



Visit to Aisne Region of France Ann & Adrian Dite

We have driven through this part of France many times, but on this occasion, we had offered to find the graves of three men connected to Thame who fell in WW1. The region sits in the area between St Quentin in the North, Reims in the East, and includes the medieval town and Cathedral of Laon. The region takes its name from the Aisne River forming the southern edge of this triangle.

It is thought that the Aisne Region was the birthplace of trench warfare. The British Expeditionary Force had initial early successes driving the Germans back to the Aisne River, where they dug in and managed to hold out against both British and French attacks. This German entrenchment was to mould the entire face of the War as both sides began digging in and fortifying their positions. Thus, began the stalemate that became a significant feature of the War. Having said this, our three casualties all died in early/mid 1918 as major offensives were launched to try and end the stalemate and bring the war to an end.

The first cross to be delivered was for Captain Richard Hewetson, at Vendresse British Cemetery. He was the only son of the Reverend William Hewetson, vicar at St Mary's and his wife Susan. In May 1918, his division was overwhelmed by a strong German force and Captain Hewetson was taken prisoner with his leg smashed. Gas gangrene set in and his leg was amputated but he died five weeks later, age 24.



Adrian at Vendresse Cemetery

Our second cross delivery was for Alfred Thomas Cross, from Moreton. He was called up in May 1917 and sent to the front with the 2nd Battalion, Devonshire Regiment. On 27th May 1918, fighting a rear guard action, Alfred was wounded and captured when the Germans overran the local casualty clearing station. He died there of his wounds on the 6th June 1918, age 19, and now rests in Vailly British Cemetery.

Our third cross of the trip was delivered to Ralph Line who is buried in Chauny Town Cemetery, a community cemetery with areas that have been set-aside for the fallen of both sides. Ralph had come to Thame sometime in 1911 where the family lived in Lower High Street and he was employed as a warehouseman for Pursers. He was killed by machine gun fire during the Battle of St Quentin, part of the German spring offensive known as Operation Michael, on 23rd March 1918, age 30.



Vailly British Cemetery

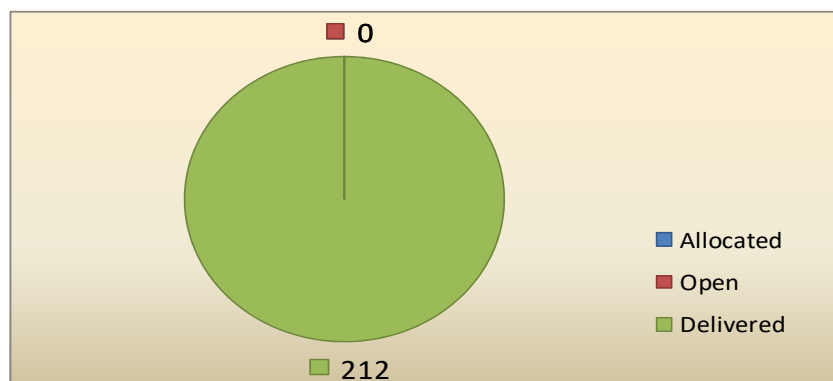
It has been a great privilege and honour to be part of this project, reconnecting our todays with some of those who laid down their lives to make it possible.



Grave of Alfred Cross

How are we doing?

Over the past four years we have tried to keep you up to date with all the deliveries as soon as possible after they have happened and then frequently added a pie chart to show the progress towards our goal. Well! here is the final pie chart.



We have calculated that to deliver a Thame Remembers Cross to the resting places of all 212 men from Thame over 300 people have travelled more than 150,000 miles and visited;

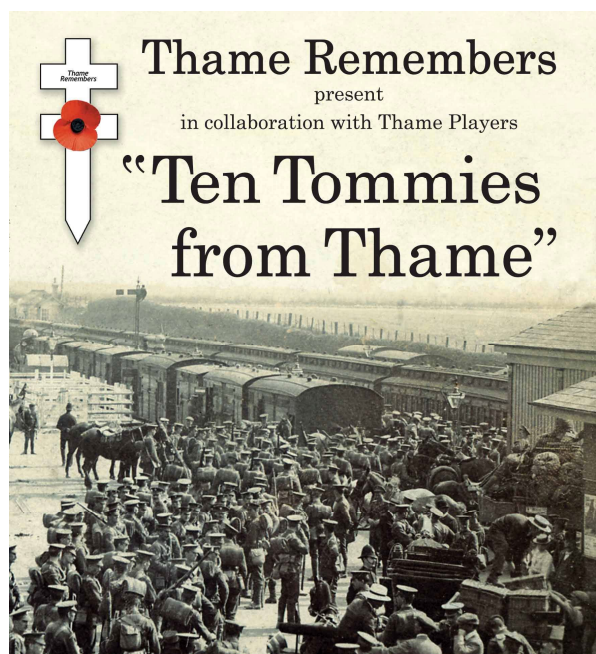
4 continents, 23 different countries,

31 separate memorials and 102 individual cemeteries.

Thanks to the people of Thame for this fantastic achievement

On the next page you can see how you can join us to celebrate our success.

“Ten Tommies From Thame”



Friday 9th and Saturday 10th November at 7.45pm

The Players Theatre, Nelson Street, Thame
Tickets £6 from Spear Travels, Greyhound Walk, Thame,
Tel: 01844 217228 or online from www.thameplayers.co.uk

Thame Remembers is a commemoration project within Thame Museum Trust, a registered charity.
Thame Players is an amateur company and a registered charity.

Tickets are selling fast for our revue 'Ten Tommies from Thame' at Thame Players Theatre on 9th and 10th November.

Based on a Thame Gazette report at the end of August 1914 about ten men from Thame signing up for active service, research by the Thame Remembers team has filled in a lot of background, enabling us to present their subsequent experiences and individual fortunes, into a stage play which explores the impact of war on them and on their families back in Thame.

Conceived by and written as a collaboration between Mike Dyer and local author Catherine Jones, the production will feature some of our own volunteers amongst the cast.

Tickets at £6 each (no concessions) are available from Spear Travels in Greyhound Walk or through the website www.thameplayers.co.uk.

Crosses Recently Delivered

23 Aug 2018

Sergeant

Stanley James Allen

Oxf and Bucks LI

John Ashfield

Naples War Cemetery,
Italy..

Diary dates

11 Aug to 19 Dec '18

Thame Remembers

Exhibition

Thame Museum

11 to 15 Sep 2018

'O What a Lovely War'

Players Theatre

Tickets available from

Thame Players & Spear Travels

21 Oct 2018

Book Launch

5pm. Barns Centre

TAL Festival

9 & 10 Nov 2018

**'Ten Tommies from
Thame'**

Players Theatre

Tickets available from

Thame Players & Spear Travels

11 Nov 2018

10.50 am

Remembrance Service

7 pm

Beacon Lighting

7.45 pm

Thame Remembers

Celebration

Spread Eagle, Thame

Thame Remembers Celebration

May we extend an invitation to everyone who has taken part in the Thame Remembers Project to join our celebration event on 11th November 2018 at 7.45pm. We have booked the banqueting suite at the Spread Eagle, where we will serve up a buffet supper and be entertained by some strolling "Players" who will immerse us in the atmosphere of 1918, interspersed with short speeches, recollections, and mutual congratulations on a job well done.



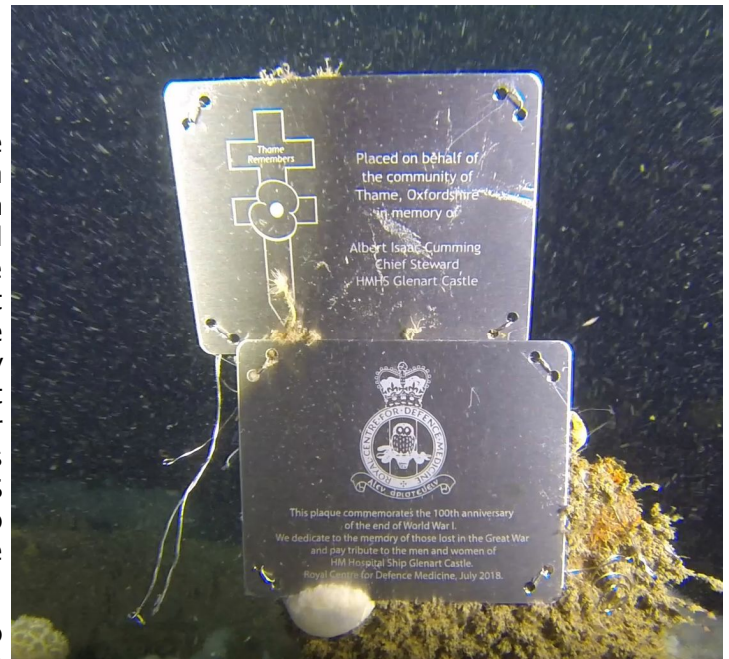
Spread Eagle 1918

Initially we are restricting bookings to those who have been involved with the project, but if you have delivered a cross, joined us on one of our Battlefield Tours or in any way made a significant contribution to the project then we hope that you will join us on this occasion.

We are able to subsidise the cost of this celebration and so have kept the price down to just £12.50 each. Please book through David on 01844 215178 or Mike on 07973 440229.

HMHS Glenart Castle

It had always been an ambition of the Thame Remembers Project to leave a commemorative token at the actual wreck site of a vessel in which a man from Thame had lost his life. As the project neared completion, and despite our best efforts and a couple of frustrated initiatives, it began to look as this might never be achieved. Then a few months ago we were contacted by Major Henrietta Poon, Royal Army Medical Corps, who had been part of the team that had earlier visited Scapa Flow and laid a wreath on our behalf above the wreck of HMS Vanguard. She was working with another team planning to dive HMHS Glenart Castle and asked whether they could do anything for Thame Remembers which, of course, we accepted without hesitation.



Thame Remembers Plaque and Dive Team Plaque
that were taken down to the Glenart Castle
(MOD Crown Copyright)

Thame records only one Merchant Navy seaman who lost his life in wartime. Albert Isaac Cumming was serving as Chief Steward on the hospital ship HMHS Glenart Castle when, at 4.00am on 26th February 1918, it was torpedoed by the German submarine UC-56, ten miles west from Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel.

The ship had just departed from Newport, South Wales, on route to Brest in France to collect wounded from the Western Front and had all her lights burning to identify herself as a hospital ship.

She sank in just seven minutes and more than 150 were killed, including Albert and eight female nurses on board. There were just 33 survivors. The incident caused widespread outrage as a war crime and there were reports that the U-Boat surfaced and turned its guns on those in the water in an effort to cover up its mistake. The submarine Captain, Wilhelm Kaiserwetter, was arrested in Spain after the war and interned in the Tower of London, but had to be released under the terms of the Armistice.



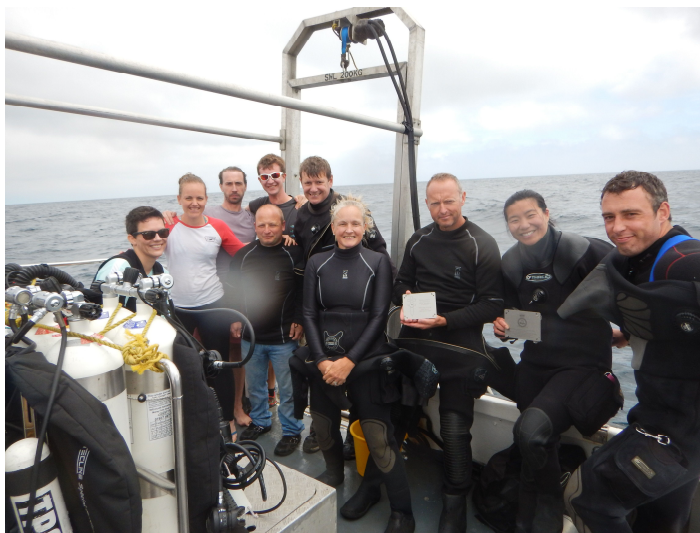
As soon as we were offered the possibility of getting down to an actual wreck site we had to consider what would be the most appropriate token to leave behind in commemoration. A floral wreath clearly wouldn't be suitable as it wouldn't survive the dive, and a plastic wreath would not be environmentally acceptable. We thought of an engraved brass plaque but soon realised it would quickly turn green with verdigris, the natural coating formed when brass is weathered and exposed to air or seawater over a period of time. We did some research and took some advice and decided that, although not cheap, we should do the job properly by using 316 Marine Grade Stainless Steel. That then posed another problem as stainless steel is a hard material and not easily

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engraved, but we found that it could be shot blasted by local company Engrave-it UK Ltd in High Wycombe who, on our recommendation, also supplied and engraved the plaque taken down on behalf of the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine. Henrietta takes up the story : "Defence Medical Services Diving (DMSD) is a branch of British Sub-Aqua Club (BSAC) based in Birmingham and many of our members are part of, or have affiliation to, the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM). We thought it would be appropriate, in this centenary year of her sinking and of the Armistice, for current serving military medics to pay tribute to the nurses, officers and men from the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) who perished on the hospital ship. I then recalled the Thame Remembers project and established that a man from Thame was amongst the crew, so I contacted Mike and he jumped at the opportunity.

We started planning for the dive over a year ago and, heavily reinforced by members of the Royal Engineers Sports Diving Association, we trained over many months with rehearsals to ensure that each member of the team instinctively knew their role. There were many challenges- the remote location, the need for favourable wind speed and direction, strong currents which make access hazardous, and the need for slack water all combining to dictate a neap tide in summer weather as the most favourable window. HMHS Glenart Castle lies at 73m on the sea bed and, at such depth, the dive needed to be conducted using Trimix (mixture of helium and air) and required long decompression stops before ascending to the surface in order to reduce the risk of decompression illness. On the day conditions were favourable and, after three hours transit to the dive site, the first three divers went down but, due to the location of the shot line, they were not able to get onto the wreck. The skipper promptly moved the shot once he was sure that the divers were safely away from it and the remaining two divers, one being myself, descended into what appeared an abyss. After what felt like eternity we finally spotted the wreckage in the darkness and, under the torchlight, we could see that it was covered in soft corals. We wasted no time in preparing and securing the plaques, and were only able to spend ten minutes at the wreck before the current picked up.

The many months of preparation, the team effort and good fortune made it possible to place the RCDM and Thame Remembers commemorative plaques onto the final resting place of those who bravely gave their lives a hundred years previously. We were humbled by their sacrifice and felt privileged to visit their final resting place, as well as proud of the team effort in bringing this together".



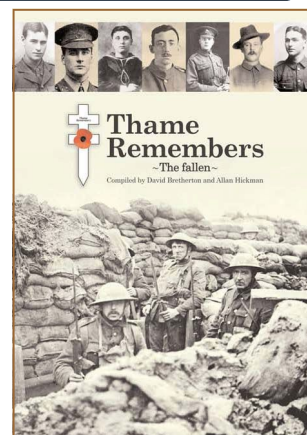
The Dive Team (Henrietta is second from right, holding a plaque) (MOD Crown Copyright)

Thame Remembers Legacy Book

With all of our 212 Cross deliveries now made the Thame Remembers legacy book is nearing completion. The book records how the project came about and how it has progressed, some general contextual background about the conflicts, a report on every man remembered in Thame, details of each Cross delivery, and much more.

We will be publishing the 260+ page book with many photographs in full colour on gloss art paper and hope to go to print early in September. We are still on target for our formal launch at Thame Arts and Literary Festival on Sunday 21st October, 5pm at the Barns Centre, where David and Mike will be on stage in conversation with Dr Ann Barrington.

The book is available to pre-order at the discount price of **£20** instead of £25. Please contact David for more details 01844 215178.



Thame Remembers is a project of Thame, Oxfordshire to commemorate the centenary of World War One by researching those from Thame who fell in all conflicts worldwide, and remembering them by placing a Thame Remembers Cross on their grave or memorial wherever in the world that may be. If you feel that you can help please contact Dave on 01844 215178.