

BMS meeting minutes 5.9.19:

1. Welcome by Roger Bragger to all attendees including guest Mr W. Smith.
2. Apologies received: 9 – M. Atkinson, J. Carver, P. and S. Handford, C. Mellor-Hill, P. McDermott, M. Platt, R. Painter and D. Seeney.
3. Stats: T – 19, M – 8, D – 3 and ONS – 2. Guest W. Smith.
4. No new members.
5. Matters arising previous meeting/Research Questions/Library requests – None.
6. Functions/Visits: reminder OMRS convention at Nottingham 15 and 16.9.19.

Also ? a BMS table at Midlands Arts Centre 28.9.19 – Secretary to message S. and P. Handford to clarify if a BMS table booked – M. Harrison and R. Bragger available to assist if this has been done.

Stratford-upon-Avon Medal/Militaria fair – Secretary has just booked a table for the BMS with four passes for this fair 27.10.19 – Price £25. [J. Scott, D. Seeney, J. Carver and C. Davies have offered to cover this fair.

7. Committee points: J. Scott took a list of those wishing to buy the Medal Year Book 2020. Please let him know directly if you wish to order a MYB 2020 through him.
8. Tonight's talk: Speaker M. Harrison was welcomed to give his talk – Roger Bragger anticipated that there may no medals amongst BMS members with a link to the assassination of Heydrich so there will be an opportunity for recent acquisition talks at the end of the meeting!
9. Next Meeting: 3.10.19 'Dawkita 1897 – The West African Rorke's Drift' by J. Carver.

'An Anthropoid in Wales' by M Harrison.

The trigger behind Martin's talk was the purchase of an unnamed trio of medals consisting of The Defence Medal, Civil Defence Long Service medal and St John Service Medal with three bars. Martin had added the Serving Officer Medal of the Order of St John to which the recipient, Superintendent Rees Alwyn Powell, was entitled.



Above left: Medals attributed to Rees Alwyn Powell - Left to right – Serving Officer of the Order of St John, Defence Medal, Civil Defence Long Service Medal and St John Service Medal [with three bars].

Above right: Rees Alwyn Powell pictured in his St John Ambulance Brigade Uniform.

The St John Service Medal was originally issued in silver up to 1947.

The medals were sold with various newspapers clippings and photos – It was initially difficult to be sure all the images were truly of the same man, but after scrutiny Martin was happy they were.



Above: Newspaper clipping showing Powell seated front row – far right. [Note the other headlines..]

Rees Allwyn Powell was born in 1903 in Cwmgiedd, Wales – one of nine children – He'd joined the Ambulance Brigade in 1931 and married in 1937. His census information of 1939 confirmed that he was a miner but also an ARP warden and in the Ambulance Brigade.

Also shown was an RAF base pass with the lower strapline 'not to be removed from the airbase' [the significance of this pass was unclear].

Based on his joining the Ambulance Brigade in 1931, he should have been entitled to two or three more bars to his St John Service Medal.

Leamington Spa connection.

Martin then explained the significance of a building named 'Harrington House' in Leamington Spa – This had been built by a Major Seel at considerable expense in 1879. During the second World War, the Free Czech Army had been based there and used the building as their HQ.

Harrington House was demolished in 1970 to make way for the 'Royal Spa Centre'.

Heydrich and the reprisal:

There followed a short description of Reinhard Heydrich which touched on his career covering some of his characteristics. During WWII, the Czech territory was important for the German war effort especially with the Skoda engine plant. Briefly, in 1941, Heydrich had been appointed 'Deputy Reich Protector of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia' effectively controlling the territory – He terrorised the population with brutal policies and quickly became known as the 'Butcher of Prague'.

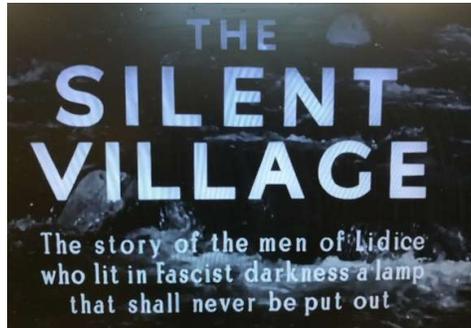
The Czech government in exile had decided on a mission to kill Heydrich - Operation Anthropoid was the code name for the mission [Anthropoid was defined as 'resembling a human being in form'].

There followed photographs of Heydrich's car after the attack. He had been mortally wounded by gunshot and grenade in the attack of 27th May, 1942 dying of wounds one week later. The leaders of the Czech team were Gabčík and Kubis – the team had been specially trained by the Special Operations Executive ['SOE'].

The population of the Czech mining town of Lidice was deemed to have assisted and aided the attackers – It was destroyed by the Germans in retribution for the assassination of Heydrich. Almost 200 men and boys over the age of 15 were shot. A similar number of women were deported to concentration camps. Of 105 children, 82 perished in the concentration camp of Chelmno, 6 in orphanages but 17 were to survive. There had been some opposition in the Government in exile to Anthropoid for fear of such reprisals.

British Government Propaganda film:

Martin then showed a short propaganda film entitled 'The Silent Village'. It was made by the 'Crown Film Unit' shortly after the destruction of Lidice in 1942. Its theme was to emphasise the appalling nature, cruelty and consequences of Nazism. The film was set in a small mining community – the one chosen for filming was 'Cwmgeidd' South Wales where Powell and his family were located.



Above left: Still from the film title 'The Silent Village'.

Above right: Rees Powell's brief appearance in the film.

Rees Powell has an uncredited part in the film and we were invited to look out for him! – The film certainly featured his father's shop. The film ended with the poignant scene of the removal of the children into the 'authorities' care.

Memorials.

There is a recently renovated memorial to the seven Czech soldiers involved in 'Anthropoid' in Leamington Spa. It has a parachute design and features their names in the panels around the fountain.



The Parachute Memorial in Leamington Spa

Post talk discussion:

The material shown and the talk provoked much discussion afterwards – views were expressed on the difficulties a local population might face in the event of a military occupation of unknown duration. The locals who had collaborated and had not anticipated the change back to the old ‘state of affairs’ could face much uncertainty.

Public shaving of heads and then being paraded through the streets along with beatings were known punishments for collaborators especially in newly liberated France in 1944 but also in other occupied territories.

The discussion moved to another similar WWII Nazi Retribution at Oradour-sur-Glane, in June 1944. The German Army were retreating from the South of France to assist the defence of the Normandy bridgehead. In particular, the 2nd SS Panzer Division ‘Das Reich’ were in this troop movement heading north through central France. Nearby, the local resistance group, in this instance, communist ‘Maquis’ had claimed to have kidnapped one of their SS Officers – the Das Reich reprisal was to destroy the entire village of Oradour-sur-Glane – women were separated from men and locked in the local church – the men were machine gunned then the church was set ablaze – a total of 642 inhabitants were killed in the atrocity - there being just one survivor. After the war, the original village was left unchanged as a memorial to the dead and can still be visited today. The new Oradour-sur-Glane was rebuilt nearby.

Films about the Operation Anthropoid and the assassination of Heydrich received varying degrees of member recommendation – These were ‘Daybreak’, ‘Anthropoid’ and ‘The Man with the Iron Heart’.

Worthy of recommendation to members was the author Philip Kerr [died 2018 and a Graduate of Birmingham University] who had written a very entertaining series of 14 novels based on a fictional Berlin Policeman named ‘Bernie Gunther’ – They cover the interwar and WWII periods and are set [mostly] in Berlin or Europe - One of the books entitled ‘Prague Fatale’ [Number 8 in the series] features Heydrich in which Gunther is invited to Prague to Heydrich’s residence and has to prove his investigative prowess to solve a murder. These books are extremely well researched and similar in style of writing and thoroughness to Bernard Cornwell, Peter O’Brien and C.S. Forrester.

Recent acquisitions section:



An Edward VII Long Service and Good Conduct [LSGC] medal with WWI pair featured next. The LSGC was awarded in 1904 for service on HMS Gladiator Chief Petty Officer [CPO] J.W. Winn – The pair were named to the rank of ‘Gunner’. Also sold with the lot were an archive of photographs and original documents which included his original service record and an old photo of a ‘Dreadnought’ battleship. The member was also able to access the 90 minute sound archive of Winn being interviewed in 1955 by his grandson D.W. Lewis about his navy and wartime experience. Two amusing points raised were - CPO Winn not spending the £25 his was given for funding a new Uniform - instead he kept the money and made do with his old uniform! – and his recovery after nine days from

pneumonia at the end of WWI where he awoke to the sound of bells ringing which were, in fact, the Armistice bells ringing on 11.11.1918 rather than his arrival in heaven!!

Also, for members' viewing was an unnamed Masonic medal commemorating the end of the WWI – its significance was its designer – **Edward Carter Preston** – the renowned sculptor and medallist whose important design contributions include the Distinguished Flying Cross [DFC], the Air Force Cross [AFC] and last, but not least, the WWI Memorial Plaque name which possibly most of us may have in our collections.



Above left and right: Magnificent obverse and reverse of an unnamed Masonic Medal commemorating the end of WWI. Designed by Edward Carter Preston – see text. [His initials E.C.P. seen near the base of the female figure's right foot].

Another member discussed an unusual WWI trio with a low regimental number of 18 named to Gunner Alexander Bowman of the Calcutta Volunteer Battery of the Bombay Artillery – They had served in Africa in WWI – Their artillery pieces were pulled by oxen as draft horses were intolerant of African conditions. These soldiers had to tolerate major difficulties of terrain and risk of illness namely dysentery, black water fever and the jiggers.

8th Calcutta vol battery had been based in East Africa – in North Nairobi in 1915, in action in 1916 and returned to India in 1917.

In WWI, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in Africa was General Jan Smuts – Smuts had led a Boer Commando in the Boer War 1899-1902. Smuts was also instrumental in a report of 1917 about air services that led to the formation of the Royal Air Force on 1st April, 1918 [see BMS minutes of John Scott's talk April 2018].



Above left: WWI Trio to Gunner Alexander Bowman.

Above right: Reverse of 1914-15 Star showing naming to 'Calcutta Volunteer Battery'.

Thanks were given to our main speakers and to all contributors.

My thanks to Martin Harrison for the use of his photographs in these notes.

Typed 11.9-23.9.19 with my apologies for any inaccuracies or omissions.

Chris Davies

BMS Secretary.