



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

There is a very interesting new documentary on British composer George Butterworth which is being shown at the bijou Sherborne Cinema in Gloucester. Butterworth, who was regarded as one of the prime movers in a radical era for British music, lost his life on the Western Front during the Somme Offensive of 1916. He was aged 31 years. This film explores his life and music and you can catch a viewing of it this Wednesday (September 11th) at the cinema in Sherborne Street GL1 3BY. There are three viewings - 2.30pm, 6pm and 8.30pm with tickets available on the door.

Last month I asked for volunteers for ten minute Christmas talks for our December Meeting - just a nudge to say that there are still slots to fill if you feel so inclined to put your hat in the ring.

Andy Hinks has arranged a visit to the Machine Gun Collection at Swindon and the provisional

dates are either Saturday 26 or Sunday 27 October. Eleven members have shown interest so far but he can accommodate more, so if anyone else is interested please contact Andy on speakers@cgwfa.org.uk. Each visitor should make a donation to the collection and in addition, if a blank firing demonstration is to be performed then we will need to cover the cost of the blank rounds. Andy will have a final cost in early October depending on the numbers as well as finalising the date.

The WFA's Cenotaph Committee is planning for the 2019 ceremony. The Metropolitan Police have confirmed that they will be supporting the WFA Cenotaph event this year and will continue to do so. After the ceremony at 11am there will be the usual service at the Guards Chapel with a lunch at the Albert Pub afterwards. Further details will be confirmed on the WFA website and in the next *Stand To!*

Peter

Future branch events

Tuesday, 8 October

More to this case than meets the eye

David Saunders

National Star College at 7.30pm

In the early evening of 3 July 1918 at Pont Coulogne, Calais, 40 year old Detective Sergeant Harold Arthur Collison DCM, MSM, MFP, a mature and experienced policeman, made a decision that ultimately led to his murder at the hand of a British Officer. To this day that decision has never been properly explained.

David takes a policeman's view of that decision and some of the other mysterious elements surrounding this case.



Tuesday, 12 November

*The Learning Process in Practice:
Tactics and Training in the BEF 1916-1918*

Professor Peter Simkins

National Star College at 7.30pm

Our President, Peter Simkins examines the 'learning curve' or change in practices undertaken by the BEF as a result of the Somme experience and expressed in contemporary tactical and training documentation. He calls on his vast experience as a leading academic, testing the outcomes in battle as victory loomed in 1918, that support such influential works as his book *From the Somme to Victory*.



Private Alfred Joseph Fletcher (36794) 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Alfred Joseph Fletcher was born in Tewkesbury on 23 April 1895 to John Fletcher, a Stableman/Groom, and Mary Ann Fletcher (formerly Booth). In 1901, the family of five daughters and two sons was living in Barton Street. By 1911, John was working as a Labourer and they were living in High Street, Tewkesbury. Alfred was educated at the Council Schools in Chance Street, after which he became a Blacksmith with Milners, who held him in 'high esteem'; subsequently, he worked for Thomas Walker, a fairground ride manufacturer. Alfred worshipped at the Congregational Church in Barton Street.

Alfred's obituary in the Tewkesbury Record claimed that he was 'one of the few remaining Territorials'. He probably volunteered in late 1914, spending up to two years in home service battalions before being sent overseas sometime in 1916 when he was posted to the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. The battalion was part of 3rd Infantry Brigade in the 1st Division, one of the first British formations to move to France in 1914, landing at Le Havre on 13 August.

The obituary also reported that Alfred was gassed and returned home for a period of five weeks for treatment at Mitton Red Cross Hospital. Whilst there, he was entertained by a choir which included his niece; his smile and

wave was the 'last memory of him' that the girl remembered. She did recall that, when he returned in the summer of 1918, he was acting as a dispatch rider but was wounded by a sniper and died of his wounds on 27 September 1918. However, the family's version of events conflicts with both a newspaper report of the time that he was 'killed by a shell' and by the battalion's War Diary. Before Alfred was killed on 29 September, the situation was reported as quiet, with the battalion mainly in support or reserve; no casualties were incurred during the previous week. Late on 28 September, the battalion moved to the Gricourt area, north of St Quentin, in readiness for an attack the following day; this was part of a bigger offensive known as the Battle of the St Quentin Canal, an attempt by the British Army to breach the supposedly impregnable Hindenburg Line. The attack by the 1st Gloucesters on 29 September was successful as was the overall battle; the War Diary comments at the end of the day that 'By dark both second and third objectives had been gained. Casualties were 8 Other Ranks killed and 47 wounded'.

Private Alfred Joseph Fletcher was reported as killed in action on 29 September 1918 and it seems most likely that he was one of the eight casualties referred to in the War Diary for that day. He is buried in Bellicourt British Cemetery, which was created after the battle.

Extracted from a biography in 'A Noble Band of Heroes' published by the Tewkesbury Historical Society.



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