



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

This month I am very sorry to let you know that we were told recently of the passing of long-time branch member David Rogers. David was one of our very first attendees and quickly became a popular and supportive figure at meetings. When we instigated the Gloucestershire War Graves Project, David enthusiastically became involved and despite being unable to attend many meetings in recent years he maintained his role on the War Graves Adoption Project to the end. David also gave me great personal encouragement and support from almost the first meeting. I am sure that you will join with me in sending our deepest condolences to David's wife Anne in these difficult times for her.

On 4 November we shall be running another pop up military history day at The Folk. This is your opportunity to seek assistance in your research of family members involved in the Great War. Come along with as much information as you have and test our resources!

Also on 4 November at The Folk there will be two performances (4.30pm and 7.30pm) of a new 45 minute play entitled *Somehow, Somewhere in France* which tells the true story of five brothers from the Welshman family from the Westgate Street area of Gloucester during the First World War. It explores their lives before the conflict and the dangers and loss experienced during this time. Written by John Bassett the script is based on thorough historical research from St Nicholas Church records and other archives. For tickets please visit: www.ticketsource.co.uk/gloucester-civic-trust.

The next evening talk at the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum is on 4 October at 7pm: *The Poets of Gloucestershire: In War and Peace* with Lieutenant Colonel Rob Dixon. Tickets are £5 for non-members, £2 for members, and are available from the museum and on their website: www.soldiersofglos.com.

Peter

Future branch events

Tuesday, 10 October
Birdie – more than 'Soul of Anzac'
Richard Farrimond
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

Field Marshal Lord Birdwood of Anzac and Totnes was given the accolade 'Soul of Anzac' in General Hamilton's second despatches from Gallipoli. Birdwood was one of a very few who left those shores with his reputation intact, perhaps even enhanced. He took his beloved Anzacs to the Western Front where he became the ninth longest serving Corps Commander before finishing the war as one of Haig's five army commanders. This talk looks at Birdwood's distinguished life of service – personal, military and political.



Tuesday, 14 November
*Retribution to Redemption:
The 35th (Bantam) Division, 1914-1918*
Professor Peter Simkins MBE FRHistS
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

Few episodes in the massive expansion of the British Army in 1914-1915 more graphically illustrate the haphazard, improvised and often reactive nature of that process than the story of the 'Bantam' experiment and, in particular, the experience of the 35th (Bantam) Division. What began as a well-intentioned attempt to harness the patriotic spirit of men who, due to their diminutive stature, would otherwise have been denied the chance to serve their country, led, in reality, to disappointment and tragedy, principally because no one, at the outset, appears to have carefully considered the full implications of the scheme they had initiated.

Private William Joseph Hopkins (8032) 2nd Battalion, Welsh Regiment

William Joseph Hopkins was born at Charlton Kings in 1884, one of a family of nine children born to Joseph William Hopkins and his wife Fanny.

On 2 October 1903, at the age of 19, he joined the Army in Cardiff and was posted to the Welsh (or 'Welch') Regiment. Unfortunately no service record survives but he is likely to have joined the 1st Battalion and seen service in India. A typical term of engagement was seven years with the Colours and five in the Reserve. If he entered the Reserve in 1910, he would have been liable for immediate recall upon the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914. The 1911 Census records him as living in Napier Street in the Barton area of Gloucester and his occupation as a lamplighter in the service of the Gloucester Gas Company.

Joseph (as he appears to have been known) married Jane Nellie Townsend in 1908 and the couple had four children born between that year and 1913.

Having been recalled to the Colours, Joseph was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the Welsh Regiment and went with the battalion to France on 13 August 1914: the battalion becoming part of 3 Brigade, 1st Division. The 2nd Welsh took



part in the Retreat from Mons and on 1 September 1914 were located at Villers-Cotterets. The tide had now turned for the Allies and it was the turn of the Germans to retreat across the River Marne and the River Aisne.

On 14 September, on a foggy morning, 3 Brigade, including 2nd Welsh, was tasked with trying to establish a foothold on the Chemin des Dames, which overlooked the Aisne valley. It was a day of attack and counterattack and once the fog lifted the British artillery managed to suppress any German counterattacks and with great determination the 2nd Welsh managed to establish themselves on the Beaulne Ridge. The *Official History of the Great War* states that the 14 September 1914 was 'the first day of 'stabilisation' of the battle line ... the beginning, for the British of trench warfare'.

Private Joseph Hopkins was one of twenty-four Other Ranks of the 2nd Welsh killed in action on that day. His body was never recovered and he is commemorated on La Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial to the Missing. His name is also present on the Gloucester War Memorial. His widow, left with four young children, re-married in 1918.

Graham Adams

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