



# The Fusilier Museum

## WARWICK

Monthly E-Newsletter - May 2023



## MUSEUM NEWS

### CELEBRATING MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS

As we approach Volunteers' Week (1st - 7th June), a national celebration of the contribution of millions of people across the UK to volunteering in communities, it is worth pausing to consider the contribution that volunteers have made to the museum since it reopened in January 2023. Due to the two-year hiatus caused by Covid and the closure of the museum at St. John's House, it was uncertain how many previous volunteers would come back when the museum reopened. Luckily, many did, including one who will be mentioned again below.

We were also lucky that a volunteer recruitment drive, early in 2023 produced many new volunteers including a Fusilier veteran, a keen militaria collector, several experienced museum volunteers, and someone with useful business skills. Each individual is valuable to the museum in different ways. The abilities of all the volunteers cover a wide range from research skills to collection cataloguing, IT to customer service and financial book-keeping to carpentry. Many also have excellent visitor engagement skills.

While grateful for their contribution, the museum notes its responsibility to support volunteers and train them so that they can grow with the organization. In one example, a new volunteer joined because of their interest (and experience) in volunteering with museums but has since discovered a passion for military history including the life of Field Marshal Montgomery! Our Museum Assistant David Baynham has shared some of his considerable knowledge with members of the volunteer team and this in turn has helped them to provide a richer engagement for visitors.

It is worth reflecting that volunteers are an interface between the organisation and the external communities it serves. The diversity of backgrounds of our current volunteers is starting to represent the diversity of users as a museum we want to reach. This is also helped by the museum's commitment to supporting young people through work experience and Duke of Edinburgh placements. Three of these are planned for this year.

Finally, on behalf of the museum, I would like to acknowledge one of the museum's long term volunteers Val Sawyer who has sadly passed away. Val had a lovely personality and had gained a high level of skill as a family history researcher. It was my privilege to meet and talk with Val several times including for the submission of an article she had written for this e-newsletter. Val's obituary and article can be found below. This issue of the e-newsletter is dedicated to Val's memory and the recognition of her exemplary example as a skilled and committed museum volunteer.

*-Chris Kirby, General Manager*

[www.fusiliermuseumwarwick.com](http://www.fusiliermuseumwarwick.com)



**If you are interested in learning more about volunteering at the museum, contact us at [volunteering@fusiliermuseumwarwick.com](mailto:volunteering@fusiliermuseumwarwick.com).**

# CURRENT PROJECTS

The museum continues to manage different projects that will both enhance the access to the collections, promote the Regiment's story and provide opportunities to generate funding essential to the organisation's future.

## THE RESET PROJECT

Late last year, the museum curator Stephanie Bennett was successful in gaining a grant from West Midlands Museum Development (WMMD). This was to provide greater access to the new museum at Pageant House for members of the hearing impairment community. The funded project involved installing a new hearing loop system at the museum reception and British Sign Language (BSL) presentations of the audio narratives in the museum.

The new hearing loop has now been installed at the reception desk meaning visitors with a hearing aid or hearing loop receiver will have amplified sound of the voices of reception staff. A company called A2i is currently taking the transcripts of the different museum audios and is translating them into BSL to then be filmed. The intention is for one of these films to be inset into the welcome screen in the entrance lobby. Three other films will be put on to the museum's new YouTube channel and will be accessed by smart phone through QR codes placed in the galleries.

The final part of the project is to invite a local hearing impairment group into the museum to try out the new facilities and feedback what they think. This project is one step in a greater plan to break down barriers to engagement in the museum and hopefully increase audiences.

## THE BRANDWOOD ROOM

The funding collected so far for the Brandwood Room project has allowed the museum to commission large roller blinds for the two windows each with printed museum logos on the external face. These have been secured at a competitive price from a local supplier in Leamington Spa.

The banners have arrived and been installed just as this e-newsletter is about to go to press.

As the photo shows, these black-out blinds effectively control the light in the Brandwood Room to allow a range of activity to take place from illustrative talks using a projector to children's activities or wedding receptions.

The logos are only placed on the exterior of the blinds and as another image illustrates, when partly or completely shut, effectively advertise the presence of the museum to people and traffic (of which there is a fair amount) passing through the main street of Warwick!

Thank-you to all the generous donations made so far!



**We are now down to just £400 needed to complete this project.**

**If you can donate at least £10 to make the Brandwood Room an effective learning and hiring community space for the museum, please support this project and make a difference –**

**<https://fusiliermuseumwarwick.com/support>**

# VAL SAWYER

The museum was saddened to hear of the passing of longstanding volunteer Val Sawyer in April.

When I sent out an email to the other volunteers who knew her saying Val had passed away unexpectedly, every reply I got used the word 'lovely' about her. They are right. She was that sort of person.

Val first got involved with the museum through researching her ancestor Jake Asbury, who had fallen during the Battle of the Somme while serving in the Birmingham Pals. She had a passion for research and was a very confident Ancestry user.



As a volunteer with the museum Val used to cover Saturday lunchtimes at the counter and would work from home on research enquiries. She was good with the public, having had some experience in roles where she dealt with people, particularly at Warwick University Students Union.

When it came to research she described herself as "like a dog with a bone". Val put time and energy into looking for every available document on a person she was researching and then double checked to make sure she hadn't missed anything. Her writing style was very good too, probably from her jobs as a secretary.

Val cared deeply about World War 1 and during the centenary she knitted poppies. But she knew that like a pet, WW1 commemoration is for life & not just the centenary. Val collected Bruce Bairnsfather items, such as pottery and postcards with his cartoons on them, as well as reading widely about the Western Front.

She also had various cats during the time she was with us, collected teddy bears and liked the musician Andre Rieu.

She appeared in an article in the Royal British Legion magazine, in which she talked about both Jake & volunteering at the museum. It included a photo of her stood in front of the case that had the Birmingham Pals Jacket, looking serious. I have used that photo here but am also using one from a Facebook post we did of a museum stall at an event, because she's smiling in it and that is how we all remember her.

Museum staff and volunteers attended Val's funeral, which was very moving and included her son Craig reading the poem 'In Flanders Fields' which had been a favourite of hers since childhood.

*-David Baynham, Museum Assistant*

# PRIVATE WILLIAM JOHN (JAKE) ASBURY

503, 'C' COMPANY, 14TH SERVICE BATTALION (1ST BIRMINGHAM PALS), ROYAL WARWICKSHIRE REGIMENT

BY VAL SAWYER



Jake was born in Birmingham on 27th April 1888, the son of Annie and Arthur Asbury. His younger sister, Doris, was my mother-in-Law. In 1912 the family moved to a small tobacconist shop in Green Lane, Small Heath. With experience working as a stockbroker's clerk, Jake took over management of the shop. Following the death of his mother in 1925, Doris continued to run the shop until the early 1970s, when it was demolished. Jake enlisted in Birmingham over the August Bank Holiday 1914, in response to an invitation by the Birmingham Daily Post. After acceptance, each volunteer in the 1st and 2nd Battalions was presented with an enamel badge to show they were on War Service. Then they were issued with the special 'blue' training uniform. An original jacket is on display in the Museum.

In the early hours of the 21st November 1915 the Battalions left for France. Jake's letter of the 21st December 1915 detailed the journey from the port, the many stops they made, and the marching, which amounted to around 70 miles, before the 1st Battalion had their first experiences of the front line trenches at Carney on the 8th December. The following are extracts from that letter with dates and places from the War Diary.

*Carney 8th - 11th December 1915; The next night we were in the front line of the trenches. Mind you right in the firing line, with live bullets and shells flying about...the men seemed to take it just as a matter of course....*

*For myself I did not feel a wee bit funky and managed to find a hole in the trench and got into it and slept for about five hours, only waking with the cold... I had to find the Officer's dugout. This was not such an easy job and I got stuck in the mud up to my armpits and had to be dug out. One of our men was stuck for 16 hours... we had to stay in the trenches for four days and four nights, no water to wash, very little to drink*

*Billion Wood 11th December 1915: At the end of the four days, every man was dead beat. I could hardly march to the camp. We were put in tents with two blankets with straw. It was raining like the devil. This night I took off my clothes for the first time since arriving in France, but there was nowhere to dry them, so I had to put them back on wet. (The men had been wearing greatcoats which were saturated and heavy). We remained here for three nights, then back to the firing line in (support position as Battalion in reserve)...It seems fairly safe in the trenches providing you take care of yourself and keep your head well down, as the Germans have darn good snipers. One man we had killed was shot through the head when he was firing over the trench... all in the space of 4 seconds.*

*Carney 15th - 18th December 1915: On the 15th December the Battalion took over a sector of trenches at Carney. Conditions here were a little better but still plenty of mud. The Officers' Servants had a little dugout to themselves where we could cook meals. Some of them are quite comfortable and we have a coke fire. The best of it is that we Servants can sleep at night, whereas the men in the ranks cannot. We came out of the trenches on Saturday night but expect to go back in on Xmas Night for three days"*

The Battalion marched to Froissy and did not return to the trenches until the 27th December, so were able to enjoy the festivities and food provided over Xmas, including a Christmas Pudding, a Christmas Card and a bottle of 'Bass' for every soldier from the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Birmingham. It would also have been the first time the men had seen the Divisional concert party, the 'Whizz Bangs. A Mills Bomb exploded in the canal brought to the surface stunned fish which were immediately landed! Jake had great respect and sympathy for those from the Regular Regiments who had been out since the start of the War, considering that they should 'all have a VC and a pension for life'. 'How they kept up their good spirits I do not know. They were always willing to put you in the right way of doing things... I may say we were not by any means first class to start with but we have made a big impression since we have been out here. But I don't think I shall want to visit France if once I get back home to Old England." Jake ends his letter: 'take care of yourselves and keep smiling until this confounded war is over, when I shall be very pleased to get home and all be happy again...'Your Affectionate Son and Brother Jake'

Following Jake's death at High Wood, on the 23rd July 1916, his Officer, Second Lieutenant Alfred Stanhope O'Dwyer, wrote to Jake's mother: ...'C' Company of the 1st City Battalion was terribly cut up in the attack on Saturday night and your dear Son was killed instantaneously, without any pain at all and was decently buried behind our trenches by some of his friends. ... We indeed miss him very much for he was a most faithful and devoted Soldier and Servant unto his life's end..... Stanhope O'Dwyer was killed on the 29th July 1916. He was 19 and intended going into the Ministry. Jake and Alfred Stanhope O'Dwyer are remembered on the Thiepval Memorial. When my mother-in-law, Doris, left the shop she spoke of her love for Jake and passed on to me the items she had kept. Jake's photograph is in a prominent position in our home where we often say "Hi Jake" as we pass, reminding us also of Doris, a much-loved mother and grandmother.

With thanks to all Fusiliers, Fusiliers cadets and members of the Armed Forces who took part in the parade and events for the Coronation of King Charles III on 6 May, 2023.



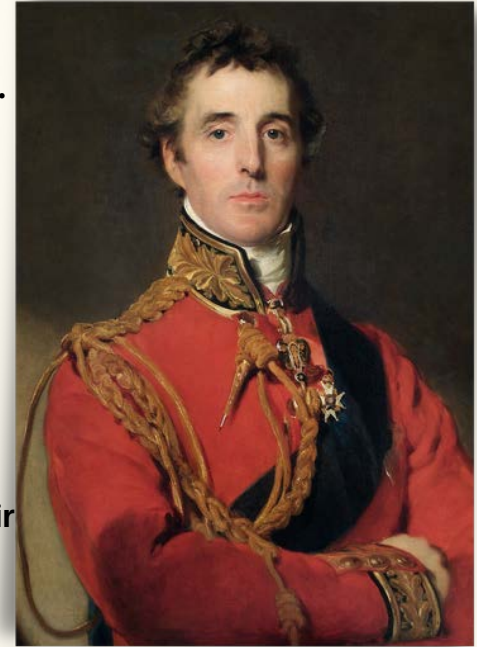
Image Sources: The Fusiliers, The Army in London, 5 Fusiliers

# REGIMENTAL STORIES

*Honouring the enduring legacy of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, formed on April 23, 1968.*



In 1811 Wellington's forces were laying siege to the fortress of Badajoz on the frontier of Portugal and Spain. Marshal Soult, the French Commander in Southern Spain, brought a force of 24,000 men to relieve the garrison. The Allied force of 15,000 Spaniards, 12,000 Portuguese and 10,000 British soldiers took up a position at Albuhera to meet the French.



Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington

On 16 May 1811 the French attacked. They surprised the Spaniards and threw them into utter confusion. The remaining British Regiments stood firm, but, being now greatly outnumbered by the French, were in dire straits. The only British reserve was the Fusilier Brigade, commanded by Sir William Myers of the Royal Fusiliers, and composed of the 1st and 2nd Battalions Royal Fusiliers and 1st Battalion the 23rd, or Royal Welch Fusiliers.

"This", said Sir William Myers 'will be a proud day for the Fusiliers' - and a proud day it was. So fierce and determined was the Fusiliers' attack that the French wavered and hesitated. The Fusiliers closed with the enemy and, as it was later recorded in history, 'Nothing would stop that astonishing infantry'.

The Fusiliers Brigade captured the heights of Albuhera and history tells us that the French, 'giving way like a loosened cliff, fled headlong down the ascent'. It is recorded of Albuhera that when the battle was won, 'Fifteen hundred men, the remnants of 6,000 unconquerable British soldiers, stood triumphant on the fatal hill'.

**Of the Battle of Albuhera, perhaps the most treasured of the 7th Fusiliers Battle Honours, it was said: "Then was seen with what strength and majesty the British soldier fights."**



A depiction of The Buffs surrounded by enemies at the Battle of Albuhera, by William Barnes Wollen.

The British guns, lost earlier in the day, were recaptured by the Royal Fusiliers, and the Regimental Colour of The Buffs was recovered and restored to that Regiment.

The losses at Albuhera were very heavy and the two Battalions were amalgamated, the staff of the 2nd Battalion going home to recruit a fresh Battalion. Sir William Myers was killed; Gen Cole and the three Colonels, Ellis, Blakeney and Hawkshaw were all wounded.

Albuhera Day, 16 May, is now a Regimental Day for the Fusiliers.

# MUSEUM EVENTS FOR 2023

Here is a list of museum events for the rest of 2023.  
Make sure to get them into your calendar!

## Armed Forces Day

12 – 4pm, Saturday 24th June 2023

A programme of music and military and re-enactor demonstrations with fun free activities for families. Based mainly at St. Nicholas Park but with linked events to Warwick's regimental museums including the Fusilier Museum Warwick.



## Fusilier Fun

10am – 5pm, Saturday 29th July 2023

A programme of family activities and re-enactor demonstrations at the Fusilier Museum Warwick. Watch out for our special stall in Warwick Market!



## Gallipoli Day

10am – 5pm, Saturday 12th August 2023

A special day of events in collaboration with the Yeomanry Museum Warwick exploring the WWI campaign in Gallipoli. A talk by well known historian Peter Hart, special exhibitions of Gallipoli material in the Court House, Warwick and WW1 family activities and reenactors in the Fusilier Museum Warwick.

## A Soldier's Tale

10am – 5pm, Saturday 28th October 2023

Marking the beginning of the autumn half term, a day of exciting events in the museum, including reenactors presentations in the museum looking at the life of the soldier.

## Armistice Day

12 – 4pm, Sunday 12th November

A special presentation at the museum marking Remembrance Day or Armistice Day following the laying of the wreaths at the Warwick War Memorial



# FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM TALKS

## JUNE-SEPTEMBER 2023

We invite you to attend our history talk series hosted by the Friends of the Fusilier Museum Warwick. Talks are offered online and in person.

### MONTY'S FLYING FORTRESS



**Zita Ballinger Fletcher,  
Author and Historian**

**2 PM London Time  
Saturday, 24 June**

### DASHING HUSSAR, BRAVE CUIRASSIER



**Maj. Mick Atkinson**

**2 PM London Time  
Saturday, 29 July**

### P.J. PRETORIUS & THE SMS KONIGSBERG



**Peter Griffiths,  
Chair, East Rand Military Historical Society**

**2 PM London Time  
Saturday, 30 September**

To learn more about & register for these events,  
please email:

[friends.fusiliermuseumwarwick@gmail.com](mailto:friends.fusiliermuseumwarwick@gmail.com)

For Zoom talks, a link will be sent to your email upon registration.

## JOIN THE FRIENDS

The Friends support the museum and its mission of preserving regimental history and also promote education and activities for history lovers, both online and locally. All are welcome to join!

To learn more, contact us at [friends.fusiliermuseumwarwick@gmail.com](mailto:friends.fusiliermuseumwarwick@gmail.com)

## VISIT THE MUSEUM

**Pageant House,  
2, Jury Street,  
Warwick,  
CV34 4EW**

01926 258288

[enquiries@fusiliermuseumwarwick.com](mailto:enquiries@fusiliermuseumwarwick.com)

