Office on 01242 522852 or online at [www.cheltplayhouse.org.uk](http://www.cheltplayhouse.org.uk).

This is a fundraising event for the branch so please spread the word.

#### **Tuesday, 14 March**

*Pyramids and Fleshpots: The Egyptian, Senussi and Eastern Mediterranean Campaigns 1914-16*  
Stuart Hadaway

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

Stuart's talk is based on his book of the same name which gives an overview of the campaigns in and around Egypt, including the Battle of the Suez Canal, support for Gallipoli, and the advance across the Sinai.

#### **Tuesday, 11 April**

*Remembering Bungo - An appreciation of the life and career of Field Marshal Lord Byng of Vimy*  
William Franklin

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

Field Marshal Lord Byng of Vimy is a largely forgotten figure of the First World War. The talk will examine Byng's major involvement in the battles of Vimy Ridge and Cambrai in 1917 and his response to the Ludendorff Offensive, and 100 Days campaign in 1918. Also his background and early life will be looked at.

## 22053 Private Lionel Victor Gray 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Infantry

Lionel Victor (Vic) Gray was born in 1894, the son of Mrs Alexandra Gray of 29 Lansdown, Stroud. He emigrated to Canada in 1912 and when the war was declared volunteered at once, arriving in England with the first contingent of Canadian troops. After training he and his unit went to France on 1 April 1915 and he was soon wounded in action, although not seriously.

At Christmas 1915, following a period of leave, he went back to join his unit and took part in the Battle of Mount Sorrel, near Ypres, between 2 - 13 June 1916.

At seven minutes past 1pm on 2 June, after a vicious artillery bombardment which lasted two hours, German assault troops, who had been secreted in underground bunkers opposite the Canadian Corps left their trenches and overwhelmed the defenders before they had



chance to organise themselves. There had been no prior indication of the German intentions. Despite their initial victory, the lost trenches were re-taken from the Germans by the Canadians ten days later. Both sides lost over 5,000 killed, missing or wounded in this action.

Private Gray was killed on the second day of this engagement and, having no known grave, is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial. He is also commemorated on the St Paul's Church Memorial (as V Gray) but his connection with Cheltenham is unknown.

His brothers Alec, who served with the Gloucesters and the RAMC, and Douglas, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Welsh Guards, were both wounded during the war.

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

### The Battle of Arras - 100 Years

Various events and exhibitions have been organised in Arras to mark the centenary of the battle.

#### 18 March to 16 May

**Faces of the Battle of Arras** - a town trail showing a photographic exhibition featuring portraits of soldiers serving during the battle.

#### 18 March to 11 June

**Witnesses** at the Museum of Fine Arts.

An exhibition on loan from the Canadian War Museum showing works by soldiers serving in Artois in 1917.

**(Re)Trenches** at the Museum of Fine Arts.

A trench reconstruction in the main courtyard.

#### 1917: Saint-Vaast Abbey

An exhibition at the Abbey of photographs and eye-witness accounts to discover and remember the story of the Abbey during the Great War.

#### 2 to 12 April

**Poppy of peace - Victory Medal** at the Place des Heros.

A participative work which honours the New Zealand soldiers who fought in the Great War.

#### 8 April

**Inter-religious Ceremony** at Saint-Vaast Cathedral commemorating the men of all faiths who fell during the Great War.

**Flowers in the gun barrel** at Casino.

A theatre work based on authentic accounts and chronicles from the front.

#### 9 April at 6.30am

**Dawn ceremony** at the Wellington Tunnels, Memorial to the Battle of Arras.

A memorial ceremony paying tribute to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who fought in the battle.

### Contact details

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