

# THE TIGER



**THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND BRANCH  
OF THE  
WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION**

**ISSUE 4 - JANUARY 2012**

**EDITORIAL**

***“Aeroplanes and tanks are only accessories to the man on a horse”.***  
**Sir Douglas Haig in 1927**

Welcome again, Ladies and Gentlemen, to the latest edition of “The Tiger”, and let us take this opportunity to wish all our readership “A Happy New Year”.

January 2012 will see the eagerly anticipated release in cinemas of Steven Spielberg’s adaptation of Michael Morpurgo’s *War Horse*, an event that will hopefully result in even greater publicity for the plight of animals in theatres of war, and further raise public knowledge of the conditions for both human and equine combatants in the Great War.

Equally of importance is the re-publishing of *Warrior*, an account by Major General Jack Seely (Gallop Jack) of the adventures of his trusty mount, as horse and rider served together throughout the conflict. Seely, a decorated aristocrat and Imperial Cavalryman of note, was a Liberal MP in the immediate post-war era, being appointed Secretary of State for War between 1912 and 1914. Both Seely and Warrior were to survive the Western Front, unlike Seely’s first son, Frank, who fell in action during the 1917 battle for Arras. Seely would return to politics, becoming Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, whilst Warrior enjoyed his retirement on Seely’s estate until his demise during the Second War. Seely’s grandson is the well-known racing commentator, Brough Scott.

Seely’s close associate and fellow cavalryman, Captain (later Major General) Geoffrey Brooke is also worthy of mention. Brooke was a horseman of considerable stature, and contributed greatly to equine literature with his many equestrian tomes. He was awarded the D.S.O. and M.C. for his bravery in action, being the first man (alphabetically) to be gazetted for the latter award upon its instigation in January 1915. Brooke, like Seely, had aristocratic connections but is a largely forgotten figure today. His second wife Dorothy, however, is better remembered, particularly for her sterling work in rescuing ex-war horses in Cairo from their sorry plight in the 1930’s. 2011 saw the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dorothy’s initial fund-raising efforts to establish what today survives as “The Brooke”, an internationally known animal welfare charity which continues to operate throughout Egypt and the Middle East. The story of Dorothy and her Old War Horse Memorial Hospital was featured in our Armistice Pilgrimage to Ypres last November and we will be pleased to provide copies of our handout upon request - please do e-mail and we’ll bring some along to the next meeting.

The study of the horse in the war dominates our pages this month, providing another absorbing tangent for research in a multi-faceted conflict. We trust our readership will find this issue both of interest and educational, if not inspiring!

V. E. J. & D.S.H.

**PARISH NOTICES**

# **BRANCH MEETINGS**

**Lord Mayor's Room, New Walk Museum, Leicester  
7.30 P.M.**

**16<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2012  
Guest Speaker: Andy Longeran**

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**“Lt. Gen. Sir Thomas D'Oyly Snow”**

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**FEBRUARY 2012  
PLEASE NOTE  
DATE, VENUE & SPEAKER TO BE CONFIRMED**

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**Lord Mayor's Room, New Walk Museum, Leicester  
7.30 P.M.**

**19<sup>th</sup> March 2012  
Guest Speaker : Professor Peter Simkins**

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**“Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies”**

**16<sup>th</sup> April 2012  
Guest Speaker : Kate Wills**

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**“Salonika - Theatre of War”**

**FROM THE MAILBOX**

Continuing our theme, Mr Peter Spooner has forwarded the following piece:



*The above postcard, from a series collected by SQMS Henry Tyler, who served with the 1/1st Leicestershire Yeomanry, before transferring to the Machine Gun Corps (Cavalry) and serving with the 7th and 8th Machine Gun Squadrons, shows a horse and farriers of the Leicestershire Yeomanry. Regretfully there is no indication as to the date and location of the photograph, which might have been taken in France or Belgium.*

*Unfortunately not all War Horse stories had a happy ending. The experiences of Private Harry DAY of B Squadron 1/1st Leicestershire Yeomanry illustrate this point. Harry was born in 1894 and wanted to joined the Cavalry. His family objected, so he joined the Leicestershire Yeomanry instead. He was mobilised on the 4th August 1914 and a few days later went with others to The George Hotel Hinckley to collect horses requisitioned by the Army. He approached a horse that had an upset woman and girl standing next to it, who confirmed that they owned the horse. Harry said if he could keep the horse he would promise to look after it. He did keep the horse but could not keep his promise for long. In January 1915 the horse was with others, hobbled on the bank of the Yser canal, the horses were hit by shell fire and Harry's horse was killed.*

*In 1915, having reached the rank of Sergeant Harry was sent on a six week course to be commissioned. First serving with the 4th Reserve Regiment of Cavalry and then the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, he was given the job of arranging visual communications on the ramparts of Ypres. For this he received a Mention In Despatches and leave in England. On returning to the front he was sent back to the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, but to avoid a third winter in the trenches he joined the RFC, at one time being a member of a night flying unit. He was later recalled by the Inniskillings (it is not clear if this was the Dragoon Guards or the Fusiliers), to take part in Battle of Amiens, during which two horses were shot from under him in one day. Harry survived the War and lived until 1992.*

## **A MAN TO REMEMBER**

**PERCY CECIL EVANS-FREKE**



The second son of Baron Carbery, of Bisbrooke Hall, north east of Uppingham, Percy Cecil Evans-Freke was born in 1871. After seeing service in South Africa in 1900 and 1901, he was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the Leicestershire Yeomanry, which became part of the North Midland Mounted Brigade and arrived in France in November 1914 to join the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Division. So few casualties were initially incurred that the Leicestershire Yeomanry became known as “God’s Own”.

This situation changed on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1915, when the Yeomanry went into action in front line trenches on the Frezenberg Ridge, as dismounted cavalry, numbering 291 strong all ranks. B and C Squadrons took up forward positions in the advanced trenches, with A Squadron to the rear in support trenches. Whilst B and C squadrons made a heroic stand against the German advances that morning, A Squadron, meanwhile, had held the support trench under strong shellfire until 5:30am, when they began to fall back towards the road behind the trenches.

There they were met part-way by the regimental commander, Lieutenant Colonel Evans-Freke, the second-in-command and the adjutant. The Colonel shouted "Hold hard Leicester Yeomanry!" and A squadron halted and returned to the support trench. The Colonel was killed directing the defence of the trench, struck first by shrapnel in the arm then, within three yards of support trenches, hit by a bullet, which penetrated his breast killing him instantly.

The Yeomanry were to suffer 172 casualties that day, including seven Officers. The body of Evans-Freke was one of the few recovered from the battlefield, and he lies in the Divisional Cemetery, on the outskirts of Ypres. In May 2009, Evans-Freke’s great grandson, Colonel Robert Boyle, travelled to Ypres to unveil a plaque commemorating the Leicestershire Yeomanry, in St George’s Memorial Church.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The main responsibility for the care of horses in the British Army fell to the Royal Army Veterinary Corps? It began as the Army Veterinary Service in 1796 and changed its name in 1914, the Royal prefix being granted in 1918.

Amongst the most popular works of the day was Fortunino Matania's painting *Goodbye, Old Man*? It depicts a British soldier nursing the head of his dying horse as shells burst around them and a comrade calls out for him to leave. Adored by the public it came to be an iconic image for all involved in animal welfare and appeared on posters for various charitable organisations including the Blue Cross, to whom the original painting was gifted, and the American Red Star.

In the French village of Chipilly, on the River Somme, there is a life size memorial statue by sculptor Henri Desire Gauquie of an artillery driver and his injured horse? It was erected by the local people in memory of the 58<sup>th</sup> (London) Division which recaptured the village in August 1918.

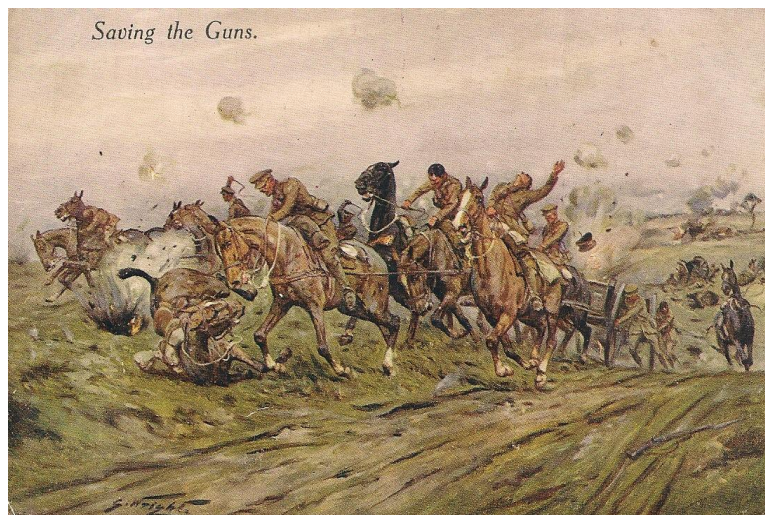
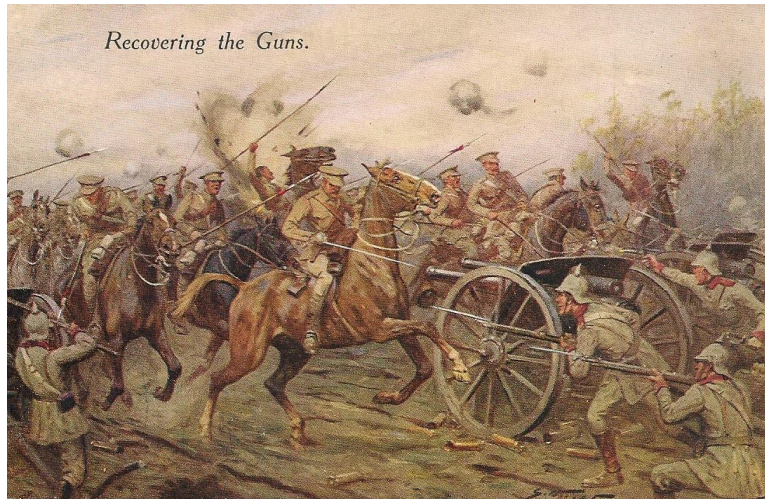
The song *As if he Knows*, written by Eric Bogle in 2001, tells the story of the horses of the Australian Light Horse during the First World War? Of the approximately 53,000 horses sent by Australia, only one ever returned after the war. The Anzacs were ordered to get rid of their horses and most were sold or given away, but in Palestine the Light Horsemen refused and chose instead to shoot them all. The song is based on an actual Light Horseman, Elijah Conn, who had a horse called Banjo. Conn never forgot Banjo and for the rest of his life could not talk about him without tears coming into his eyes. The song is included on Bogle's CD "The Colour of Dreams".

Modern day equestrian events such as dressage and show jumping owe their history to military horsemanship? Horses, since classical times, were trained to perform movements intended to evade or attack the enemy whilst in battle.

Possibly the most famous donkey of the First World War became a walking ambulance? Australian soldier and stretcher-bearer, John Simpson Kirkpatrick, rode the donkey from dawn 'til dusk scouring the cliffs and beaches of Gallipoli, constantly exposed to enemy fire, searching for injured men. Over 300 casualties were rescued until, on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1915, tragedy struck as machine-gun fire suddenly exploded around them and, seconds later, Simpson lay dead. The donkey continued on alone to the Casualty Clearing Station safely delivering the patient he was carrying. "The Man with a Donkey" made a huge impression on the fellow soldiers and many considered that Simpson should have been awarded the Victoria Cross.

Two memorials to the Leicestershire Yeomanry stand in our counties? One in Bradgate Park close to Old John which was unveiled on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1927 and commemorates the fallen of the Boer War and both World Wars. An annual wreath laying service takes place every 13<sup>th</sup> May. The Rutland memorial can be found in Oakham Castle and commemorates the men of A Squadron who fell in The Great War.

**COLLECTORS CORNER**



Continuing our equine theme, we offer two postcards recently purchased on Leicester Market, showing paintings by a well-known equestrian artist, George Wright.

The reverse of the cards is also of interest - the cards were sent by a Gunner by the surname of Dalby, of A Battery, 5<sup>th</sup> Reserve Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, Catterick, to a Miss Powell, of Bull Head Street, Wigston Magna, and a Ms A Dalby of Welford Road, Blaby.

Are these names familiar to any of our readership? If so, please contact us and let us know . . .

## **IN PASTURES NEW.....**

On the Western Front, strung either side of a meandering 400 mile line stretching from the Swiss border to the North Sea, two armies became entrenched. Barbed wire, machine guns and gas controlled the ebb and flow of

**battle. Not a particularly endearing prospect for our well trained Cavalry and, following early, often futile, engagements how they must have longed for more traditional opportunities to charge at the enemy! Their horses, lances and swords would soon be exchanged, however, for bayonets and rifles as it quickly became clear to Military Commanders that the men were at their most effective when fighting on foot alongside Infantry Units.**

**Prior to 1914 the British Army had just over 20,000 horses but during the first three years of the war it had been necessary to purchase over a million more. Whilst men volunteered in their thousands horses and mules were removed, under government orders, from quiet rural farms, liveries, hunt stables etc to be shipped overseas and sent into the heat of battle - an army of equines who took on the drudgery of heaving rations, guns and munitions up to the front lines - essential transport for the bloody business ahead.**

**Artillery was the principal weapon of attack and, as the guns became bigger and heavier, so the arduous task of moving them became greater. This problem was exacerbated by the lack of roads and the terrible state of the terrain. Huge numbers of horses were required for draught work, for ambulances and as pack-animals. All ammunition was carried to the gun emplacements by horses and the dreadful conditions in which they and the men toiled can be seen in many contemporary photographs and accounts. Much time was spent picking their way over the glue-like mud spaced between great pools, pools deep enough for horses and men to drown in, dug out by high explosives the resultant craters quickly infilled by rain and the low water table of Belgium and Northern France.**

**Today, few of us have ever experienced any first hand contact with a horse. Some of us have never even touched a horse. In 1914 the complete reverse would have been the case as we would have ridden or been carried in some form of transportation pulled by horses. We would be familiar with the daily routine of feeding, mucking out and grooming, through which close contact came recognition of the character of individual animals. Consider, then, the continual whistle and explosion of shells, the tearing of shrapnel and the rat-at-at of machine guns all combining to confuse and madden man and beast. Ever had either been required to perform in such a hell on earth?**

**Over a million horses died on the Allied side of the Western Front alone. It is estimated that the total number killed on all sides and in all theatres of the war was eight million. It is believed that one lesson of the war was that the days of the military horse were numbered and that Cavalry techniques, perfected over centuries, were proved ineffectual. The horse had become merely a beast of burden, it's former glory gone. David Kenyon's new book however, *Horsemen in No Man's Land*, seeks to challenge conventional thought on this emotive subject and is a worthy read. Ironically though, within our own lifetime, perhaps the very need for fighting men, let alone horses, will soon, too, cease to exist.....**

***“Scores, hundreds of horses are wandering around, gathering into herds and into twos and threes, lost, exhausted, bony but still alive where they have been able to wrench themselves free from a team whose other horses have been killed. Some, like our horse, are still in harness, or dragging a shaft with them, and there are wounded horses... the undecorated, unnamed heroes of the battle who for a***

*hundred, two hundred miles have hauled this artillery, now dead and drowning in the swamp..."*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn  
from his book "August 1914"  
about Imperial Russia's defeat at the Battle of Tannenberg

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**WE ARE UNABLE TO USE OUR USUAL VENUE FOR THE DATE OF OUR FEBRUARY MEETING - A DECISION REGARDING DATE, VENUE AND SPEAKER WILL BE DISCUSSED AT THE JANUARY MEETING.**

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We thank once again those readers who contacted us following the production of previous issues. Your comments are always valued and welcome.

Remember we are always open to suggestions as to what our readers would like to see included/excluded from future issues. Anybody wishing to submit material is more than welcome to contact us by E-mail at:-

[foft@live.co.uk](mailto:foft@live.co.uk)

We very much look forward to your continued support.

Valerie Jacques (Newsletter Editor)

David Humberston (Branch Secretary)

*"Look back at our struggle for freedom,  
Trace our present day's strength to its source,  
And you'll find that man's pathway to glory  
Is strewn with the bones of a horse"*

Anon.