



## CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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### Welcome!

Our Branch Tour this year, *Severn and Somme*, will run from 14 to 17 September. Centered at the Holiday Inn at Arras, the tour will explore associations between Gloucestershire and the 1916 Battle of the Somme, focussing on personalities and units from the county that took part in the battle. It will include battlefield walks, a museum visit and an interpretative exploration of the events around La Boisselle on 3<sup>rd</sup> July (resulting in VCs for Lt Col Carton de Wiart and Private Turrall, both of whom have local connections), as well as visits to sites familiar and not-so-familiar. The cost per person is £440 for a double room and £495 for a single room. The cost includes packed lunches for the Friday and Saturday, plus museum entry. Our tours are run on a 'not for profit basis'. There are application forms available tonight. Places are limited so if you would like to join us please get your application form in as soon as possible.

There will be a Rededication Service at the Wayside Cross in Woodchester on 10 June at 4pm. The Wayside Cross was the first War

Memorial in this country. The service will be attended by the Princess Royal and representatives from numerous organisations. School children from all the local schools will be present to lay flowers. 5,000 people came to the the first dedication and the organisers are hoping for a bigger attendance this time. For more information please pick up a copy of the Press Release which is available tonight or contact George Bastin at [gab001@sovision.co.uk](mailto:gab001@sovision.co.uk).

The many years of hard work by Philippe Gorczynski and his group of dedicated volunteers will come to fruition later this year when the Mk IV salvaged tank *Deborah* (D51) is moved during June from her present location in a barn in Flesquieres, near Cambrai, to a purpose-built museum, but still located in the same village where she became a casualty of shellfire during the attack on the Hindenburg Line. The museum will open on 26 November which will mark the actual centenary of that action, part of the Battle of Cambrai 1917.

*Peter*

### Future events

**Tuesday, 13 June**

*Gloucestershire and the Somme*

Bob Brunsdon

National Star College at 7:30pm

*Adrian Carton de Wiart*



Bob's presentation commemorates the county's association with the Battle of the Somme through the stories of individual soldiers from the county who fought there, both on the First Day and in subsequent operations.

Through their experiences, we will also examine the role of various battalions of the Gloucestershire Regiment in this long and historic battle, not least that of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion under the leadership of the charismatic Adrian Carton de Wiart.

**Tuesday, 11 July**

*A Moonlight Massacre: The night operation on the Passchendaele Ridge, 2 December 1917*

Michael LoCicero

National Star College at 7:30pm

Popularly known as 'Passchendaele', the infamous Third Battle of Ypres was the British Empire's major military effort for 1917. Launched in Belgium on 31 July of that year, the great offensive was terminated by the British high command in mid-November after three and one-half months of fierce fighting. However, one more large-scale attack, ignored in most of the related literature, was sanctioned for early December with tragic consequences.



## Major Henry Sullivan Becher 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles

Sullivan Becher was born in India on 9 April 1876, the only son of Lieutenant Colonel S E and Mrs C A Becher, of Kingswood House, Wotton-under-Edge.

He was educated at Marlborough College and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst and was gazetted as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in January 1896, joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, in India, in April of that year.

One year later he transferred to the Indian Army, joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurka Rifles. He saw service in a number of campaigns in northern India, including the North West Frontier and for a time served as ADC to the Commander in Chief of the Indian Army. Several promotions were attained over the years and he became a Major on 22 January 1914. An enthusiastic sportsman, he represented the Regiment at polo on several occasions.



At the outbreak of war the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles were posted to France and on 2 November 1914 the battalion was in action in the Neuve Chapelle area. In *The Indian Corps in France* by Merewether and Smith, there is a description of how Sullivan Becher met his death that day: *One shell blew four men into the air, with the debris of the parapet, rifle and a machine gun and killed Lieutenant Lucas while rallying his men. At the same time Major Becher was killed while trying to get his men back to the cover of an old trench.*

Major Becher's body was not recovered from the battlefield until May 1915, when he was buried near to where he had fallen. The grave was lost in subsequent fighting and he is now commemorated on the Neuve Chapelle Indian Memorial to the Missing and also on the Wotton-under-Edge War Memorial.

(Taken from *First World War Heroes of Wotton-under-Edge* by Bill Griffiths)

## Anzac Day

This Anzac Day, Tuesday 25 April, my friend Rick Cavaney from New Zealand accompanied me to visit the ten Australians who lie in Cheltenham Cemetery from WW1. These ten soldiers were being treated at some of the Voluntary Aid Hospitals in the town but most succumbed to the effects of gas poisoning plus the effects of the great Influenza pandemic of 1918. We were escorted to the grave site by a very helpful member of the cemetery staff



where we placed crosses, poppies and a few Australian flags in remembrance of these fellow countrymen so far from home. Several pictures were sent to Australia and some will appear in the next RSL magazine down under.

I also sent this picture to a research colleague at the Victorian Federation and it

will be included on the website [victoriancollections.net.au](http://victoriancollections.net.au).

Ian Hollingsbee

### Contact details

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