

# Cotgrave War Memorial



by Rupert Matthews MEP



European  
Conservatives  
and Reformists  
Group



## HELLO AND WELCOME

As Conservative MEP for the East Midlands, I was delighted to become Chairman of the East Midlands War Memorials Association.

Here in the East Midlands our war memorials are important reminders of what we owe to previous generations. But they are also stark reminders of the evils of war and why it is so important that we never let up in our efforts to maintain peace and understanding between the nations of Europe. And in their day the war memorials played their role in fostering reconciliation. The crosses, angels and other features that adorn war memorials in Britain, Italy, Germany, France and further afield show how much we have in common.

In the European Parliament I spend much time seeking to improve understanding between the member states of the European Union. The same cultural underpinnings that make war memorials in England so similar to those in Belgium or the Netherlands also help to build friendly relations in the European Parliament between myself and my fellow MEPs.

Far from the usual admonition of "Don't mention the war", I find that the shared history and experience of warfare brings us together in a shared determination never to allow such horrors to happen again in Europe. My role as Chairman of the East Midlands War Memorials Association helps to build bridges to MEPs from other countries. My father's cousin was killed in 1944, the father of the German MEP whose office is opposite mine was killed that same year. We both remember men we never really knew at war memorials.

Where war once divided nations, war memorials can now bring them together.

*Rupert Matthews.*

## PART ONE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The summer of 1914 was glorious across the East Midlands. The sun shone, crops ripened in the fields and the factories hummed with booming production that guaranteed work to the thousands who toiled away within them. If anyone noticed that an Austrian Archduke had been murdered in the Balkans, it did not really register. That sort of thing went on in the Balkans all the time.

When the Austrians invaded Serbia in supposed outrage over the murder – though in truth they had been seeking an excuse for years – only the mildest of alarm bells rang. But then Russia invaded Austria to support Serbia, Germany attacked Russia to support Austria and France invaded Germany to back up Russia. Finally, Germany invaded France. On 4 August German armies poured over the Belgian border as part of a great, sweeping march to outflank the main French armies on the Franco-German border. And then Britain declared war on Germany to honour a treaty defending Belgium.

At this date, the counties of the East Midlands, as with most counties across the UK, had their own local regiments: The Lincolnshire Regiment took precedence, having been raised in 1685 and was numbered 10th in the Army List; the Leicestershire Regiment dated to 1688 and was numbered 17th; the 48th Northamptonshire Regiment was raised in 1741 and also drew recruits from Rutland. The final East Midlands regiment was the Sherwood Foresters, which had been created in 1881 by the amalgamation of the 45th Nottinghamshire Regiment and 95th Derbyshire Regiment.

Men from our counties served not only in their county infantry regiments, but also in various cavalry regiments and some were to be found in the Royal Navy. But in wherever they served, these men marched off to war.



British infantry attacking near Thiepval, 7 Aug 1916, during the Battle of the Somme. This photo was taken from the firing step of the trench that they've just left. Note the wooden stakes supporting coils of barbed wire. Before an attack such as this, military engineers would have cleared paths through the wire.



British infantry advancing in support near Morval on 25 September 1916, part of the battle of the Somme. Note the man carrying a stretcher in the centre, while the others carry rifles and the standard pack, in which would be ammunitions, food and a blanket. The spades were used for repairing trenches.



British wounded returning from fighting on Baneztin Ridge on the Somme, July 1916. Walking wounded were expected to make their own way back to field hospitals for initial treatment where medical staff decided if they could return to their units or had to be evacuated to hospitals in the rear. Note that the man fourth from the left wears a German uniform and is presumably a prisoner, which may explain the unwounded man with a rifle behind him.

The fighting of 1914 involved rapid advances, cavalry charges and sweeping infantry attacks, but neither side delivered a knockout blow. When the bad weather of autumn set in, the armies dug defensive trenches to hold their position through the wet, dismal winter weather, confident in the expectation that come the good spring weather more mobile warfare would resume and the war would soon be over.

Meanwhile, the regular regiments were thinly stretched along the line. Massive recruitment drives began to raise new troops. Some were drafted into regular battalions, but others were put into special battalions formed to last only for the length of the war. All of the East Midlands regiments gained these additional units.

The battles of 1915 – at Neuve Chappelle, Ypres and Loos – soon revealed that there was to be no easy breakthrough leading to a quick victory. Instead, the war was likely to descend into a murderous war of attrition. The victor would be the side willing to spend the most money and most blood to gain triumph.

Efforts were made to break the stalemate in secondary campaigns. In both Mesopotamia and at Gallipoli attacks aimed at knocking out Germany's ally Turkey took place. Romania and Italy were induced to attack the Austrians. These ploys failed, but men and resources were sucked out of Germany to prop up their allies.

In 1916 the Germans attacked first, assaulting the famous French fortified city of Verdun. They inflicted vast casualties on the French. It also caused the planned Allied attack on the Somme to take place sooner than planned and without adequate resources. The bloodbath that was the Battle of the Somme was the result.

Back in the East Midlands the demands of war were making themselves felt with increasing impact. Day after day, week after week the local newspapers carried the

names of local men who had been killed, wounded or decorated for gallantry. Men coming home on leave spread the news about the conditions in the trenches, discussed the role of new weapons such as machine guns or aircraft and passed on legends, rumours and gossip. Factories were re-equipped to make weapons instead of tractors, furniture or tools.

Above all there was a need for more and more men to join the army. Throughout 1915 volunteers had kept up the numbers, but in 1916 conscription was introduced. All men aged 18 to 40 were liable to service.

As the men went off to fight, their places in factories, farms and other workplaces were taken by women. Young, unmarried women without family ties were encouraged to work in factories far from home. Working class girls volunteered in large numbers to earn the top wages on offer. Middle class girls preferred the more genteel, if less well paid, roles of nurse or teacher. Right across the East Midlands gender roles were becoming more fluid.

In 1917 the USA entered the war to support the Allies and hopes of victory rose, only to be dashed a few months later when the Russian Empire collapsed into a chaotic revolution that took her out of the war.

By the spring of 1918 the Germans launched three massive offensives that came close to breaking through the British lines and gaining victory for Germany. In the event the attacks were just held. On 8 August the British, French and Americans launched their own massed assault. The German Army high command told Kaiser Wilhelm that defeat was inevitable and



British machine gunners near Arras, 1917. The heavy machine gun dominated the battlefields of the First World War and effectively made infantry attacks so dangerous as to be impossible.



A Sopwith Camel of the Royal Flying Corps. The Camel was primarily a fighter designed to shoot down enemy aircraft, but it could strafe enemy trenches with its guns or carry light bombs under the wings.



British Mark V tank. The Mark V entered service in 1918 and was a far more reliable and improved version of the Mark I of 1916 and Mark IV of 1917. It was armed with four machine guns and two 6 pounder guns. Bovington Tank Museum



advised him to seek an armistice as quickly as possible. On 11 November 1918 that armistice was signed at 5am, and came into effect at 11am – the symbolic eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. The Great War was over.

In popular imagination, the First World War was a nightmare of mud, trenches and inhuman barbarity in which brave men were led by incompetent generals. As with many stereotypes, there is some truth in the popular image, but only some.

The image of mud comes mostly from a few weeks of hellish conditions in 1917 during the Battle of Passchendaele. The heavy casualties of the Battle of the Somme in 1916, during which some units were effectively wiped out in a few hours of fighting, created the image of sudden, massive casualties.

For most men, the daily routine rarely changed. The men would be called to 'stand to' an hour before dawn in case of enemy attack. Then breakfast would be served before the men were given their tasks for the day – latrines had to be cleared out, food had to be cooked, weapons needed cleaning. At night, men would go into no man's land out on patrol. The barbed wire in front of the trenches had to be checked and, if necessary, repaired.

Sometimes a night-time raid would be carried out on the enemy. This might involve as few as a dozen men sneaking forward to hurl grenades into enemy trenches, or larger raiding parties would leap down into the enemy front line to kill sentries and set demolition charges to blow up enemy trenches.

Nor were the men in the front line all the time. Units spent a few days in the trenches, then moved to a rear area for rest and training. After a period that might be a week or so, or sometimes as long as a month, the battalion would be moved up to the reserve trenches before going forward to the front line again.

During the course of the war, tactics changed dramatically. The British devised a plan of co-ordinated action between aircraft, artillery and infantry that was deployed on the Somme in 1916, and which failed. The French tried more daring dash-and-hold tactics, but they too proved abortive. In 1917 the Germans came up with the stormtrooper tactics. This saw small units of fast-moving elite infantry dash forward to penetrate through weak points before spreading out in the rear areas to assault enemy command posts, artillery positions and communications links.

Aircraft were used to direct artillery fire to make it more accurate, then to drop bombs with even greater accuracy. Poison gas was deployed to clear entire sections of the enemy front line. Artillery barrages became heavier, then creeping barrages were developed to move just ahead of attacking troops. New weapons made infantry fighting in trenches more murderous – grenades, sawn-off shotguns and flamethrowers were just some of the new inventions put to use.

In the end the answer to the stalemate of the trenches came in the shape of the tank. First deployed by the British in 1916 these behemoths were still rather unreliable and slow by the war's end, which made them less useful than they would be in 1939.

## PART TWO

# THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS REGIMENT



Cap badge of the Sherwood Foresters.

The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 caught the British military rather by surprise. Although a Franco-German conflict was considered fairly likely few expected it in 1914. And most people thought that British involvement would be restricted to supplying France with weapons and cash. It was the German invasion of Belgium on their way to France that brought Britain into the war.

At this date, Nottinghamshire was rather unusual among English counties in not having its own regiment. In 1881 the Nottinghamshire Regiment had been amalgamated with the Derbyshire Regiment to form the Sherwood

Foresters, which in 1902 was renamed The Sherwood Foresters [Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment]. By 1914, the regiment had two regular battalions, plus two Reserve Battalions and four Territorial Battalions.

The Reserves were made up of men who trained for four weeks per year, having undergone six months of training when they first signed up. These units were equipped with weapons and kit identical to that of the regulars, and were expected to be posted overseas in wartime, although not to serve in front line duties except in an emergency.



Bomb carrying party of the 1st Battalion, Sherwood Foresters going up to the front line near La Boisselle, France, on 6 July 1916.

The Territorials, by contrast, were made up of men who had enlisted for four years. They were expected to attend 20 days of training each year, mostly at weekends with only seven days spent away from home and under canvas. They were equipped with old rifles and other equipment considered obsolete by the regular army. It was expected that they would take over routine home defence tasks in time of war, freeing the regular and reserve battalions to go to war.

When war broke out in 1914, the 2nd Battalion marched off first, arriving in France in September and marching straight to the Western Front. The 1st Battalion followed two

months later. Kitchener decided to recruit new battalions, so by the summer of 1915 the Sherwood Foresters had six battalions in France, all formed into the same brigade, the 139th, within the 46th Division which was mostly made up of Midlands regiments. The territorials, meanwhile, undertook their allotted tasks of home defence, and served in Ireland.

Inevitably the regiment took heavy casualties during the Great War – as the conflict of 1914-18 was known before the war of 1939 broke out. It was because of this that the county's war memorials were erected.

But one village was lucky: Cromwell. Of all the men who marched off to the First World War from Cromwell, every single one of them came home safe. This makes Cromwell one of the "Thankful Villages", of which there were a scattering across the country, but only one in Nottinghamshire.



A Memorial Tower for those of the regiment who died in battle was erected in 1923 on Crich Hill in Derbyshire. © Rob Bendall



Men of 5th Sherwood Foresters do their washing while out of the line, 4 November 1943.

## BATTLE HONOURS OF THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS

**FIRST WORLD WAR:** Aisne 1914 & 18, Armentieres 1914, Neuve Chappelle, Aubers, Hooge 1915, Loos, Somme 1916 & 18, Albert 1916 & 18, Bazentin, Delville Wood, Pozieres, Ginchy, Flers-Courcelette, Morval, Thiepval, Le Transloy, Ancre Heights, Ancre 1916, Arras 1917 & 18, Vimy 1917, Scarpe 1917 & 18, Messines 1917, Ypres 1917 & 18, Pilckem, Langemarck 1917, Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Broodseinde, Poelcappelle, Passchendaele, Cambrai 1917 & 18, St Quentin, Baupaume 1917, Rosieres, Villers Brettaneux, Lys, Bailleul, Kemmel, Scherpenberg, Amiens, Drocourt-Queant, Hindenburg Line, Epehy, Canal du Nord, St Quentin Canal, Beaufort, Courtrai, Selle, Sambre, Piavé, Suvla, Landing at Suvla, Schimitar Hill, Egypt 1916.

**SECOND WORLD WAR:** Norway 1940, St Omer, Ypres-Comines Canal, Dunkirk 1940, Gazala, El Alemain, Djebel Guerba, Tamera, Medjez Plain, Tunis, Salerno, Volturno Crossing, Monte Camino, Anzio, Campoleone, Advance to Tiber, Gothic Line, Coriano, Cosina Canal Crossing, Monte Ceco, Singapore Island.

## PART THREE WAR MEMORIAL

Cotgrave is a small town in the borough of Rushcliffe in Nottinghamshire. Cotgrave's origins can be traced back to the Iron Age, although there is little in the way of archaeology until the 6th-Century Anglo-Saxon burial ground at Mill Hill to the north of the old village. Today Cotgrave stands on the Grantham Canal, which runs for 33 miles from Grantham through 18 locks to West Bridgford joining the River Trent. It was opened in 1797 as the main method to transport coal to Grantham, however, while there were attempts to find coal none was discovered until 1950, turning the town into a successful mining town.

Cotgrave war memorial is in the graveyard at Scrimshaw Lane opposite All Saints Church and burial ground and commemorates the fallen of those from the First and Second World Wars. All Saints Church is a Grade 1 listed building dating from the 12th Century, although it is thought that there was a wooden church here before the Norman Conquest, as foundations of a smaller building were discovered, including a tower. Records from the Domesday survey (1086) give an insight into the history of the church, as a church was recorded in 1086 that refers to 'half a church' in Cotgrave, this reference to 'half a church' is explained by the division of the manor between the two landowners of Cotgrave. This meant the church was divided into two "Medieties", an arrangement that was not uncommon, and there were six other examples of this in Nottinghamshire at the time and continued until 1662.

The war memorial is currently not listed, but is looked after well by the local church that ensures it is easily accessible to the public. Also, the memorial is in good condition due to a grant given for the upkeep of the memorial in June 2006.

The memorial itself is a cross of local sandstone with a metal sword and wreath attached to the front, the base of the shaft is moulded and the cross sits on a plinth and a three-stepped square base. The front plinth has a metal plaque with the names of the fallen from the two world wars, there is also another name engraved on a face of the plinth.

### THE PLAQUE READS:

“ TO THE MEMORY OF THE MEN OF  
THIS PARISH WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES  
IN THE GREAT WAR  
1914-1918 ”

“TO THE MEMORY OF THE MEN OF  
THIS PARISH WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES  
IN THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918  
[NAMES]  
BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH AND  
I WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE.”

A SECOND PLAQUE UNDERNEATH READS:

“1939-1945  
(NAMES)  
BE WE ALSO FAITHFUL.”

### THE NAMES ON MANTON WAR MEMORIAL FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR ARE:

Samuel Lacey	John W. Hayes
Joseph Hind	Arthur Harrison
George Middleton	Herbert Marshall
William J. Herapath	C. Arthur Moulds
Arthur W. Simpson	John E. Carrington
Sydney Henson	Francis C. Woolley

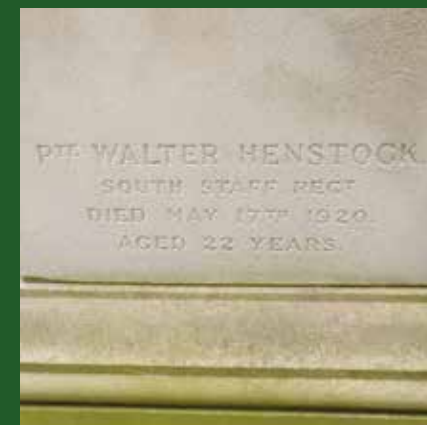
### AND FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR:

George David Cole	James Pepper
John Fryer	Dennis Dixon Phillips

The names listed from those who have fallen in the First World War were: John Carrington, Arthur Harrison, John Hayes, Sydney Henson, William Herapath, Joseph Hind, Samuel Lacey, Herbert Marshall, George Middleton, Arthur Moulds, Arthur Simpson and Francis Woolley. Those who fell in the Second World War were: George Cole, John Fryer, James Pepper and Dennis Phillips.

The men who died were all heroes in their way, and it is unfair to pick out individuals. However, there are some interesting details that should not be ignored. For example, John Carrington was born 1898 in Scarrington and was one of nine children. Before the war he was a farm labourer living in the Shepherds House Cottages where the Shepherds pub is today. Carrington was part of the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment and while the exact date he joined the Army is unknown, it is thought he moved to France with his unit on the 18th/19th September 1918. Unfortunately, Carrington died only a few weeks later on the 8th October 1918, most likely during the Battle of Cambrai on the Hindenburg line. His grave is in Montbrehain British Cemetery close to Cambrai.

John William Hayes was born in 1886 in Bingham and was the eldest child of six living in 8 Gripps Cottages in Cotgrave where he was employed as an agricultural labourer. Hayes joined the Regular Army in 1911 in the 1st Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters and served with them in India as an Assistant Armourer. The Battalion was sent to France in November 1914 without an opportunity to adjust to European conditions, as a result the men suffered badly in the first four winter months of 'Trench Warfare'.





In 1915, Hayes was with his Battalion when it took part in two major battles, Neuve Chappelle and Loos. Later Hayes moved to the 2nd Battalion and on the 1st July 1916, they supported a French attack to the south. Thirteen divisions of Commonwealth forces launched an offensive on a line from north of Gommecourt to Maricourt. Even though the preliminary artillery bombardment lasted seven days, the German defences were barely touched. The attack therefore met unexpectedly fierce resistance, there were many losses and the initial attack was declared a failure.

Thus far, Hayes had got through all this fighting with barely a scratch, but his luck was running out. On the 16th September 1916, Hayes was killed while fighting with his battalion and is commemorated at the Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 10C, 10D and 1A. The Thiepval Memorial, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, bears the names of more than 72,000 officers and men of the United Kingdom and South African forces who died in the Somme sector before 20 March 1918 and have no known grave. Over 90% of those commemorated died between July and November 1916.

Interestingly, Hayes' youngest brother Ernest Hayes joined the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in 1916 and fought on the Western Front. Ernest Hayes was also awarded the Military Medal in 1918 and later 2 bars to the medal. He survived the war and died in Nottingham in 1938 where he is buried in Beeston.

Herbert Marshall was born in Cotgrave in 1883 and was living at 3 Gripps Cottages with his wife Annie when he joined up. Marshall served in the South Nottinghamshire Hussars, a light cavalry unit that was officially a Territorial regiment, but which in 1914 was converted into a regular line formation.

Throughout his life, Marshall had an affinity with horses and worked variously as a groom, cart driver and delivery man. He joined the hussars when war broke out and in 1915 went to Egypt before being sent to take part in the Gallipoli campaign. Having survived the murderous Gallipoli fighting, Marshall and his regiment were evacuated back to Egypt and then moved to Salonika. It was there that Marshall fell ill with an unspecified illness. He was moved back home to England, but died on 9 December 1916.

Walter Henstock was another man born in Cotgrave. He was working as a ploughman before the war. On 23 February 1916 he joined up in Derby and was sent to join the Lincolnshire Regiment. On 21 March 1918 he was reported missing in action during the great German offensive of spring 1918. He had been captured and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. He remained in the army after the war, and on a home visit to Cotgrave met and fell in love with a local girl. On his return to his regiment he fell sick with pulmonary tuberculosis and died. Among his effects was found an engagement ring, which he had never had the opportunity to give to his girlfriend. His name was included on the war memorial because the doctor

who treated him in his final illness believed that his death was due to his weakened condition caused by his imprisonment.

Two Cotgrave men died at the same time during World War 2. Neil Boyle and Edward Carter joined the RAF and were serving on Wellington bombers with No.12 Squadron. On 7 February 1941, the squadron was part of a force of 37 Wellingtons sent to bomb German bases near Boulogne. Their aircraft was attacked by a German fighter and both men were killed. The damaged bomber managed to get back to England, so their bodies were able to be returned to their families and are buried in Cotgrave cemetery.



# ABOUT THE EAST MIDLANDS WAR MEMORIALS ASSOCIATION

The Association was founded to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War. There are thousands of reminders to the fallen of the First World War and later conflicts all over the East Midlands. We believe that these war memorials should be cared for and respected.

- We will fundraise for repair or improvement works to war memorials.
- We will look to tell the story of those brave individuals named on our memorials.
- We will work to ensure that all worthy war memorials in the East Midlands are listed by Historic England.
- We will create an educational program for schools in the East Midlands where we will be offering lesson plans to schools on the importance of Remembrance Day.

To keep up-to-date with our work, please visit our website at  
[www.eastmidlandswarmemorials.com](http://www.eastmidlandswarmemorials.com)

where you can learn how to: sign up for our email newsletter, nominate a war memorial for listing, join our fundraising activities, join us when we visit war memorials.

## WHO WE ARE

The East Midlands War Memorials Association is a not-for-profit company limited by share guarantee.

PRESIDENT: Her Grace Frances Duchess of Rutland

CHAIRMAN: Rupert Matthews MEP

VICE CHAIRMAN: Squadron Leader Andrew Smith

HON. TREASURER: William Scott

HON. SECRETARY: Simon Whelband







**RUPERT MATTHEWS MEP**



**European  
Conservatives  
and Reformists  
Group**

# The European Conservatives and Reformists

Rupert Matthews MEP is a member of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group within the European Parliament.

## About the ECR

The ECR Group is a political group within the European Parliament that includes the British Conservatives and like-minded political allies from several other countries. We are the only group in the European Parliament that believes the EU should decentralise power back to national capitals, town halls or to families and individuals.

We were created in 2009 to bring about major reform of the EU based on Eurorealism, a decentralisation of powers, more openness and a focus on supporting Europe's economic growth.

We promote principles like open markets, lower tax, the transatlantic alliance and the family.

As the third largest group in the European Parliament we put forward an alternative agenda for the EU to bring together all MEPs who believe the EU cannot go on as it is and needs to change.

## EU Reform

The ECR becoming the 3rd largest group in the European Parliament and the success of our member parties in elections across Europe show that our calls for reform are resonating with the growing skepticism of European voters across the continent.

The current policies and structures of the European Union, largely designed to meet the needs of the 1950s, make it unfit to meet the challenges of the 2050s. This must change.

Europe needs a fresh approach. It needs new policies to modernise the economy so its industries and business can be competitive in the global marketplace. It needs reform so it is able to generate jobs and prosperity in the century ahead.

## Contact the ECR

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