



## CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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### Welcome!

I do hope you had a lovely Christmas that was safe, warm and healthy and may I wish you a very Happy New Year! I want to reiterate what a fabulous programme of talks Andy Hinks has put together for this year (including of course tonight's by Mike Sheil). So in order that you don't miss any do take a calendar of events home with you today - and indeed take any number that you wish to distribute to friends, family or other interested parties. And, of course, you can always keep an eye on our website ([www.cgwfa.org.uk](http://www.cgwfa.org.uk)) or our Facebook page.

I reported to you before Christmas the sad news of the passing of Scott Balchin. This I feel is another terrible loss to our branch. Scott was a great supporter of the branch and regular attendee of meetings and will be sorely missed by myself and I'm sure many of you. Please spare a moment's thought for Scott tonight as we remember our Gloucestershire fallen and join with me in sending Scott's family our most heartfelt condolences and best wishes.

There are a couple of WFA online talks this month. On 23 January at 8pm *Elsie and Mairi Go to War* by Diane Atkinson. Elsie Knocker and Mairi Gooden-Chisholm were the only women to nurse on the front line during the Great War and were under constant threat from sniper fire and heavy artillery bombardments. The recipients of seventeen medals for bravery and self-sacrifice, they became known as the 'Madonnas of Pervyse'.

On 30 January at 8pm *TORNADO: Operation Desert Storm 1991* by John Nichol. A total of eleven Tornados were lost in intensive training before the war and during the conflict itself. Twelve aircrew were killed, three badly injured, and seven were taken prisoner. John tells the story of the conflict through the eyes of the jet's crews and their families and will talk about the build up to the conflict.

Members wishing to participate via Zoom will need to register and full details of the events are on the WFA website.

**Peter**

### Future branch events

**Tuesday, 14 February**  
*Missing - Died - Survived:*  
*The Senior Brothers and the Great War*  
Guy Senior  
**The Ed Shed at 7.30pm**

The story of three brothers who fought on the Western Front. Joseph, Walter and George Senior were all born in the Yorkshire town of Wakefield and educated at Wakefield Grammar School. Joseph served with the West Yorkshire Regiment; he would later volunteer for the Royal Flying Corps and saw action over the Ypres battlefield as an observer. Walter also served with the West Yorkshire Regiment taking part in the Battle of the Somme, leading his men on a daring raid of The Triangle in the Thiépval sector. George served with the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and was later attached to the Sherwood Foresters. Only one would come home.

**Tuesday, 14 March**  
*The Artists Rifles in the Great War*  
Michael Orr  
**The Ed Shed at 7.30pm**

The 28th Battalion of the London Regiment (the Artists Rifles) made a unique contribution to the history of the First World War, as Michael will explain in this talk. The 1st Battalion served with the BEF in France and Flanders but this was the least significant part of the Artists Rifles' wartime history. More importantly over 10,000 men were commissioned into the British Army, Royal Flying Corps or Royal Air Force and even the Royal Navy. But Michael will argue that the most significant contribution of the Artists Rifles has been in how we remember the First World War and the images, words and even sounds that we associate with the war.

## Chief Mechanic Charles William Printer (313869) Royal Air Force - Airship NS3

Charles William Printer was born into a farming family at Bulley, on the edge of the Forest of Dean, on 1 April 1895. He was the only son of the three children born to William Isaac Printer and his wife Lucretia Mary. His father died when he was four years old and at the time of the Great War his mother lived at Linden Road, Gloucester



*The crew of Airship NS3*

After leaving Sir Thomas Rich's School, Gloucester, in January 1911 Charles entered the Royal Navy as a Boy Artificer or engineer. Upon completion of his engineering training, he joined the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) and achieved the rank of Petty Officer 3 in January 1917. He transferred to the Royal Air Force in March 1918, following the merger of the RNAS with the Royal Flying Corps. He became an Airship Engineer at East Fortune Station, near Edinburgh in July 1917.

From April 1918 Airship NS3 had been carrying out escort duties in the North Sea, for convoys travelling to and from Scandinavia. At about 17.10 on 21 June 1918, it set off with a crew of ten, including Chief Engineer Printer, to escort a south bound convoy, which it located off Aberdeen at about 19.00. Just after midnight a storm blew up and with winds reaching 50 mph the airship became increasingly difficult to control due to severe turbulence. Strenuous attempts were made to make landfall and to keep the airship afloat but the severe winds drove it back out to sea. It lost pressure and hydrogen gas and eventually the stern section

hit the sea at about 70 mph. The power car was ripped off and sank instantly with two engineers inside, one of whom may have been Chief Engineer Printer. The airship collapsed into the sea and five crew members were drowned; the captain plus four others survived to be picked up by a destroyer.

An officer wrote of Chief Mechanic Printer: *'He was a very keen and clever engineer and a very hard worker, never complaining even under the most trying circumstances. It is typical of him that he carried out the orders for the engines up to the last moment with extra-ordinary promptness, although in imminent danger and this probably reduced the loss of life.'*

Lost at sea, Charles William Printer is commemorated on the Hollybrook Memorial at Southampton and on the Gloucester War Memorial; he was 23 years of age.

*Graham Adams*

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