

Tetbury Advertiser – December 2025

On Remembrance Sunday, like millions around the UK and the world, we laid a wreath on behalf of our members to remember the fallen of both past and present conflicts, so it was a stark reminder the next evening at our November meeting to find that there are still hundreds of thousands of casualties from both world wars, the Korean war and all the other 20th century conflicts, who have no grave, or an accurate record of where they may have died.

Our speaker was Alexia Clark, a member of the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre – the 'War Detectives' – who took us through the painstaking processes required to attempt to identify the human remains still being found from battles some now more than a hundred years ago. DNA tracing is a vital modern tool that can help the identification but it has to be preceded by lengthy and complicated searches through the records to find possible descendants to match DNA. With the passage of time, artefacts found with the bodies have deteriorated, medal ribbons have faded and identity discs, which were made of cardboard in WW1 have disintegrated, but with scrutiny can provide vital clues to an individual's service record and consequently narrow down their possible identity. The group are also sometimes tasked with trying to find the identity of those soldiers 'Known to God', who were found, buried but never identified. She assured us that these bodies were never exhumed, but every effort is made to track them through records.

However, once an identification has been proven, the department then arranges a burial and a headstone, or, in the case of those already buried in one of the many Commonwealth War Grave cemeteries, replace 'Known to God' with a name, a rank and a regiment. The burials are celebrated with a burial detail from their regiment (or the contemporary regiment if the original regiment has been absorbed into another) with family, the British Legion and often local dignitaries and regimental associations.

Everyone who attended the meeting was profoundly moved by her description of the lengths to which the Centre will go to bring a closure to the lives of these fatalities and to their families.

The meeting concluded with our AGM, with the re-election of the committee and a new President and reports from the Secretary, the Treasurer and the President, plus short reports from the groups. Linda Sheen has been an outstanding President, and, as the one elected to step into her shoes, I already know she will be a very hard act to follow

On a lighter note, our Christmas dinner will be celebrated at the Cirencester Agricultural University on 1 December and our December meeting will be a social, with, quite possibly, a little fizz and a few nibbles.

It just remains for me to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a great 2026, we do welcome new members, and we'd be delighted to welcome you as a guest initially to see if our organisation has something to offer you,

Rowena Palsler

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