



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

It's that time of year when I start to look towards our Christmas meeting and the request for three ten minute talks from members. We were really treated last month at our summer meeting with three wide ranging and interesting presentations by Adrian Smith, Paul Haigh and Simon Shephard and so the bar has been set high. However, please don't be put off, if you have a short talk that you would like to deliver to us in December on any subject vaguely related to the Great War, then please put your name forward to me.

There are a number of issues arising for the branch which will benefit from a larger discussion than the numbers we normally expect at our November AGM. Such matters arising will be a possible necessity to change venue once again, a need to encourage more members and greater attendance, an increase of

the entrance 'donation' and an exploration of projects to raise much needed funds for the branch. The date of the AGM will be announced shortly via branch email, please look out for it and please consider attending if you don't normally do so. We do value as many voices and inputs as possible.

On Friday 13 September at 12 noon Neela Mann will be giving a talk about the Cheltenham Cemetery Great War Crosses. The talk is at Cheltenham Cemetery, Bouncers Lane, GL52 5JY - follow the signs to the exhibition. Neela was involved in the research, along with students from Pittville School, of the soldiers and their crosses. Her talk reveals the stories of some of the soldiers and how the crosses taken from the battlefield now have a permanent home.

Peter

Future branch events

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

Tuesday, 12 November
Haig and his Army Commanders
Professor Peter Simkins MBE FRHistS
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*.



Haig's principal subordinates on the Western Front were the commanders of the five Armies which formed the BEF in the field, from 1916 to 1918. Some were controversial figures. In this talk Peter discusses Haig's relationships with these officers and examines their respective contributions to the BEF's operations.

Second Lieutenant Allan John Braine Meikle Royal Air Force

In St Martin's Churchyard at Charlton Abbots, near Sudeley there is only one Great War related war grave. It is that of Allan John Braine Meikle who was born at Barnham, Suffolk in 1900 and came from a farming family. Latterly the family relocated to Cotehay Farm, Andoversford and Allan was educated at Belmore House School, Cheltenham.



After leaving school he became an apprentice tool maker with an engineering company in Coventry. In January 1917, at the age of sixteen, he enlisted in the Army obviously overstating his real age. He was posted to the Motor Transport section of the Army Service Corps and saw service in Ireland. In about 1917 he applied to join the Royal Flying Corps and his service record states his date of birth as 24 January 1889. He was accepted and became a Cadet on 13 August 1917 and undertook training in Buckinghamshire. By 8 November 1917 he had qualified as a pilot and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant.

He specialised in flying single seater aircraft, which included the Sopwith Pup, Camel and Triplane. In July 1918 he came home on leave, in anticipation of a posting overseas. Whilst awaiting this he was posted to No 4 Training Depot Station at Hooten Park aerodrome on the Wirral, Cheshire.

On 5 August 1918 he took off on his final flight, in a Sopwith Dolphin.

A report of the inquest appeared in the *Chester Chronicle* of 10 August 1918: *(Second Lieutenant Meikle) started (the) flight at about 10.40am. When about 250 feet up the machine 'flattened out' a little, then did a flat turn to the left, thus causing it to spin immediately and crash to the ground. (The) deceased, it was stated, appeared to 'take off' at too great an angle, which caused a loss of flying speed. The machine burst into flames. Verdict ... accidental death.*

Allan was baptised on 29 July 1900 and BMD records indicated his birth registration was in Q3 of that year – so most likely he was born in either late June or July 1900. He evidently concealed his real age when enlisting in the Army and transferring into the RFC. He was therefore only just 18 when he died.

Graham Adams



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