



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

Unfortunately Professor Mark Connelly has had to pull out at the last minute from delivering his talk to us this month. However, we are blessed to have our own homegrown talent Bob Brunson gallantly step into the fold! As many of you will already be aware, Bob is an excellent speaker and a superb replacement so we, as a branch are very privileged to have him volunteer so readily to help. I am sure that you will very much enjoy learning about some of the Gloucestershire Constabulary's exploits in the Great War. Bob looks at the various intakes from the Constabulary into the military (reservists then the volunteer intakes), what the constabulary's additional roles were in wartime, and the impact of the war on the development of the Special Constabulary and Women Police.

Please do keep an eye on our branch website for any other amendments to talks and speakers from our 'Calendar of Events'.

I send my apologies once again for not being with you tonight - my thanks go to Graham

Adams for stepping into the role of MC for the evening.

The WFA have posted some of their lectures on YouTube: *Douglas Haig: Hero of Scotland, Britain and the Empire* - Professor Gary Sheffield; *Punching Above Its Weight? Some Reflections on Scotland and the New Armies, 1914-1918* - Professor Peter Simkins; *Vera Brittain: Nursing on the Western Front 1917-18* - Dr Phylomena Badsey; *He's a Lumberjack and he's Okay ... The Canadian Corps 1914-1917* - Rob Thompson and *Scotland in British Propaganda 1914-18* - Professor Stephen Badsey. There are also some new podcasts on their website: *The Ulster Division during the Spring Offensive* by Michael Nugent; *Humour in British literature during the Great War* by Dr Emily Anderson; *L/Cpl Wijnand 'Vic' Hamman, 2nd South African Regiment* by Emile Coetzee and *British Territorials in India* by Professor Peter Stanley.

Peter

Future branch events

Tuesday, 9 July

Hartlebury VAD Hospital

Douglas Smith

National Star College at 7.30pm

Tuesday, 13 August

Sir William Robertson: Architect of Victory?

Ross Beadle

National Star College at 7.30pm

In March 1919 Hartlebury VAD hospital closed its doors to patients for the last time. The records of such hospitals were destroyed after the war and with them the stories of the soldiers and nurses who lived and worked there, but not Hartlebury. The Commandant of the hospital, Frances Gibbons, had four autograph books which she preserved. Douglas was fortunate enough to be asked to do the research on the books and found that there were four more books in the possession of the Hive in Worcester. From the jumble of photographs and messages has emerged his book *Cheer Boys It's Hartlebury!* which tells the story of the 436 soldiers recorded. It contains their final messages, their poems and art work, the nurses who looked after them and the countless trips, entertainments and sports they took part in.

Haig gets all the attention, but he was only half of the double act that set British war plans from December 1915 to February 1918, all the way through the Somme and Passchendaele battles. The other half of the act was Sir William Robertson,



Chief of the Imperial General Staff and famously the only man ever to rise from the lowest rank all the way to Field Marshal. This talk explores his role in setting the BEF's ultimately victorious strategy and the accusations made against him of duplicity towards the Government.

Flight Cadet William Douglas Henderson

32nd Training Depot Station, Royal Air Force

William, known better as Douglas, was born on 8 December 1893. He was the son of Alexander Henderson, a draper, and his wife Mary who between them had a total of no less than nine children. When Douglas was very young the family lived at Clarence Street in Gloucester, although they later moved to Hucclecote to what is today the Royal Oak public house.

After attending King's School as a chorister, Douglas obtained an apprenticeship at Messrs Nicks and Co, Timber Yard on the Bristol Road. He was a keen sportsman, playing both cricket and rugby and was also a member of Gloucester Rowing Club. In May 1911 however, at the age of twenty-two, Douglas sought a new life in Canada, initially working as a lumberjack and then taking a job in the motor trade.

On 31 March 1916 he drew on his skills as a motor mechanic and enlisted into the Canadian Army Service Corps as a Driver, proceeding to the Western Front in August of that year. In the Spring of 1918, seeing a future career in aviation, Douglas applied to transfer into the newly formed Royal Air Force and left for England to train as a pilot with the 32nd Training Depot Station (TDS) at Montrose in Scotland. Initially, of course, Douglas flew with an instructor in a two-seater trainer but it was not long before he went solo and learnt to fly the single-seat aircraft he would be using operationally including the famous Camel.

On 28 November 1918, Douglas took off for a practice flight in one of the training school's Camels, one of a batch of forty that was built from salvaged parts. He left Montrose airfield and headed south to practice aerobatics above



Henderson as an OR with the Canadian Army Service Corps

the ancient hill fort at Ironhill, putting the Camel through its paces. As he performed one of the acrobatic manoeuvres, probably a turn or a loop, Douglas's lap strap gave way and he was thrown out of the cockpit. His body was found at Castle Farm near Lunan Bay, the official cause of his death being given as a fracture to the base of the skull.

The subsequent investigation concluded that Douglas was not to blame for the accident, his lap strap had failed under the strain of the aerobatics. Douglas was over six-foot tall and his weight, combined with that of his heavy flying clothing, may have contributed to its failure.

Douglas was buried at Gloucester Cemetery a few days later, his brother-in-law, the Reverend Mackay, taking the service.

Bob Brunson



Henderson at Montrose

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