



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

Due to the lack of interest or volunteers coming forward to take on the roles of branch chair, treasurer and newsletter/Sentinel editor which will become vacant at our AGM in November I have been asked to hold an EGM. This has therefore been booked for 7.30 p.m. on Thursday 29 August and will be held at the Ed Shed. Should these roles not subsequently be filled it seems unlikely that the branch will be able to continue. If you have any time to spare and appreciate the work of the branch, please consider putting yourself forward for one of the roles. Both myself and Hilary will support as necessary anyone taking over the positions.

In our May newsletter we mentioned a fundraising effort by the Friends of St James Church to procure a headstone for Private Arthur Fowler at Charfield, the CWGC declining to include him in their register. The Friends are

pleased to share the news that their fundraising efforts have raised over £2,000 which means they have enough to purchase the headstone and cover the engraving which will include Private Fowler's Worcestershire Regiment cap badge. The headstone will be of Portland stone and similar in style to the CWGC headstones. The Friends would like to thank all those who supported this project and once they have a timeline for the installation and dedication they will let us know the date. You can follow them on Facebook: *@Friends of St James Church Charfield*.

Nicolas Wheatley has kindly pointed out that there is a production of *Birdsong* coming up at Cheltenham's Everyman Theatre in October in the week of the 22 - 26 which may be of interest to some members.

Peter

Future branch events

Tuesday, 10 September
Morris Meredith Williams,
an Artist on the Western Front
Phyllida Shaw
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

Born in Glamorgan, Morris Meredith Williams was trained in London at the Slade School of Art but working in Edinburgh, as an illustrator and teacher at Fettes College, when he joined up in April 1915. Commissioned into 17th (Service) Battalion (1st Glamorgan), the Welsh Regiment's first Bantam battalion, he later transferred to the Royal Engineers. In France from June 1916, he filled pocket-sized sketchbooks with vivid images of army life, in and behind the Front Line. These, combined with his correspondence with his wife, create a rare insight into a junior officer's days. This talk concludes with a brief look at the memorials on which they worked together after the war, including the famous frieze in the Scottish National War Memorial at Edinburgh Castle.

Tuesday, 8 October
The Half-Shilling Curate
Sarah Reay
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

The only Great War padre awarded the Military Cross for gallantry, the Rev Herbert Butler Cowl served with the BEF in France and Flanders. He was severely wounded and returned home on the ill-fated HMHS *Anglia* when she sank in the Channel (the first hospital ship mined during the war). The talk draws on Cowl's letters and journals, communications to/from the War Office, letters from comrades in his battalion and newspaper accounts, to tell the story of this fascinating man. It is based on Sarah's book, *The Half-Shilling Curate*.



Lance Corporal Archibald Evatt Bland (234)

1st Field Company, Australian Engineers, Australian Imperial Force

Archie Evatt Bland was a Gloucester boy, who like many of his compatriots, had emigrated to the Dominions but returned to fight for 'the old country' in its hour of need.

He was born in Gloucester in early 1885, the son of Samuel Bland (a journalist) and his wife Emma. Both parents had died over a decade before the outbreak of the Great War. Archie was educated at Dean Close School, Cheltenham and was a talented footballer and played for Gloucester City FC.

After leaving school he undertook a college based engineering course and for a time worked for a firm in Dudbridge, near Stroud. According to a report in the *Gloucestershire Echo* he also spent time in Russia before emigrating to Australia in May 1911. He became a civil and mechanical engineer at Manly, a beachside suburb of Sydney and married in 1912.

Following the declaration of war he enlisted in the Australian Army, as a Private on 16 September 1914. On 22 December, he embarked from Melbourne as part of the 1st Re-enforcement draft and arrived in Alexandria, Egypt on 3 March 1915, where he joined the 1st Field Company, Australian Engineers, as a Sapper. He landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 and remained there until



27 December, when he returned to Egypt. Field Companies undertook a variety of duties supporting the front line troops and although dangerous work Archie's service on the Peninsular saw him stay free of wounds and sickness.

On 6 March 1916 he was promoted to Second (or Lance) Corporal and on the 28th of that month landed at Marseilles, en route to the Western Front.

The 1st Field Company was part of the Australian 1st Division and on 23 July 1916 the

division was a lead element in the attack on the Somme village of Pozieres. The attack went in at 12.30am and was successful in that a large part of the village was captured. However, German artillery shelled the ruins of the village remorselessly and by the time the battle ended the 1st Australian Division had suffered 7,700 casualties.

Archie Bland was wounded on 23 July and was taken to 44 Casualty Clearing Station at Puchevillers, where he died. He now lies in Puchevillers British Cemetery and is commemorated on the Manly War Memorial and on the Australian National War Memorial in Canberra.

Graham Adams

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"When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today."