



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

I sincerely hope that you had a healthy and happy Christmas and may I take this opportunity to personally wish you a very happy New Year.

For all of us with an interest in the Great War, 2018 is an important year and I feel certain will be a memorable one, especially as we near November. From now until then we have some excellent speakers booked for the branch with a good variety of subject matter so I hope that you will be able to join us at as many meetings as possible.

As many of you will know, the branch was bequeathed Cecil Ballantine's Great War book collection to sell for branch funds. In the collection was *Leaving All That Was Dear - Cheltenham and the Great War*. This book is highly sought after and is very hard to find. I took the decision to withhold this from general sale and instead offer it for sale by auction - in the first instance to WFA members and our

regular attendees. Anyone interested in the book (which is in good condition) can send me a 'closed' bid offer via email (petergill@live.co.uk). I have set a reserve price and will sell it on behalf of the branch for the highest price above the reserve. Should the reserve not be met I'll put the book on eBay. Closing date for bids will be January 16th.

At our next meeting in February we will be holding an Unwanted Christmas Presents Auction to raise some funds for the branch. So please bring them along and we will start the auction at 7.15pm.

Our Branch Tour this year, *British Forces in Italy 1917-1918*, will be from 12 to 16 September and based in Asiago. There are details available tonight and if you are interested please let Hilary know as soon as possible - treasurer@cgwfa.org.uk.

Peter

Future events

Tuesday, 13 February

Monty and Rommel in the First World War
Dr Peter Caddick-Adams

National Star College at 7.30pm

The names of Field Marshals Montgomery and Rommel are familiar to us all. But what did they do in the First World War? How did they learn the trades of command and leadership? Based on his book, *Monty and Rommel: Parallel Lives*, Peter will bring these two enigmatic characters to life in terms of their 1914-18 service.

Peter has been a lecturer in Military and Security Studies at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham, since 1999. He specialises in current defence analysis, military doctrine, military history, terrorism, psychological information and military-media operations. Peter regularly broadcasts on TV and radio, and is the author of numerous books, including *By God They Can Fight*, *The Fight For Iraq* and *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell*.

Tuesday, 13 March

Commemorative Art Medals of WWI
Mike Cerrino

National Star College at 7.30pm

Mike's light-hearted talk looks at the fascinating history of rare cast-metal Great War commemorative medals, privately produced in Germany, Austria, Hungary and France. These are very different to military medals and some, such as the Lusitania Medal, became famous in their own right.



The Lusitania Medallion

Armourer William King (132458)

Royal Navy – HMS Viknor

William King was almost 50 years old when he re-joined the Royal Navy at the start of the Great War. Born at Northfleet, Kent on 30 September 1864, his early naval career had been with the Royal Marine Artillery. Serving on board the heavy cruiser HMS Terrible he would have visited South Africa, during the Boer War and the China Station.

By 1911 he was in receipt of a naval pension and was living in lodgings at Bridge Street, Cairncross, Stroud, working as an engineers' storekeeper at Dudbridge Iron Works.

Following the outbreak of war the former Blue Star Line passenger ship Atrato (recently acquired by the Viking Cruising Company Ltd and renamed Viking) was requisitioned by the Royal Navy and converted into an Armed Merchant Cruiser, HMS Viknor. The ship was attached to the 10th Cruiser

Squadron, operating on blockade duty between Scotland and Iceland. William King was a Petty Officer on board.



On 13 January 1915 Viknor was sailing in heavy seas approximately 11 miles west of Tory Island, off the coast of County Donegal. It is believed that it struck one of the mines laid by the German auxiliary minelayer SS Berlin in October the previous year, which had caused the sinking of the dreadnought battleship HMS Audacious. All Viknor's ship's company of 22 officers and 273 ratings were lost, which included 25 men from the Newfoundland Division of the Royal Naval Reserve, who are now commemorated on the Newfoundland Memorial Park, Beaumont Hamel.

Armourer William King is commemorated on Panel 8 of the Portsmouth Naval Memorial.

Graham Adams

The scanning of Pension Records

You will be pleased to learn that the scanning of Pension Records and other sets of records such as Naval Ledgers has commenced. Ancestry has undertaken to scan and digitally make available the approximately eight million records that the WFA has saved from destruction. These records comprise upwards of six million cards relating to soldiers' (and sailors and members of the RFC/RAF) pension claims relating to their service in the First World War.

Pension record cards of soldiers who were killed in the war number approximately one million and these cards often yield fascinating information that cannot be found on other military or genealogical records. However,

arguably the more important aspect of these records are the cards that relate to those men who survived the war. Often this is the only record that still exists of an individual's war service and is especially useful as it often links the genealogical record (such as home address) to the military record (regimental details). For this reason the cards can often be used to positively identify individuals who were believed to have served in the war, but without any way of knowing with which regiment they served.

Further information will be made available as the processing of the records proceeds over coming months.

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