

## Good Old Days – Famous Names of Worcester

The Events Team had arranged a double billing for the November Good Old Days session. As well as a talk by Paul Harding on the Famous Names from the Great War our very own Rev Sarah gave us a talk about her walk through the War Cemeteries of the Great War.

Sarah went first with a very enlightening and, at times, extremely emotional talk on her walk through the Cemeteries. She explained how the enormity of what these young men had done when she was on the ferry from Dover. She knew that she was going for a week with beds and food, but they just did not know what they were going to face or whether they would ever go home again.



The group had all been sponsored to do the 60 mile walk over 4 days and during the visit they would visit some of the key sites from the War, including the Tyne Cot Cemetery, Airplane Cemetery, Thiepval Memorial, Lochnagar crater and



the Menin Gate. Sarah shared some lovely photos that she had taken on the trip. She was also very honoured to be asked to read the Kohima Epitaph and Exhortation at the Thiepval Memorial. She explained that at Tyne Cot 70% of the graves were unknown and how heart-breaking it was to keep seeing 'Known unto God' on the headstones. The walk ended at the Menin Gate where they took part in the daily Last Post Ceremony, which

was packed with people all standing quietly as it is every day, and this was the final emotional high for Sarah.

Following the inevitable break for refreshments, including the wonderful homemade cakes the lovely people donate for the event, we then went back to hear from Paul on the famous, and not so famous, names associated with Worcester during the Great War. He started by holding up a photo and asking who we thought it was. Of course, all the known names were shouted out like Woodbine Willie and Frederick Dancox but we were



all wrong as it was Maj Edward Hankey! Who may you ask was he, as we did. Well in the early days of the war in 1914 and after many days fierce fighting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Worcestershire Regiment were sent to a 'quiet' area to recover near Gheluvelt. Almost immediately they were ordered back in to action as the German forces had found a gap and were trying to push through, Maj Hankey and the Battalion rushed to Gheluvelt to help 'plug the gap' and they were successful. Had they not been then the German forces may have got through and gone on to seize the ports and as Paul said that could have changed the course of the war and been the end of the British Empire.



Paul told us about Woodbine Willie, Rev Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, who was Vicar of St Paul's in Worcester in 1914 and where he gave away his own bed as one of his parishioners was so poor, they could not afford to buy one. He is obviously well known from his exploits in the War where he would go around the trenches handing out bibles and Woodbines, the former the troops were not too worried about but they always wanted the latter. He was awarded the Military Cross for going in to No Man's Land and rescuing the wounded.

Paul also told us about Private Ted Dancox, who won the Victoria Cross and was a giant of a man. He was part of a mopping up force following up after the main attack near Ypres when they came under



heavy machine gun fire from a concrete pillbox. He worked his way round to the back of the pillbox and entered it with a grenade primed in his hand. The next thing his colleagues saw was him bringing out 40 German prisoners single-handed. He then went back in and brought out the heavy machine gun under his arm and then used it for the rest of the day firing on the enemy. He was due back in Worcester on his way to collect his VC from the King

but, in the days before instant communications the crowds waiting were unaware that he died from a shrapnel wound just before he was due to return to UK. His wife collected his VC from the King, but shortly after had to sell it for £5 as she had no money to feed her family.

Paul also told us how Sir Edward Elgar wrote lots of stirring music for the Great War and how Vesta Tilley, Matilda Alice Powles, helped the war effort by singing rousing songs, dressed as a soldier and then encouraged the men in the audience to come up on stage to enlist. On one night she was said to have recruited over 300 men.