

ALCESTER & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FEBRUARY 2016



William
Smallwood &
the Smallwood
Almshouses

www.alcesterhistory.org.uk

JANUARY MEETING: Our first talk of the new year set a very high standard and proved to be one of those talks that was so much more than the title implied. Sir Andrew Hamilton is the author of three books on the First World War and is currently at work on a fourth about the first day of the Battle of the Somme. As a teacher of history for some fifteen years and expert at capturing the imaginations of children, he is a master at conveying the scenes, backgrounds and people of which he speaks.

His grandfather kept a diary all his life and it was this diary written during his time in the trenches with the 1st Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment that formed the basis of this fascinating talk.

Sir Andrew's grandfather joined the army as soon as he left school and saw action in the Boer War where one of his best friends was one Bernard Montgomery, later Field Marshall Montgomery.

Another army friend was Bruce Bairnsfather of Stratford, the famous cartoonist, who drew on comrades from the trenches to fashion his characters such as 'Old Bill'. Last year's play 'Christmas Truce' at the RSC was based on his work.

The diary records the Royal Warwicks leaving from Folkestone for France in 1914 and a wonderfully clear, hand drawn map in the diary showed the Western Front. There were some marvellous photographs of people and places and of life in the trenches, squalor, mud, but also humour.

The Christmas Truce itself formed the second half of the talk. A preliminary meeting in no man's land hammered out the details of the truce, despite language difficulties. Soldiers from both sides, all along the front met in their hundreds, shaking hands and exchanging small tokens. In some places the trenches were quite close to each other, only yards apart. This short truce made a huge impression on those who took part. However, Sir Andrew pointed out that few, if any, football matches took place as the pitted ground and shell-holes would have made it impossible. A kick around illuminated by a 'star-shell' on a cold, frosty night did take place and lived long in the memories of those involved.

This wonderful and vivid, illustrated talk, given by a really superb speaker, was also, truly memorable.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Subscriptions for 2016 are payable at the February meeting. As always, please **do not** hand in money with no indication of who has given it – place your subscription in an envelope bearing your name and address. As agreed at last year's AGM, the subscription will, henceforward, be **£5** per person.

NOMINATIONS TO JOIN THE COMMITTEE: As our highly esteemed bookseller John Shakles is sadly standing down from the committee, nominations are invited for the vacant place.

Nominations should reach the Secretary Janet Hollington by email: jhollington@talktalk.net or phone: 01527 892653, no later than 5th February.

MUSEUM AND LIBRARY RE-OPENING: Please note that on Monday 8th February, Alcester's wonderful new cultural hub, containing both the Heritage Centre and Library, will be re-opening under one roof at Globe House. Please do go along and use these two important attributes of Alcester life which we are so lucky to still have!

HASELOR: A link on our website www.alcesterhistory.org will lead to a delightful website entitled 'Haselor Through the Lens of Time'. Do take a look at some fascinating old photographs of bygone Haselor and district, in the form of a photograph album.

NEXT MEETING: Our next meeting on **Wednesday 10th February** will commence with the **AGM** and election of officers and committee.

Following the AGM, our speaker will be Graham Smith of Redditch, a teacher of some 36 years standing whose subject will be the Smallwoods, famous for the Alcester Almshouses and the old Redditch Hospital. The talk is entitled **The Life & Times of Edwin & William Smallwood** and is fully illustrated.

Talks take place at St Benedict's Sixth Form Centre and commence at **8.00pm**. All are welcome.

SUE FISHER