

“THREE HEROES “

Pilgrimage Tour 7-11 APRIL 2014

AMIENS, YPRES, MEMORIALS AND CEMETERIES

This **Pilgrimage Tour** will be referred to as a “Tour” for ease of reference. There were 20 persons present and it was organised under the auspices of the Society of Old Framlinghamians (“SOF”). As we needed a minimum number of 20 attendees to make a viable cost for everybody many ‘non-Fram’ individuals were targeted and organisations such as AROPS, The Royal British Legion and the Royal Signals Association. Although the tour emanated from a first meeting three years ago with the Framlingham College Headmaster, sadly no College staff or pupils were able to attend.

The **Three Heroes** in the title are Framlinghamians - Lt G M Flowerdew VC, L/Cpl W H Hewitt VC and Grp Capt P C (“Pick”) Pickard DSO & 2 Bars, DFC and Czech War Cross.

Christopher Pickard (nephew) and family friend Adrian Orchard (G72-79) were unable to join us in Amiens at the last minute and Michael Woods (Pickard nephew) sent his good wishes.

Nine Old Framlinghamians attended and the driver had Served and showed so much interest in the events of the tour he is counted as a member; he joined in all the tributes and social activities which did not take him away for coach manoeuvre duties. It is therefore important to start the report with a list of attendees to see their interest in the event. Christian names are used throughout and hence they are listed in that alphabetical order. Unfortunately, Mr Bell-Wright was unable to accompany his wife at the last minute.

ATTENDEES

OF is the designation for old pupils: the capital letter denotes the House attended and the figures denote the years at the Junior School and the College. The party comprised:

Albert Thurling, National Service in Royal Signals 47-52, Despatch Rider in Orkneys

Andrew Wright, R 48-57, Past President SOF; RAF 59-61, Air Traffic Controller, Nicosia

Bill Collard, S 55-58, Father at Fram with Pickard; Vice-President SOF; Amiens Raid historian

Brian Smith, S 53-56, Past President SOF; NS in Royal Signals 59-61, Cypher i/c Signals Section
Langeleben Listening Post

Clive Smith, S 54-58, Interest in British History and OF Heroes

Chris Essex, K 69-75, President Designate SOF, Editor Overseas Bag and Distinguished Section

Dave Allen, 30 yrs Queens Waterman (Ret’d); Marine Transport Consultant, Watermans Company and City of London interests

David Mitchell, R 50-57, Vice-President SOF; Golfing Society; interest in war history

Georgina Sayer, wife of Richard, Poet with specialism in WWI

James Ruddock-Broyd, (Joint Leader), G 46-52, NS in Royal Signals 1960 & 1961, Moving School of Signals; Past Editor OF Magazine

Jean Smith, wife of Clive, visiting uncle’s place of rest

Margaret Wright, wife of Andrew, visiting by proxy grave of uncle

Neil Flowerdew, RAF 1964-2004, Wing Commander, Great nephew of Gordon Flowerdew VC

Nick Lephard, NS in Royal Signals Ripon 52-54, RSM’s Assistant, a Batman & a Waiter

Paul Timms, (Driver) REME 1969-76 & 1982-88

Penny Bell-Wright, QARANC 1977-83, Royal British Legion City Hall Branch Committee & Richmond Branch Secretary, Greater London District Committee

Peter Gascoyne-Lockwood, (Guide & Joint Leader) R 57-64 Queen’s Regiment 1st Bn 1967-84, Chief Executive of Old Country Military & History Tours Inc.

Richard Sayer, S56-61 President SOF

Richard arranged for everyone to take part in at least one remembrance ceremony.

Sue Mitchell, wife of David, drama teacher; interested in history of WWI & II

Valerie Smith, wife of Brian, interested in history of WWI and WWII

Below is a group photo taken outside Amiens Jail.



Some 20 OFs and four family ancestors were commemorated at their graves or on the large memorials for those with no known graves as per Appendix I. In the Great War about 150 OFs died with another hundred in WWII.

Messages were received and read out as follows from -

Paul Taylor, Headmaster of the College: “Current Framlinghamians are hugely proud of their association with Gordon Flowerdew, William Hewitt and Percy Pickard, and are conscious of the debt they owe to them and their like for the way they are able to enjoy the freedoms that they do today. The Headmaster sends his best wishes for this OF pilgrimage to mark the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WW1 and the 70th anniversary of the Amiens raid.”

David Gibbs, Chairman of Hunsdon Parish Council in which parish is the old airfield once occupied by 140 Wing: “I must sadly decline joining you and compatriots on what will be a mixture of pride, sadness, thanks and above all a very humble feeling that these young men gave their lives for the cause against tyranny. Your tour effort deserves praise and good wishes. The Hertfordshire Airfield Memorial Group hope the tour is successful.”

A longer message from **Nicole Pickard**, granddaughter of Pick is produced at Appendix II

Nine out of 20 in our party had Served in the Forces for a total period of 88 years spanning from 1947 to 2004.

MONDAY 7 APRIL – TRAVEL TO AMIENS

The party set off from the Union Jack Club at Waterloo at 1000 hours with introduction from Peter who stressed: “The Tour is Yours; take as much time as you like at different place. The Itinerary is a proximate guide.” Albert produced “Cemeteries & Memorials in Belgium & Northern France” published by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which with two indexes quickly locates any cemetery in the area. At 1250 we re-boarded coach at Folkstone Services as rain started. Trying to clear Customs quickly the driver said: “I’ve got hundreds for you.” After the woman’s surprise he added: “I’m taking them back” and then seriously “they are all fine upstanding citizens - been to the same school.” We then cleared all check points quickly but there was long waits including one queue for an hour before we could board the Shuttle train.

So with one hour on we were not departing Calais until 4pm when Peter put on a DVD of Martin Shaw’s presentation on Operation Jericho on BBC2 on 23 October 2011 where he queried the reason for the Raid on Amiens Prison. Interviewees in the programme included Michael Woods, nephew of Pick who knew several OFs including the Bromage family and Flt Lt Maxwell Sparkes whose medals were sold by OF Auctioneer Philip Allwood on 28 March. Silence reined taking in all aspects of the searching programme which visited the archives of MI6. The peace was only broken as heavy



rain turned into horrendous downpours with misty fog in places which slowed the driving. It was ironical that the peak of the rain occurred as Martin Shaw spoke of the snowstorm over Amiens on 18 February 1944. In spite of the delays encountered we arrived at 1801, one minute late on Peter’s itinerary and congratulated the driver for keeping going in terrible conditions and then booked into the Ibis Centre Cathedrale Hotel in Amiens with its foyer carpet a concentrated pattern of poppies.

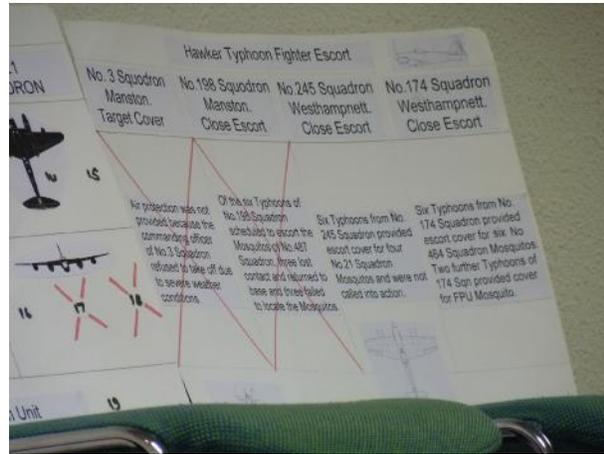
At 1930 there was a mini meeting of Officers for James to update his plans for purchasing a duplicate set of the seven medals awarded to Pick to place beside the Amiens Raid painting recently presented to the College. Penny, Chris and James chose to have dinner with driver Paul in the hotel. It turned out his ancestors had a treble-barrelled name the middle of which was Blaxhall as in the village near Framlingham and when he heard of the exploits of the Three Heroes he wanted to visit the College and particularly see the Chapel.

TUESDAY 8 APRIL - AMIENS, PICKARD AND CITY



All gathered in the Lecture Room at 0900 for a Pickard ‘briefing’ by Bill. He had conducted many detailed researches in the last years and started with a presentation of the Mosquito squadron formations for the departure of 140 wing from Hunsdon airfield on the morning of 18th February 1944. He went on to describe the horrendous weather conditions faced by the crews of the bombers and escort fighters.

It was not only the weather that would be on Pickard's mind as he left the English coast. The orders for the deployment of his third squadron (No 21) had been changed at the last moment leaving him to make the unenviable decision on a possible complete destruction of the prison and its 7/800 inmates. The escort rendezvous point over Littlehampton was a total shambles with two complete fighter escort squadrons failing to arrive due to the weather and inadequate flying orders. Pickard would have expected a minimum of 22 fighter escorts for his first two squadrons (Nos 487 & 464) when in fact he went into the raid with just 6 fighters and no aerial cover. Two fighters were assigned to a Film Production Unit Mosquito.



Bill's researches have shown that it is most unlikely that Pickard chose to circle the downed plane of his colleague Sqn Ldr Ian McRitchie as the official Air Ministry report states. Nearly 30 miles separate the crash sites of Pickard and McRitchie. Reports at the time clearly state that Pickard did not issue the red, red, red signal to call off No 21 squadron. The pilot of the FPU plane made this call.

Pickard's Superior, Air Vice Marshal Basil Embry, did not write the official Air Ministry Bulletin on the raid until months after the event and Bill thought the contents were somewhat embellished. This could be part of the reason why Pickard was not awarded a VC, which the French villages did informally on his first grave.



The group asked many questions for 20 minutes or so and Bill was thanked for a very thorough report of the Raid. As a footnote, James had had a strange timing coincidence at home on 18 February - the 70th Anniversary. He had finished two jobs in the office and then had to vacate for the cleaner, so most unusually he sat in the lounge at that time of day. He picked up "Wings of Night" so he could finish it soon. Without any planning to be at that stage in the book, he read exactly at 12.06 that day of the Raid flying over the straight road from Albert one minute late, at 1201, despite delays due to fog and planes not

ready.

With a mass of information now in their heads, the party left the hotel at 1015 and the first stop was at 1025 outside the Main Gate of the Prison. Aside the gate was a plaque on the wall with flowers below encaged within iron rails. The first Group photo (see page 2) shows wary travellers hoping the enormous door does not suddenly open. When the wall was rebuilt they carefully used a different colour mortar so the position of the main breach was very clear to us today.





We then drove north-east of Amiens and turned north-west towards Molliens au Bois and slowly cruised along the country lane to find the crash site of Pick 's "F for Freddie" plane. White markers were seen but not the expected two crosses recently erected in place of other crosses taken down by the farmer so he could cultivate his land. All standing in a windy spot, Georgina read a poem by John Gillespie Magee written September 1941 and he was killed three months later. Driving through St Gratien we saw the Maree by the church some distance away from the crash where the locals took the bodies of Pick and his navigator Alan Broadley.



Back to the outskirts of Amiens we alighted at 1148 at St Pierre Cemetery and walked through rows of very French ornate tombstones to the military area at the rear. On the right were rows of French graves with their stone crosses (see picture left) and on the left were rows of British graves in the traditional white Portland stone all beautifully cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission founded in 1917. Strangely the Pickard and Broadley graves were



not side by side but in adjoining rows with the latter one place to the right of the former and many nearby were WWI graves. Penny had arranged wreaths with a centre piece of the appropriate logos clearly showing amid the circle of red.





James produced a laminate he had been given only a week ago of a photograph of Pick's original medals held in the Private Collection of Lord Ashcroft together with his Wings and ribbon decorations. This was placed by the grave while the group paid homage. James read a personal message shown at Appendix II from Nicole to her grandfather and then Richard read the short message from Paul Taylor. Andrew read two verses from Laurence Binyon and all joined in the Act of Remembrance.

Bill laid the wreath with the Fram crest and a message written by Richard on behalf of the SOF and all of us. James laid a wreath first reading a personal message on the grave of Alan Broadley and saluted the grave. The emblem was of 21 Squadron where Broadley was Navigating Officer at the time of his death. Broadley had been Pick's navigator on over 100 missions and the cemetery register showed his family had visited on 18 February.



IN DEEP GRATITUDE TO AN
OLD FRAMLINGHAMIAN HERO.
MERCI POUR TEL COURAGE.
The Society of Old Framlinghamians.
8th April 2014.
To GROUP CAPTAIN P.C. PICKARD
In Remembrance



FLY LT J.A. BROADLEY DFC, DFC
IN MEMORY OF A COMRADE
AND SKILLED R.A.F. AIRMAN
WHO GAVE HIS LIFE ALONGSIDE
HIS DEAR FRIEND GROUP CAPTAIN
P.C. PICKARD DSO, DFC, DFC
18th FEBRUARY 1944.
In Remembrance

At 1400 the guide Christian Sutcliffe gave us a potted history of Amiens after being founded in 20BC and "thanks to Marshal

Goering about 60% of the buildings, mostly the worst ones were destroyed 1939/40." The main ones to survive were the Hotel de Ville and the Cathedral. The city's importance lies in the fact it is situate half way between Paris and

London and was the capital of France for a short while. A tall 'spicky' clock was passed which had been fully restored in 1999 except for the nymph statuette which was recovered from a dump. A square free-standing Bell Tower is UNESCO listed. We walked through the old city to the Cathedral forecourt.





This Notre Dame was built in the old fashioned style 1225 to 1336 and is 42 m high. We stood in different areas according to the centuries we were hearing about and as we progressed nearer to the building the wind got stronger and colder. Eventually we were in the warm of the cathedral and three notable pieces were: a bronze tomb of the prostrate bishop who laid the foundation stone - only a few around of that metal; a decorative pulpit and three rose windows (look out York!)

About two-thirds of the way round an announcement was made and the visitors evacuated sadly missing the war memorials including one to Essex Yeomanry. James thought it was because of a



service and was one of the last out. We were marched swiftly to the tidy and clean Food Market and then sirens were heard all over the city – a bomb had been found in the vestry; the concern was that it might be a mustard gas one from WWI where recently a farmer found one and 5 were killed instantly. A man carrying a white bag came under suspicion with the word “DIESEL” on it – it was James’ and he still has not lived it down!

Four Smiths kindly asked Penny to join them for dinner and James was a late addition to make six. They walked to near the cathedral and dined at the recommended Bistrot du Brucher in the Rue Dusevel. Half an hour later the rest of our party, having smelt the good food, took up a very long table.

WEDNESDAY 9 APRIL – FLOWERDEW, THIEPVAL & YPRES



The morning was given over to Flowerdew and we were very honoured to have in the party Gordon’s great nephew, Neil, who had served 40 years in the RAF and is now the heir to Gordon’s memorabilia; although he had a large quantity himself and in the family he was interested in James photographs and programmes of the VC



coming back from Canada in 2002 and the ceremony he was at for placing together in the Imperial War Museum our three VCs in 2003. Neil intimated it was not an easy process to get the VC back from Canada.



We passed numerous woodlands and undulating fields some of the bright yellow oilseed rape with a slight mist hanging just as it would have been in March 1918. Had a short stop at Guyencourt and Neil talks of the Canadian horses being very strong and tons of feed where sold very profitably by East Anglian farmers and shipped via Ipswich to France every week for the two years 1915/17. We were prevented from

going the direct route as the road explored yesterday by Peter and Neil now had a “Barree” sign – the locals must have known a ‘service’ contingent was invading! Another short stop to see the French ‘Cavalry’ regiment monument which Peter said was actually for a ‘Foot’ regiment erected by friends in 1934.

The sun was now coming out for the next stop at 1035 at the charming village of Castel where Major Seeley saw his local commander. A new bridge is built on top of the old one and the reverse of hanging baskets adorn both parapets. The village sign proclaimed “Castel – Commune de Moreuil” and Peter got out his large scale maps and the party gathered round him to hear the detailed



movements of “C” Squadron of Lord Strathcona’s Horse on 30 March 1918 which was only 75 strong. They were facing a contingent of Germans who had been 8,000 strong but were probably reduced to half by now; four men would defend each machine gun of which 20 would be operating. It seems Flowerdew ordered it a semi-unofficial charge by saying “It’s a Charge, Boys.” As they went over the top, the bugler was the first to be shot without playing a note and Gordon was soon afterwards. Chaos then reined and the troop was annihilated within 35 seconds; only one unwounded trooper was left. Neil added comments on his views from many researches of his own. Severely injured Gordon was carried by four men to the Brigade Casualty Clearing Station and the rarely seen report shows he was wounded in 1917 and on 31 March “DIED OF WOUNDS. ‘GSW. Thigh” and initialled.



After a while a large 4WD drove up and out got Mr Brunel sporting Lord Strathcona’s emblem on his jacket and unfurling a full size orange and green flag with the regimental insignia in the centre. Mr Brunel was known to Peter as he owns the farm land on which Gordon won his VC and he is steeped in the history of the battle of Moreuil Wood and wanted to take the party across his fields to the actual site of the charge but our Guide declined due to the rough terrain and a question of time. The Monsieur is 67 years old but looked 85 and it would have delayed the party even

more if his family history was gone into.

Suddenly from nowhere came a young m’amselle in jeans with notebook and pen at the ready - the local press had been alerted to report the reasons for our visit. There was one big snag – she only spoke French or language of the neighbouring countries. Neil, Richard and particularly Andrew came to the fore and explained in slow French phrases our intentions of being in force at this particular time. We finally departed that charming spot at 1122.





A proper view of Moreuil Wood was marred by piles of broken concrete in a long lay-by but the active ones jumped out of the coach and got the best views they could and found a sunken wide 'track' which was expected to be the route Flowerdew approached the wood. The second squadron in the battle on 30 March was led by Lt F M W Harvey who was awarded the VC in 1917 and died in Calgary in 1980. In the first troop one soldier had 59 bullets in one leg. The irony is that the Germans retook the wood on 1 April and held it for four months but the purpose of the charge was to delay advances of the enemy and

that aim was achieved. Twenty VCs were awarded in the March campaign.



At 1158 we came to the Canadian Cavalry Brigade Memorial at which another group photo was taken with Neil in centre place. He spoke of Suffolk men going to Canada and 'adopted' that country hence often being called "Canadians". Georgina paid tribute to ALL the horses used in the Great War and we especially remembered them in her reading of "Horses" by an unknown author. We then spent some time viewing three metal plaques on the monument walls with much narrative as well as the famous picture of Flowerdew's head and shoulders.



The Guide had to switch stops when half a dozen ladies from

the back of the coach nearly accosted him as we had been going all morning so at 1225 lunch was taken in Moreuil instead of Albert but the good thing was we could buy super food in the 'deli' and were allowed to eat in the Bar two doors away – actually most ate in the sun outside looking across to the town's main buildings and a massive wall type memorial of a large soldier in action on one side and many names on the reverse of both Wars.



Arriving at 1405 at Namps au Val cemetery a sombre ceremony was held with Neil laying a wreath with the Fram crest and a personal message on the grave of Capt GM Flowerdew VC and the medal 'emblem' was engraved on the tombstone. Albert read "Epitaph to the Fallen"



followed by Sue reading Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth." As with Pickard, several with their own personal messages. March or early April 1918 and and MCs.



individuals planted crosses All the Fallen here died in included graves with DSOs

Andrew made a curious comment at this stage about these two famous OF heroes. Pickard died in the French Departement of Picardie and Gordon Muriel Flowerdew died in Moreuil – some kind of mysterious destiny?



We began to see several small cemeteries scattered around the countryside and at 1543 arrived at the tiny Lonsdale cemetery with a plinth to the Dorsetshire Regiment on the edge of rape field particularly for Peter to see.

Further on we visited the enormous Thiepval Memorial seen from miles around and set in its own parkland and reaching high above the trees. Its entrance proclaims it incorporates the "Passchendaele Experience," some distance from the Visitors Centre. The memorial records the names of 72, 191 British and South Africans who have no known grave. The four signallers saluted the memorial; although the Royal Corps was not formed until 1920, signal troops were part of the Royal Engineers before then. Chris and others scoured the rows of names to find five OFs.

Leaving at 1700 Peter put on the coach video "Passchendaele" as screened by the BBC in the 1980s. Collections were made for the wreaths and crosses and

Penny was delighted to announce later that £130 had been raised towards the Legion Poppy Appeal.

It was realised too late in the day that we had missed the grave of James' great uncle at Houchin, near Bethune as we were all very tired after an eventful day. It was a shame as 'Uncle Norman' was in the Canadian Infantry which the family always called the "Winnipeg Fusiliers" having gone there about 1910. He died on 5 April 1918, age 28.

At 1835 we crossed the border into Belgium and the road surface became very bumpy. The driver's heart missed a beat when a group of cyclists turned left in front of him without the slightest warning. At 1852 we arrive at Ypres or Leper as it is shown on the maps with its cobbled streets and fine



buildings most of which had to be rebuilt after the horrendous devastation in the Salient campaign in WWI. The Ariane Hotel was very modern and had been built in the 1990s on the site of the cattle market and abattoir. Eight percent beer for the driver was very welcome after a long day. It sounded as though the connoisseur Smith party fared better food-wise for dinner than the motley crew in the President's group.

James' camera worked overtime when he saw the floodlit buildings everywhere especially the Cloth Hall and the Cathedral. He turned to Brian after the last shot who said "The lights are out." James could not believe it, turned back to look and they were! 2300 hours curfew!

THURSDAY 10 APRIL – HEWITT'S BATTLEFIELD, TYNE COT, AN OF, FLANDERS MUSEUM, YPRES CATHEDRAL & MENIN GATE



After a slight lie-in we arrived at 0945 at the Scottish Division Memorial where the plaques on the monument were written in English and Gaelic of which Hewitt's 2nd South African Light Infantry was part. Peter explained the battlefield movements of what is called the third

IT IS IN TRUTH NOT FOR GLORY
NOR RICHES, NOR HONOURS
THAT WE ARE FIGHTING,
BUT FOR FREEDOM,
FOR THAT ALONE, WHICH
NO HONEST MAN GIVES UP
BUT WITH LIFE ITSELF

Passchendaele with 2,400 troops in the brigade and produced a map of 1917 with contours of the flat fields as far as the eye could see with higher ground in the distance held by the Germans as a vantage point. They simply had to hold that position as they had got as close to the channel ports as they had been ordered.

Richard read the citation for William Henry Hewitt's VC of which a precis is: "On 20 September 1917 east of Ypres, Hewitt was wounded twice in two attacks on a pillbox finally getting the bomb inside where it dislodged the enemy occupants who were successfully dealt with by the rest of the section."

During this time we were standing at the junction of two farm paths and it was amazing the amount of farm traffic



kept coming along for which we had to stand aside – one machine looked decidedly nasty with stuck-out-spikes but one farmer shouted: “Welcome to Belgium.” “How did he know we were English,” called someone



Hewitt ended his army career as a Major and died in 1966. Brian recounted seeing Headmaster Kirkman escort Hewitt into the dining room wearing his VC in the summer of 1954. There were a few words of introduction but no response from Hewitt much to the regret of the boys.

A relative, Pam Colvin, attended the VC ceremony at the IWM in 2003 but no relative could be traced for the Tour.



At 1055 we arrived at the main Belgium Passchendaele Memorial of Tyne Cot. It is the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the world in terms of burials. There are 11,956 Commonwealth servicemen of WW1 buried or commemorated in Tyne Cot Cemetery. The Tyne Cot Memorial commemorates a

further 35,000 servicemen whose graves are not known. The main memorial was on a lower scale building—wise than Thiepval but a long wall extended from it and on the lower slopes were rows and rows of graves with the avenue walkways being strengthened under the grass and other improvements so moving around was quite an obstacle course. Towards the edge of the cemetery were two German bunkers still very much intact.



We found the graves of two OFs: SN Carley of the Carley & Webb shop in Framlingham – “Machine Gun Corps 25-09-17 age 32.” Brian placed a cross on behalf of the SOF and Georgina read John Macrae’s “Flanders Fields” (he was a doctor who died of exhaustion and is buried in Wimereux far away from the main battlefield area); then to “Capt G C Blandy, Royal Warwickshire Regiment 09-10-17 age 30” and Margaret placed a wreath for the SOF. We also paid homage to Albert’s uncle who was



recorded on the wall as “A K Cheshier KOYLI” and Richard placed a cross for us all.

Other graves noted were that of Sgt McGee who was badly wounded and died taking a pillbox across the field and won the VC. There were many graves of interest including several of the Suffolk

Regiment including a DSO aged 38, many Australians including Capt C S Jefferies VC 12-10-17 on which was inscribed “On flames’ eternal camping ground, their silent tents are spread” which gave a gulp on the throat to many of us; also 2nd Lt R H Woods, London Cyclist Bn Kings Royal Rifle Corps, graves of three South Africans whose bodies were found last year all died on 20-09-17 and several simply commemorating “A Soldier of the Great War.”

As we gathered at 1210 to depart the OF Secretary for the Belgium Branch, James Powell (G93-95) appeared and Chris accompanied him in his car as he wanted to view two more OF graves at Aeroplane Cemetery on the way back. We drove down roads with a centre lane of tarmac to Dadizeele Cemetery for the grave of Albert’s other uncle



“W R Chesher, Sapper Royal Engineers 16-10-18 age 36.” He had been building a bridge in fog and when it lifted almost the whole troop was shot and “AKC” seen earlier had died from ‘friendly fire’ on the same spot but they were buried in different cemeteries. A cross was laid by Valerie on behalf of the group who added a few words. Richard read “Kohima” as a final Act from him as he was leaving the tour early. At 1247 we pass “Sanctuary Wood” which was the subject of a cartoon by soldiers captioned “Not much sanctuary here.”



1310 arr Ariane Hotel and all sit at long table on terrace. Chris arrives with James who works a Belgium telecoms company and said he had been hacked GCHQ so James R introduced the four signallers. James P came from Great Totham, Essex and proposes organising a 150th event in Belgium next year.



for



At 1500 Peter bought us tickets for the Flanders Field Museum in the Ypres Cloth Hall very carefully rebuilt after devastation in WWI. There were several speaking pieces which of course could not be understood by most of us and the whole layout seemed a bit disjointed. Standing at a wall tablet of a poem credited to “Siegfried Sassoon at Craiglockhart,” a Scottish lady explained this was the hospital where soldiers recovered from shell shock and she deplored the new museum layout. She had brought a couple especially but it was not like seven years ago

when the tableaux looked so real and the trenches were seen below glass panels in the floor: “Your really felt part of the scene” she said. Viewed separate First Aid section of museum.

In the free time which followed several viewed the Sint Maartenskathedraal with large wall tablet to the Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and also the St George’s Memorial Church. This had kneelers on every seat which were embroidered with insignia of regiments and corps including Royal Signals and the Suffolk Regiment. Around the walls were brass plaques of schools commemorating old boys who fell at the battles of the Somme and the Salient. Fram



was not there so representations will be made for a plaque to be added. Andrew was disgusted to read a comment from a Sheffield visitor in the book which read: “Terribly Public School” so he crossed it out. (If it was not for the trained Public School lads to lead the troops on the battlefields we would have sunk into German domination years ago. Ed).



Before the ‘team’ dinner we all walked through the streets of Ypres and arrived at the Menin Gate at 1945, the proper time for the public to gather for the world renowned ceremony. Most of us were surprised at the large crowd spilling from under the gate into the Menenstraat. We were delighted to hear the strains of a band in the distance and



Peter said this only happens on rare occasions. The band of ATC cadets and two volunteer retired RAF Officers went by to the far end of the Gate. A tall girl in the crowd from Wigan



enquired of the the reason for attendance of the four signallers in their blazers and berets. At 2000 the Last Post was sounded. There was then what turned out later to be an “Extended Ceremony” of nine minutes Silence while the Chairman of the Veterans Association of Canada laid a wreath with several others including some from



British Columbia. Reveille was then sounded and the band marched forward and then back through the gate and passed ourselves. It seems a great pity we did not know the Canadians were there or whether our Service based party could have been given priority at the front of the crowd of general public as nothing of the ceremony had been seen.

Richard then ushered us together under the Gate for our own private ceremony to honour seven OFs named on the memorial; he pointed to the names within reasonable vision. The seven were read in slow reverence in turn by Clive, David and Dave. Some of us saw the display of wreaths on the inner steps of the Gate. Suddenly the four buglers were marching by in their maroon and gold braid uniforms so Penny asked for a photograph with some of the party. The bugles had been donated by the Royal Corps of Transport in 1992. Later James collared the English speaking Press Officer Carl Denys of the Last Post Association who said the ceremony is described fully on the website www.lastpost.be which produced some of the information for this report.



The ceremony started on 1 July 1928 when the Menin Gate was built with 54,000 names on it. The ceremony has taken place every night since except for 20 May 1940 to 6 September 1944 when it was performed at Brookwood as “Hitler did not like hearing the bugle sound.”



At 2045 we went straight into the Dining Room of the hotel and extended the table ourselves to take the 20 of us. Confusion reigned as the chef limited the choice of courses as we were more than six. Order was resumed when the sight of a free starter appeared. Half the table ordered mains of Fish Skewer not seen before with very ample chunks of various seafood dingly dangling on a long skewer hanging from a mini executioner's 'post.'



Richard gave an amusing speech of thank-you's to all who had made the week possible and was followed by James thanking Peter for sharing his supreme intelligentsia on military history and Richard for helping to steer the commemorative and social side



of the Tour. Short contributions were given by Paul, Peter and Georgina. One dining couple insisted on staying through the raucous laughter in spite of Richard's hint to leave with a drink but they introduced themselves by enquiring of the constant reference to Signallers as they lived at Piddle Trenthide near the Corps HQ at Blandford Camp. He had missed National Service by seven months and had worked for the Services including the Tank Corps at Bovington. It was arranged to meet them in the same place at the same time next year!

As the party broke up, emotional farewells were said after such a week's bonding of a great "Band of Brothers." The Sayers and the Wrights were leaving soon after 0700 to take three trains to get to Waterloo at 1000 en route the College's Charter Ball in Suffolk. Amongst the personal thoughts exchanged were: "Well done, you persevered" and "A very emotional week."

FRIDAY 11 APRIL – CEMETERIES, LA COUPOLE, TRAVEL TO LONDON



We started the last day at 0900 at the Ypres Reservoir Cemetery with its long grass on a heavy dewy morning and honoured two OFs: Gunner A J Beveridge, South African Heavy Artillery 13-06-16 age 28 when Sue read "Everyone Sang" by Siegfried Sassoon and Pte H A Watts Army



Service Corps attached XXII Corps "Y" Ammunition Park, 03-01-18 age 27. Penny read the "Bugle Call" by Edward Thomas and crosses were laid at both graves. On the way out was a laminate photograph of Brig Maxwell VC just lodged in the purple wisteria along the border wall.



At 1010 we came to Le Grand Hasard cemetery down a tiny lane to honour Margaret's uncle in her absence who was Pte B G Ashby, Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment ("The Buffs") 30-05-40 age 31 in a row eight of the same regiment all died 26 to 30 May. Sue read Isaac Rosenberg's "The Dead Heroes".

After a few wrong sitings of these off the beaten track cemeteries we arrived at Morbecque British Cemetery at 1040 to honour Jean's uncle Pte W H Davies, Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry 17-05-18

age 18 but not on the grave. Jean gave a few words of family connections then read Edward Thomas' dialogue of Plowman with Narrator. There were only 103 graves in this cemetery.



At 1123 we pulled into James's request of La Coupole. This site is the launching pad not long unearthed of the V1s and V2s after being manufactured at the better known Peenemunde on the Baltic. The former were flying bombs nicknamed doodlebugs by Londoners at which they were aimed and started in June 1944 and the V2s were the first rockets. The noise of a V1 cut out before going to ground when everyone tried to get out of the way but the V2s simply crashed to earth without any warning and inevitable destruction ensued. Barrage balloons were put up to try to deviate these weapons away from built-up areas.



We walked along a long tunnel and up to a viewing platform with models of the Nazis' secret launch-pads and with English audios to help we saw two films: the first a rapid summary of WWII and the second about the building of the horrible weapons to make Britain succumb to Germany. That film described how one



manufacturing point called Dora near Mauthausen took from concentration camps the main labour which was closely guarded by the SS so no-one would miss them and secrecy would be maintained – until our 'spotter' planes found the strange low level buildings of mass concrete.



Nick spotted a short tunnel with daylight end and went to investigate: he found a great view of the concrete dome. Ten minutes later James similarly investigated and when pushing the glass door open with lose chains half a dozen 'friends' (or were they foes?) and a steward bellowed: "James come back – you will drop off the end?" Not proper H & S on disused rocket sites!



at

We left La Coupole at 1300 and arrived Calais 1345 for an hours stop. Albert took ill most of the journey back and at the Calais stop 'Good Samaritan' Valerie stayed in the coach with him while the rest scoured for food and drink – and Chris' perfume shopping was cut dead when a French lady dumped her order on the counter in front of him so he had to leave so as not to miss the coach; however, Chris found a kiosk later to make the purchase so his wife was not without and he presented the driver with a well earned Tip from us all.

We were lucky to catch a Shuttle earlier than expected at 1536 and with the HOUR BACK we stopped at Wrotham at 1610 to disembark Bill and Dave for their nearby homes and arrived at the Union Jack Club as expected at 1715.



POST MORTEM

Emails were flying to and fro for days after and examples of expression **not** written by the Editor are –

"Wonderful time with all the group"

"How did you arrange the bomb trick?"

"Highly enjoyable and successful week and could not have been better"

"Humbling, moving and unforgettable experience"

"Emotions of admiration and pride as well as sadness; great camaraderie"

"It was a blast" – from someone who had been down under;

"Next time its OF graves in Baghdad and Basra!"

And finally for those who did not come, paraphrased by Brian the Bard:

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers

And pupils of Framlingham now a-bed

Shall think themselves accursed they were not here." Henry V, Act 4, Scene III

Appendix I – OF GRAVES/MEMORIALS VISITED

World War 1

<u>SURNAME</u>	<u>FIRST NAME</u>	<u>REGIMENT</u>	<u>DEATH</u>	<u>CEMETERY</u>
Symonds	Spencer L H	RFC	12/11/17	Belgium - Ypres - Aeroplane Cemetery
Clarke	Arthur R	PPCLI	08/05/15	Belgium - Ypres - Menin Gate Panel 10
Somerville	William	4 th Bn Ontario Regt	23/04/15	Belgium -Ypres - Menin Gate Panel 18
Mann	Walter G	8 th Bn Suffolks	12/08/17	Belgium -Ypres - Menin Gate Panel 21
Stanford	Alan K	29th Bn BC Regt	19/04/16	Belgium -Ypres - Menin Gate Panel 28
Ledger	Douglas	Essex Yeo	13/05/15	Belgium -Ypres - Menin Gate Panel 5
Jackson	Alan J	Middx 3 rd Bn	27/04/15	Belgium -Ypres - Menin Gate Panels 49
Symonds	William H	2 nd Bn Suffolks	16/06/15	Belgium -Ypres - Menin Gate, Panel 21
Beveridge	Arnold J	SA Heavy Art.	13/06/16	Belgium -Ypres - Reservoir Cemetery
Watts	Harry A	ASC	03/01/18	Belgium -Ypres - Reservoir Cemetery
Carley	Samuel N	MGC 207 th Co	25/09/17	Belgium - Tyne Cot Cemetery
Blandy	Gerald C	R Warks	09/10/17	Belgium - Tyne Cot Cemetery
Flowerdew VC	Gordon M	Lord Strathcona's Horse	31/03/18	France – Somme - Namps-au-Val
Bagshawe	William W	12 th Bn Y & L	01/07/16	France – Somme - Thiepval Memorial
Fry	John S	4 th SA Inf	13/07/16	France – Somme - Thiepval Memorial
Rash	Ralph R	7 th Bn Suffolks	12/10/16	France – Somme - Thiepval Memorial
Walker	Frank B	6 th Bn KRRC, att 2nd Bn	23/07/16	France – Somme - Thiepval Memorial
Milburn	William H	4 th Bn Suffolks	15/07/16	France – Somme - Thiepval Memorial

World War 2

<u>SURNAME</u>	<u>FIRST NAME</u>	<u>REGIMENT</u>	<u>DEATH</u>	<u>CEMETERY</u>
Pickard	Percy C P	RAF	18/02/44	France – Amiens - St Pierre Cemetery

Appendix II

A loving message from Percy Charles Pickard's granddaughter

I really wish with all my heart that I could have been with you today, to join you as you gather and remember Richard Sampson, Alan Broadley and my grandfather Percy Charles Pickard.

I was not fortunate enough to have known my grandfather. But I do know that he was one of the bravest men this world has ever known.

I know this because of my wonderful grandmother, Dorothy. I was very privileged to have spent time with her, listening to her speak about Pick and the war. Through her I built a picture of him in my heart that will never fade.

I visited Amiens in 1994 with my grandmother. It was the 50th anniversary of the Amiens prison raid and that is when I truly understood what it was that they achieved, and just how amazing and brave they were. I was overwhelmed when I realized the enormity of what those remarkable men did.

I was honoured to meet Ian McRitchie, Bob Fowler, Arthur Dunlop and one of Members of the French resistance (whose name I unfortunately do not know) that escaped from the prison during the raid.

It breaks my heart that there are so few people left who truly understand how great those brave young men were all those years ago. And so, I urge you to pass your knowledge on to your children and grandchildren, just as Dorothy did with me... so that they too will never forget what sacrifices were made during the war for freedom. And for our future.

Again I thank you so much for coming together to honour the men who are my heroes. Today, and every day for the rest of our lives... "lest we forget, at the going down of the sun, and in the morning... we will remember them".

Nicole Pickard, Johannesburg, South Africa