Thame Remembers News

May 2016 № 20

U3A visit to Rouen

An unexpected opportunity was presented to a group from Thame to visit St. Sever Cemetery, Rouen in northern France, on May 10th. We were on the return journey from a Thame and District U3A visit to the Chateaux of the Loire Valley. Non-members were able to join us on this tour, including David Bretherton, who knew that several young soldiers from Thame are buried there.

Rouen was away from the battlefields, but thousands of wounded soldiers were transported to the numerous Commonwealth hospitals which had been set up there. A number of the dead from these hospitals were buried in other cemeteries, but the great majority were taken to the city cemetery of St Sever. In July to September 1916, it was found necessary to begin an extension – over 11,000 young soldiers were buried there.

Thame Remembers crosses were delivered to three graves by three different members of the party, and particularly appropriate that Gill as a former teacher at Lord Williams's school should lay a cross to a former school pupil.

I was also able to pay my respects at the grave of Corporal W Lambert, of the Royal Lancaster Regiment. He was the grandfather of Lesley Read (Gill Read's sister-in-law). As Lesley lives in Canada, she has been unable to visit the grave.

After showing our respects at the gravesides, we stood in silence while David Dodds read the Exhortation. It was the first visit to a War Cemetery for several of the group and a very moving occasion! We felt very humble, but also proud of the meticulous way that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for the last resting-places of our young soldiers, who fought so bravely for their country.

Group manager Gill Bellis laying her cross

We were very grateful for the opportunity that Thame Remembers gave us to visit the graves of these Thame men.

Pauline Woods

Crosses Recently Delivered

5 May 2016

"Boy 1st Class"
Frank Tickner
Royal Navy

RAF Sub-Aqua Team
Scapa Flow
Orkney Is, Scotland

10 May 2016

Corporal
John Howlett DCM
Royal Engineers

Pauline Woods
St Sever Cemetery
Rouen, France

10 May 2016

Trooper
Reginald Farmbrough
Queens Own Oxon Hussars

David Laver
St Sever Cemetery
Rouen, France

10 May 2016

Lance Corporal
Edward Benoni Burgess
South African Scottish Infantry

Gill Bellis
St Sever Cemetery
Rouen, France

20 May 2016

Rifleman
Frank Leslie Soanes
Kings Royal Rifle Corps

Catherine Jones
Grootebeek British Cemetery
Poperinge, Belgium

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Ocean Wreath to Scapa Flow

No less than 18 of Thame's 214 known war casualties were seafarers, ten from WW1 and eight from WW2, only three of whom were buried on dry land. The remaining fifteen went down with their vessels, the wrecks of which are identified as ocean graves, and at locations as far apart as Utsira (Norway) and off the cost of Durban, South Africa.

The wreath approaching the Vanguard Buoy

They include some harrowing stories – a hospital ship torpedoed by a U-boat (a war crime), a Naval flyer killed whilst rehearsing deck landings, and two men from Thame who went down with the Battleship HMS Formidable in Lyme Regis Bay on New Year's Day 1915.

Thame Remembers crosses have already been delivered to the three graves (one in Malta) and a wreath has been delivered at Chatham Naval Memorial to two men remembered there. Two more are remembered at Plymouth, one each at Gosport and Tower Hill, and the remainder on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial where we hope to arrange a special ceremony to honour the nine men from Thame remembered there. These all have been, or will be, delivered by people from Thame as required by our project parameters.

But suppose we could also go a step further? What if we could get out to some of the ocean coordinates and place a wreath on the ocean above the wreck, or even actually dive one or more of the wrecks ? We may not be able to get to them all but every one that we can achieve would add an extra dimension, and poignancy, to the Thame Remembers legacy and if we accept outside help to do so then why not?

21 May 2016

Sergeant
William Ernest Roberts
Queens Own Oxon Hussars

Michael Hutson
Bedford House Cemetery
Ypres, Belgium

22 May 2016

Trooper
Joseph Lovejoy
Queens Own Oxon Hussars

Ian Jones
Templeux-le-Guerard British Cemetery, France

22 May 2016

Private
Alfred Willis
Durham Light Infantry

Margaret Bretherton
Bois-des-Angles British Cemetery, France

23 May 2016

Private
Lewis Rhymes
Gloucestershire Regiment

Allan Hickman
Boulogne Eastern Cemetery, Boulogne-sur-Mer, France

We were therefore very keen to follow up a contact made with the assistance of Group Captain Adrian Burns, Station Commander at RAF Halton, who is also a member of JSSADC (Joint Services Sub Aqua Diving Club). He was able to put us in touch with Chief Instructor Roger 'Ginge' Crook at JSSADC Plymouth, who was about to join an expedition to Scapa Flow and who readily volunteered to take a Thame Remembers wreath to the site of HMS Vanguard, a battleship sunk in 1917 by an internal explosion with the loss of 843 lives including Boy 1st Class Frank Tickner from Thame.

Of course, we couldn't just leave a standard British Legion wreath on the ocean as they are plastic and that would not have been environmentally responsible but a local florist, Soft Pink Flowers of Stromness, Orkney, kindly made up a wreath from red carnations incorporating the Thame Remembers cross. Ginge and his colleagues then set out on Thursday 5th May on the MV Valkyrie, located the marker buoy over the wreck of HMS Vanguard, and placed the floral wreath on the ocean on behalf of Thame Remembers and in memory of young Frank.

Ginge commented later that "It was very moving for us as Service personnel because, even though we had no local connection, he and all his shipmates are ours too". Our thanks go to Ginge and his colleagues for their contribution to Thame Remembers.

The JSSADC team onboard the Valkyrie

Poperinge, Wellington Tunnels and …

A great deal of planning goes into making a successful Battlefield Tour. Everyone agreed that our trip in October last year was a huge success, but we need to build on that and add in some different locations and experiences for next time. And so a small group of us set out during May to recce the possibilities.

We stayed our first night at the Alize hotel in Mouscron, where we are booked for the tour, and so we now know the routine. The rooms are very comfortable, the breakfast ample, and it is a lovely town with a great choice of local eateries for the evenings.

Just outside Ypres we visited the preserved trenches at Hooge, the scene of much hand to hand fighting and early gas and flamethrower attacks, and where in places the opposing lines were barely thirty yards apart – an absolute must for our next tour.

Then on to the small town of Poperinge which, despite being six miles behind the old front line, played a major part in the conflict. The recently renovated Talbot House (Toc H) was a safe haven for the troops and is an inspiration to all who go there today.

Talbot House Poperinge

The walkway in the Tunnels

Moving on to Arras, we visited the Wellington Tunnels (Quarries). Much of WW1 was an underground war and this fully guided tour gives a unique insight into the realities of living, and fighting, in the bowels of the earth. The guided tour lasts about an hour and covers all aspects of the war in Arras. There is a lift down, it is totally safe, and not at all claustrophobic. The audio visuals give a clear understanding of what went on, in what can be a very emotional experience.

Just north of Arras we visited the huge French Memorial at Notre Dame de Lorette where the cemetery seems to go on for ever. But we came especially to see a new memorial that transcends nationalities, focusing instead on the individuals. Inaugurated by the French in 2014 it contains the names of 580,000 men of all nationalities who died in the Nord / Pas de Calais areas of France, and has to be seen to really appreciate the enormity of the sacrifice in just one theatre of operations. For contrast we also went to the German Cemetery at Fricourt, another possibility for next year's Battlefield Tour.

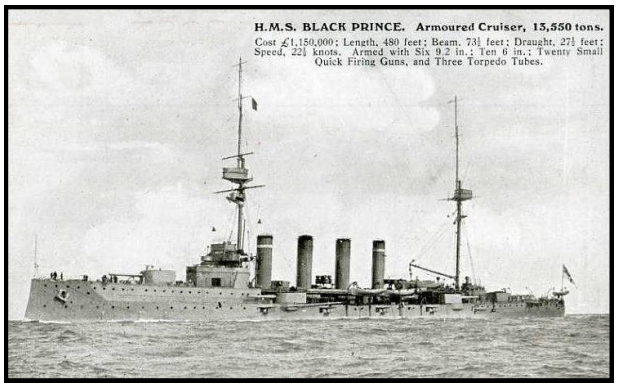
Having done our research we can now work on the itinerary for next May, adding these new destinations into the mix.

The Ring of Remembrance , the elliptical war memorial, at Notre Dame de Lorette.

Mike and Catherine find the name of a man from Thame among the 580,000 names, whilst Allan and Ian look on.

Battle of Jutland

The centenary of the Battle of Jutland is high in the news as we go to press and Thame Remembers one of our own among the 8,600 who lost their lives in the battle.



230875 Able Seaman Frederick George Beames Hake was one of the 875 crew on board HMS Black Prince when it went down with all hands on the night of the 31st May 1916. Frederick had served 12 years in the Royal Navy up to 1913 when he joined the police and served at Thame for about a year before being recalled to the Navy at the outbreak of war.

Thame museum

This newsletter is printed and published by Thame Museum Trust and distributed free to all

This paper is intended as a digest of news items about the Thame Remembers project to keep the people of Thame up to date with what is happening.

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New names for the War Memorial

In the course of the research behind the Thame Remembers project we have so far identified 36 names which do not appear on the Thame War Memorial but which we feel should rightly be there. We can find no evidence of any selection process used at the time, in Thame or elsewhere, so it is understandable that some men were missed if there was nobody to shout for them. We therefore presented the Town Council with our proposals for the criteria for adding names retrospectively and are pleased to announce that these were debated, agreed, and are now adopted.

Anyone can now put forward a name with supporting evidence, which will then be considered by a small committee of councillors.

The Criteria:

Names shall be eligible for inclusion on the Thame and/or Moreton War Memorial(s) if they meet the following criteria:

They served in HM Forces or Merchant Navy or other uniformed organisation in a theatre of conflict, or as part of any officially sanctioned international (UN/ NATO) deployment, and died during the period of that conflict.

and

They were born in the parish of Thame, spent a significant part of their life in Thame, or their close family lived in the parish of Thame at the time of their death.

Notes: *(These notes form part of the criteria)*

1. *HM Forces shall include all commonwealth or empire forces operating in support of a campaign or medal earning theatre of operation.*
2. *The period of the conflict shall normally be that declared by The Commonwealth War Graves Commission or the MOD. Deaths outside those dates may be considered where there are extenuating circumstances.*
3. *The parish of Thame is that pertaining at the time of the person's birth or death.*
4. *A significant part of their life is defined as normally more than three years or having carried out a public role within the town. Living or working in the town at the time of their enlistment would be considered significant.*
5. *Close family is defined as being; grandparent, parent, guardian, wife, husband, brother, sister or child.*
6. *No judgement should be made about their lifestyle or the circumstances of their death.*

Thame Remembers is a project of Thame, Oxfordshire to commemorate the centenary of World War One by researching those from Thame who fell in all conflicts worldwide, and remembering them by placing a Thame Cross on their grave or memorial wherever in the world that may be. If you feel that you can help please contact Dave on 01844 21 5178.