

Summary of General History Meeting 15th August 2018

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Catherine introduced our guest, member speaker, Sandra and added that we also 2 of our GH members offering short talks.

Research about a War Memorial led by Sandra

Sandra began her first talk by telling us about her interest in one of her local war memorials, Throckley War Memorial, and she continued that interest by researching the life of one of the men whose name appeared on it. He was Private Thomas Hepple of Northumberland Fusiliers. He died in World War I. What drew his name to my attention was the fact that his records said "accidentally killed". Eager to find out more it started me on a trip that took me to Newburn Churchyard, Cambois, Woodhorn Colliery Archives and Throckley. It appears he was accidentally killed with his own rifle by a fellow soldier. Many hours were spent on the internet trying to piece things together but a lot of research still needs to be done to ensure that all the information I have gathered together is true and refers to Thomas Hepple.

Sandra was thanked for the first of her meeting talks.

What happened on this day? Mike was then invited to read from his book about an interesting historical event which happened in Newcastle on this day.

Alan followed with a summary of The Battle of Amiens led by Alan

During the past four years, popular memory of events of the first World War has been largely of the epic battles, The Somme (1916) and Passchendaele (1917) with images of tens of thousands of Allied soldiers being slaughtered due to uncaring and incompetent leaders.

An idea of "lions led by donkeys" resulting in unending disasters is a myth propagated in such works as "Blackadder" and "Oh, What A Lovely War!" and major Allied successes have been conveniently ignored or forgotten.

By the turn of 1917/18 the British Empire and French forces were on the back foot as Axis forces achieved a numerical superiority due to the release of dozens of divisions from the defunct Russian front and a large German Spring offensive on the Western front, intended to capture the Channel ports and drive a wedge between the British and French armies very nearly succeeded. The allies regained superiority with the mounting supply of American troops and the end of the British campaign in Palestine. A decisive push near Amiens was planned for Summer 1918.

The battle plan was for 2 British divisions, commanded by Sir Henry Rawlinson, and 2 French divisions to hold the flanks, whilst the spearhead was to be by 3 Australian and 3 Canadian

divisions of battle hardened troops led by able commanders. A total of 75000 men with over 500 tanks, (the total British army compliment) ,



2000 guns and nearly 2000 aircraft would be involved in the initial attack.

In order to have total surprise, extraordinary measures were used to maintain secrecy. Guns were moved into position at night and straw was placed under the wheels to deaden the sound and the traditional artillery ranging shots, which warned the enemy of an imminent attack, were dispensed with. Likewise, there was to be no preliminary artillery bombardment but support to the advancing troops would be by a creeping barrage- a revolutionary innovation that depended on pinpoint accuracy to avoid casualties from friendly fire, and as the lumbering tanks were moved to the starting positions, hundreds of planes of the newly created Royal Air Force would fly low and drop bombs on the enemy to disguise the noise.

At 4.20 am on the 8th of August, the infantry supported by tanks, attacked the unsuspecting German Second army, advancing 8 miles in the day and inflicting more than 36000 casualties, including 27000

prisoners for minimum allied losses. The battle did not of course end the war but it was the beginning of a series of 100 days of Allied offensives with the

German army in full retreat.

The Allied tactics at Amiens had reshaped the nature of modern warfare and convinced the German High Command that the war was lost.

Alan was thanked for once again producing such an interesting talk especially since it was the 100th anniversary of the battle of Amiens just a few days prior to our meeting.

Animals In World War One led by Sandra

Sandra began by explaining how Great Britain had always, in the past, relied upon horses when at war. As so many horses would be needed a lot of preparation went into having them available, trained and shipped over to the Western Front. Dogs also played a vital role not only as medic dogs but also as messengers. Pigeons too were used as messengers and when gas was used canaries had a vital role. Most of the regiments had animal mascots and they also went to the war. In recognition of the role of animals played in all wars, there is a monument in Park Lane, London in their honour. One of the

inscriptions on it reads “They Had No Choice”.



Members had several comments and questions throughout Sandra’s talk sharing their knowledge of the events.

Sandra was thanked for her fascinating talks which were good examples of learning and personal research.

All three of our speakers were thanked again for providing *such an interesting meeting*.

**Our next meeting is
19th September**