

Staffordshire Regiment Museum

Friends Newsletter Issue 3 2019



A few words from our chairman

What a busy time the museum has had since the publication of our spring newsletter. The events held are too numerous to list here, and we have seen the formal opening two brand new attractions, namely the WVS Canteen, and Camp Fisher. Through it all museum maintenance and improvement has been continuing at a pace, and to top it all our education and research teams have been out winning awards. The Museum Staff have been hard pressed to bring this all together, but I know they would be the first to admit that it has only been possible due to the hard work and commitment of so many of our friends and volunteers. Despite all this, funding will always be an issue for a small military museum like ours. So is it all worth it?

I know that sometimes things move more slowly than we would like and at times progress is met with setbacks and frustrations. But a quick look through this newsletter shows the very positive results that are being achieved. It is also evident to me that others are noticing the SRM as well. Record numbers of new visitors so far this year, articles in national and local publications, very positive feedback on social media, recognition by the Mercians as the Regiment's lead museum, and growing offers for us to partner with other museums and organisations.

Clearly it is all worth it. The museum honours the service of the soldiers of Staffordshire, and I feel that there is still a lot more history for us to make as we head into the roaring 20's.

Nick Williams

Education team commended

...

Members of the museums education team were recently invited to attend a local awards evening after being nominated for a Lichfield and district volunteer award.



The teams work on school visits over recent years was recognised by the awarding of a second place commendation on the night. Education team lead Hillary Hinks commented that, "it was lovely to be considered alongside so many other groups. But our award is a fitting tribute to Mike Webley who did so much to get the education team off the ground"

25 years and counting

Long term friend and museum volunteer Phil Holmes recently marked twenty five years of continuous service at the SRM by presenting a cheque for £1156.00 to the friends group.



The donation was made by the friends of the Mercian Regiment, a group previously chaired by Phil, but is now unfortunately in the process of winding up.

Vehicles on display

Friends group vehicle lead Don Higham is continuing to improve the museums display vehicles, assisted by a small team. His attention has recently turned to our Ferret armoured scout car, which now sports replica armament, as well as a myriad of small details all intended to make it look fully operational. He is working to find a way to give visitors the chance to safely access the cars turret, and get a feel for what it was like to patrol in the vehicle.

His work on all of the vehicles has resulted in them being able to play a more active role as a museum display. Trainees on the medics course at DSM Whittington have been using them to practice battlefield casualty extraction, and Don

has also been giving informative guided tours to members of the friends group, as well as groups of car enthusiasts who attended our annual classic car show.



The Ferret scout car, is a British armoured fighting vehicle designed and built for reconnaissance purposes. The Ferret was produced between 1952 and 1971 by the UK company Daimler. It was widely adopted by regiments in the British Army, as well as the RAF Regiment and Commonwealth countries throughout the period.

Weight 3.7 t

Crew 3 (commander, driver & radio operator)

Main armament .30 M1919 Browning machine gun

Engine Rolls Royce B60 Inlet over Exhaust I6 petrol

130 hp (97 kW)

SRM in the media

Our museum has made it into a glossy magazine with national and international circulation. The monthly magazine Britain At War, published by Key Publishing PLC, featured a three page article in its August 2019 issue.



The item had been produced with the help of Museum Director Danielle Crozier, and featured an overview of the Staffordshire and Mercian regiments, as well as a lot of detail on the museum itself, and its attractions. We also got a promotional mention for our various 2019 events.



Promotion is always an issue with a small museum like ours. But such favorable coverage in a magazine with a wide circulation is sure to help raise our profile with those who have an interest in military history.



Knot at the museum



Our local Knot Classic Car club held its annual car show on the museum site for a fourth year in August. Mixed weather on the day didn't dampen visitor spirits, as over 70 classic car owners brought their vehicles to the event. Visitor numbers were also up on previous years, and all were given a grand day out by the car club team and museum friends volunteers.

The club held a raffle, auto jumble and gave a best in show award, decided by the experts of the group's committee. The museum friends gave trench and military vehicle tours, as well as displaying our new WVS canteen exhibit and awarding a prize for the car most voted for by museum visitors.



Tony Bassett from the club said *It was great to see such a good turnout, especially as the weather wasn't overly kind to us. As a club we were very happy with the event, perhaps the best one yet, and are pleased that the museum benefited too. Thanks also to Alan, for arranging period music to be playing around the site, it certainly added to the atmosphere. We look forwards to seeing you all again at next years event.*

Brew up comes to the boil

An event packed August saw the completion and formal opening of our latest friends project. Known as Project Brew Up, it is a recreation of a WW2 era Womens Voluntary Service mobile canteen.



The canteen which has been two years in the making was opened by museum handy man Dennis Smart, who put in such a lot of hard work on the exhibit's construction. He was served the first hot drink from the canteen by project lead Lynne Mace and the whole event was covered by local newspaper the Tamworth Herald. Lynne said, *Brew Up has taken longer than we expected to bring to fruition, but it's great to see what a real effort by so many in our team has been able to achieve. Special thanks have to go to Dennis for his building work, day after day, in all weathers. It's also pleasing to see and hear the reactions of so many visitors to the site when they see what has been created.*



At the height of the Blitz during the winter of 1940/41, women in the WVS set up mobile canteens to keep all manner of rescue and support teams refreshed, thus placing themselves in serious physical danger with collapsing buildings a constant threat



That's my Grandads plane

Reports on grandads in the last issue of this newsletter seem to have got members of the friends group thinking about their own ancestors and the part they played in the 20th centuries great wars. Here friends' secretary, Juliet Davies, tells us of her own grandad, and his time fighting in the sky over Europe during the second world war.

When I heard that the Volunteers of the SRM had been invited to RAF Duxford, I was especially excited about seeing one of the few remaining Lancaster Bombers left in the UK. My Grandad, George Tough, served in the RAF from 1941 as Ground Crew, then in 1943 as a Wireless Operator on a Lancaster.

George served with 514 Squadron, based at Waterbeach, just a few miles from Duxford. From his Log Book we can see that he was involved in numerous Bombing Raids over Germany, also

H2S Photo Bombing (radar) operations and evacuation of POW's. On VE Day, May 8th 1945 he was Supply Dropping to The Hague as part of Operation Manna, dropping supplies to the starving Dutch.



The Tour Guide on the day of our visit to Duxford gave a very enthusiastic talk on the history of the aircraft, including the part the Lancaster played in the Dam Busters story. Barnes Wallis, inventor of the Bouncing Bomb insisted on using Lancaster's for his daring raid on the Dam in the Ruhr Valley. Finally we were allowed to climb inside, it was such a privilege to see the Wireless Operators Seat, where George would have sat.



At the end of May 1945, George was demobbed in Redditch, Worcestershire where he met my Nan, Nancy. They were married at Bromsgrove

Church in December 1945 and had five children. George joined the Police force in Birmingham, but sadly died in 1976 aged 54.

I don't have many memories of Grandad, but in one of the few photographs the family have of him during his RAF service, he can be seen in the center of the picture holding his hand on the shoulder of the chap in front of him. I do remember him taking me and my sister to Elmdon Airport Lounge, to watch the planes, and I wonder now what was going through his mind as we watched those aircraft setting off.



Operation Manna was a series humanitarian food drops carried out to relieve famine in German-occupied Netherlands, undertaken by Allied bomber crews during the final weeks of WW II.



It was carried out by British RAF units, as well as squadrons from the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and Polish air forces, between 29 April and 7 May 1945.

The operation conducted with the acquiescence of the German forces, delivered a total of 6,680 tons of food.

Arnhem 75 WW2 Weekend

The 75 anniversary of the South Staffordshire Regiment's involvement in the Battle of Arnhem was commemorated in epic style by the museum during its summer WW2, Airbourne forces weekend. Reenactor groups attended in large numbers, backed up by members of the friends group and museum volunteers. The whole site was brought to life by many of the visitors attending in period costume.



Arnhem's occupiers were well represented by groups characterizing various parts of the German armed forces of the period. They demonstrated well, the motley force that the defenders hurled together to so strongly resist the British Airborne forces in September 1944.



The "good guys", were also on site in force, and included members of the PBI/Allied Forces Living History Association, who attended representing the South Staffordshire glider troops. They brought with them an impressive selection of heavy equipment and artillery, which many visitors were amazed to hear had been delivered to the front line by glider. They went on to give several impactful artillery demonstrations, giving visitors a small taste of what it must have felt like to have been in the heat of the Arnhem battle.



The Bridge Too Far film night proved to be an event too far, as strong gusty winds on the Saturday evening prevented the outdoor screen being used, due to health and safety fears. Although a licensed bar was provided, the disappointed crowds were kept in order on the night by US Army MP's, who were stationed at Whittington during the later years of the war. The film show was rescheduled to a later date, but the evening visitors were entertained by singing duo The Regimental Roses, Monty, who gave a stirring speech and the South Staffs reenactors, who gave an extended weaponry display. The whole team were clearly deflated by the cancelation, but many of those attending commented that the entertainment provided, made the visit worthwhile on its own.

Museum attendant and event coordinator Steve Hemming, said, *a huge thank you to all who took part, in whatever way, in the setting up, running and setting down of the event. It was a great team effort, it was a brilliant idea running the WVS Wagon purely as a staff and re-enactors refreshment stop. It was certainly appreciated by the groups attending and provided the public with some great photo opportunities of military personnel queueing for tea, well done to all 'who served. We hope to hold a similar event again next year, may be moving it forwards to a weekend in June!*



Camp Fisher at Whittington

The family of a Mercian soldier, Ian Fisher were guests of honour at the opening of the museum's new children's playground area, which took place during the last museum discovery day of the summer. The attraction is themed around operation Herrick, and in particular the part played by the 3rd Battalion of the Mercian Regiment. It consists of a main climbing frame, which is a mockup of a full size Warrior AFV, the type used by the regiment at the time. There is also an agility and confidence building course, as well as information about army life, and activities for visitors to undertake.



The area has been named Camp Fisher in honour of WO2 Ian Fisher, who lost his life in Helmand province while on deployment, in 2013. A moving opening ceremony included a ribbon cutting by Ian's sons, all respectfully watched by a large throng of museum visitors eager to give the camp a test drive.



WO Fisher's family felt that the playground was a fitting tribute to Ian, given his love of fun and family, and his enthusiasm for helping the younger generation learn about army life.



Warrant Officer Class 2 Ian Michael Fisher

1971 to 2013



Deployed to Afghanistan on 19 August 2013 as the Warrior fighting vehicle Sergeant Major for the Task Force Helmand Armoured Infantry Company of A Company, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment. His unit was part of the Manoeuvre Battle Group of 7th Armoured Brigade, based at Patrol Base Lashkar Gah in the Nahr-e Saraj district of Helmand province.

On Monday 4 November, he deployed with his company on a two day operation to disrupt insurgent activity in the vicinity of Kamparak to the north east of his patrol base. The following day, as a meeting was being conducted with Afghan National Security Forces, WO2 Fisher's vehicle was subjected to a vehicle-borne suicide attack. He was evacuated by air to the military hospital at Camp Bastion, where it was confirmed that he had been killed in action.

Streets named after Famous Staffords

Museum Trustees attended a ceremony in August, for the opening of Lichfield's Saxon Gate housing development. Streets on the new estate are to be called Barratt Court, Cain Close, Kilby Avenue, Thomas Lane, Vallentin Way, Wassall Lane and Watchman Close.



Other than regimental mascot Watchman, they are all named after South Staffs VC winners. Lichfield councilors, representatives of the Mercian regiment, and the soldier's families were at the ceremony, to hear Andrew McDermott, regional managing director at Orbit housing the site developers, say "This is a long-lasting tribute to those soldiers who fought for their country on behalf of the local regiment. We are honoured to commemorate these brave men in this way, and to have their names live on and be associated with the new community we have built in Lichfield".

Recognition for Research Team

The education team is not the only group of SRM volunteers to have been invited to an awards evening this year. In September our small but perfectly formed research team were invited to

the Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre, as finalists in the West Midlands Museum Development Programme.

This is the first time that our museum has been represented at this West Midland event, which as the name suggests is intended to encourage and develop museums in the area.



Our team were pipped at the post in the group section award on the night. But the three members of the team who attended, were pleased to have been recognized for the work they do, and had a great time networking with the 150 other guests present.

Arnhem 1944 a family story

Museum friend Bill Ruston tells the story of how events of huge international significance have a habit of touching all of our lives in often unexpected ways.

“My family had no one who fought at Arnhem. At work I did know two men who had been there – one at Oosterbeek and one who survived at the Bridge (and sadly lost both legs due to “Flak” on the Rhine Crossing) but those are other stories.

Living in West Bromwich, our local Regiment was the South Staffordshires – but all the WW2 generation in my family were in the RAF, RE, RAMC, the AFS and the Police.

At about 09.30 on the morning of Sunday 17th September 1944, a young woman was pushing her little son in his push-chair. It was a fine, sunny morning. She was on a brief holiday at her Aunt and Uncle’s home in Hatfield in Hertfordshire.

She was my Mum. The little child was John - my eldest brother.

She became aware that a lot of aircraft were approaching. Gradually the sky began to fill with air-craft. Many were towing large gliders. For quite some time they circled as more and more planes joined. The sky was filling with planes. She described it as “Black with Planes”. She tried to impress the sight on her little son – but he was only about 1 year old – today he has no recollection of it. It was obvious to her that some major military operation was developing.

Eventually the formations of planes flew away towards the East.

About 12.00 noon that day the air-raid sirens sounded in the town of Ede – eight miles to the west of Arnhem. Anyone with any sense immediately went down to their cellars and shelters, but one young lad in his early teens was encouraged by his older brother (who was his Hero) to go up on the roof and see what was going on.



The younger boy's name was Willem Van Der Bospoort.

He was later to become my uncle – he came to Britain after the war and married my mother's first cousin.

The two lads saw a huge air Armada approaching from the West. Many of the planes were towing gliders. The air-craft flew overhead and suddenly they saw strings of parachutes "Blossoming like Flowers – filling the sky". The gliders cut loose and circled down in the fields a few miles this side of Arnhem.



Sounds of gunfire fairly close-by persuaded the two boys that perhaps the cellar was a good place to be! Nobody in the cellar believed what the boys had seen!

We all know the story of the two days that became nine.

Many escaped British soldiers were hidden in Ede over the succeeding days, including one senior British officer, but nobody talked about him so we still don't know who he was.

The people of Ede were very used to hiding Allied airmen who had been shot-down either on the way to or from Germany.

Sadly, Holland wasn't liberated in 1944. That winter was very harsh.

Holland starved. The Dutch called it the "Hunger Winter".

Willem's elder brother heard that fish were being sold a few miles from home. He cycled there to get some fish for the family, but the Dutch Resistance sprang an attack on a German Staff Car. An immediate search of the area was made. The lad was hidden by a family, but he knew if he was found there, the family would be severely punished. He also knew he had nothing to hide so he gave himself up. The Germans didn't care. He was sent to a concentration camp and died there that winter. The family never knew that he had been arrested or what had happened to him until an emaciated man appeared at their door after Holland was liberated. He had been in the Dutch Resistance in the camp and the lad asked him to let his family know. He was with him when he died.

Holland was starving. Early in 1945 a big air-drop of food was organised by the RAF to help the Dutch civilians, codenamed Operation Manna. British bombers were loaded – packed with any kind of food available, tins, sacks of rice, boxes of egg powder.

A young Aircraftsman was very much involved loading the Lancaster Bombers of 101 squadron with food. It made a nice change from loading high-explosive bombs destined for Germany. He was very slim so he was the last to cram the bomb-bays with food then slide out and get the bomb-doors closed quick!



The young Aircraftsman became Val my wife's dad!

He lost his side-cap and fountain pen in the bomb-bay of the final load – presumably they were dropped somewhere over Holland. I wonder if anyone in Holland ever found them?

While my Mum was at Hatfield, she was pushing the pram on another occasion and a German fighter plane appeared out of the sky and tried to machine-gun her! She pushed the pram into a ditch and threw herself on top of it. Fortunately, the pilot wasn't a very good shot – he missed them both. Hardly a military target – a young woman, pushing a pram?

My father was in Egypt at the time – they were doing their best to kill him too. (Mind – he was doing the same to them).

None of my family fought at Arnhem but that dramatic event touched all their lives."

On the road to Whittington

With so much going on at the museum of late, it's sometimes easy to forget the work being done by members of the friends group doing outreach work. For example just at the end of the hectic summer events season, a small team took a road show to Whittington Village's summer show to represent the SRM.



They put on a large display about the museum and showed a selection of weapons and military artifacts, from various periods of the regiments history. Friends vice chairman Keith Hughes said, *we have been attending this event now for a number of years, and we are always given a great reception. Phil did a good job of coordinating our attendance, and I think we have helped to raise the profile of our museum in the local area.*



Know who you are working with

This month we hear from one of our less senior and most recent recruits to the friends group, all round museum volunteer and friend, Conall Slatery.



Hello! I am sure you all have met me by now or at the very least know of my existence in the museum, I have been invited by Nick to say a bit about myself for the friends the newsletter, so here goes. I was born in Neath South Wales in 1992 in a family of 5 and ever since a young age I cultivated the idea of a career in the armed forces, despite numerous advice to the contrary, this did however fuel and run parallel to a keen interest in military history, with weapons, Armour (tanks) and uniforms taking a central role. It was this interest that drew me to other similar past times such as the Sea Cadets, in which I spent 4 happy years as a member, the times I had there were some of the best memories I've had, but above all it helped me with confidence, as I was never what you could call a social butterfly. Still my thirst for knowledge eventually drew me to the prospect of studying history at a university level and after a years tenure working a regular job, I finally departed for Aberystwyth University.

My years in university allowed me to expand my knowledge, socialize and ultimately figure out where I wanted to be in life. Most importantly it convinced me that a career in the armed forces was not actually what I really wanted, instead I focused on the prospect of teaching and in particular lecturing in a subject I was passionate about. It was this new drive that led to me pursuing a Masters, this time in pure military history. After a year of waiting, I took up a masters course in Birmingham University, living with my girlfriend in Tamworth and commuting in to my lectures during the week. Upon the completion of my masters, both of us travelled to York so that my girlfriend could study for her own masters. It was here that I first came into contact with museum work. In between a full time job at the store Fatface I volunteered at the York Army Museum, introducing me

to the world of regimental museums. My role in the museum was to be part of the weapons handling team, which naturally given my pre-existing passion for firearms I jumped at, engaging with the public, giving demonstrations and conducting research on various items on display.

All good things come to end unfortunately and it wasn't long before we left York and returned to Tamworth, where I am currently living to this day. However, there is a most notable silver lining to this return to Staffordshire. I was informed of a local museum, naturally I was eager to make a visit. Upon doing so, I met a rather interesting and eclectic group of enthusiasts, one of which was our chairman himself, I asked if there was any opportunities to volunteer.

To be honest everything sort of snowballed after that, everything from the friends meetings, the education team, working on the Mike Webley collection, to filling sandbags, and here I am now enjoying every second of being at the Staffords and I've never looked back once.

The York Army Museum is home to the collections of the Royal Dragoon Guards and the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire. Through these it tells the story of the British Army and its importance for Yorkshire in the last 300 years.





**YOUR MUSEUM
NEEDS YOU!**

Tempted to become a volunteer at the Staffordshire Regiment Museum, or to join the friends group?

There are so many ways to get involved, and your skills are sure to be of use no matter what they are. You can put in as much time and commitment into the museum as you want, as they say every little helps. Clearly a lot of work is done on site at Whittington, but it's also possible to do research, administration, and promotional work remotely or from home.

If you want to volunteer or just talk about options pop into the museum or contact-
Steve Hemming Museum Attendant on Attendant@staffordshireregimentmuseum.com
Or Juliet Davies Museum Friends Secretary on FriendsSecretary@Yahoo.com

