

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Project Purley Meetings 2015

### *January*

#### The First World War

Project Purley's January meeting is traditionally a 'Members' Evening' with short talks around a theme. This year's theme was the First World War, in keeping with its hundred year anniversary, and the evening included three talks and displays on Purley's war dead and memorabilia and research by members. Anzac biscuits, home-made by Angela Edwards and Marjorie Butler, accompanied the usual tea and coffee. Unusually the weather was good, it is not uncommon for us to be battling snow at our January meeting.

David Downs opened with stories of some of the professional footballers from Reading who served in WWI. In 1915 the 'Khaki Cup Final' was watched by George V who then told the players "today you have fought for your team, tomorrow I want you to go and fight for your country". Many joined the 17th Middlesex Battalion which was known as the 'Footballers' Battalion'. Among those who served was Joe Bailey of Reading who won the DSO plus the Military Cross three times (i.e. he had two bars added on the ribbon) for gallantry. He survived the war and in August 1920 scored a goal in the Football League.

Frederick Bartholomew (Old Bart) a grounds man for Reading Football Club became a Company Quarter Master Sergeant in the 17th. He died in 1979 aged 94 but it isn't known where he is buried.

Nine men from the Reading Club died, including Alan Foster who played for Reading before the war. He died of wounds on the Somme. 2nd Lieutenant Donald Bell, of the Green Howards, won the VC posthumously in 1916. David concluded by recounting the story of the football game between British and German soldiers on Christmas Day 1914 which was stopped by their officers.

Our second speaker was Bridget Pollard who has researched air raids over Germany by the RNAS (Royal Naval Air Service) in September and October 1914. In early 1914 the Royal Flying Corps (Military Division) was only equipped for reconnaissance and not for bombing and it was the responsibility of the RNAS to protect the air space. The early months of the war were fraught with issues as the Germans advanced into new territory and poor weather destroyed some of the few planes available. There were also problems with the range to the targets in Germany. Neutral Holland was officially a no-fly zone yet they had insufficient fuel range to fly around it and Bridget suggested that the evidence indicates that the pilots did just take the direct route over Holland. The first mission was largely unsuccessful as three of those who flew to Cologne couldn't find the target, whilst one made Dusseldorf but dropped his bombs too low so that they didn't explode; although he did make it back to base at Antwerp.

By then wintery weather had set in and the RNAS pulled out of Antwerp leaving only two planes with their pilots to attempt one last mission. On a misty day one plane flown by Spencer Grey found Cologne; but not the airship sheds, so bombed the station. The second plane went to Dusseldorf, dive bombed the shed and destroyed a Zeppelin. Both pilots were awarded the DSO.

Jack Livesey wound up the talks with his story of the RNAS Armoured Car Section known as the 'Motor Bandits' in France and Belgium between 1-10 October 1914. This is another less-heard of group who went to ingenious lengths to adapt vehicles for armoured use and Jack showed images of







