Minutes of the BMS meeting of 1.8.2019:

1. Welcome: by President Roger Bragger. No guests this month.

2. Apologies received – 8 in total – P. and S. Handford, C. Mellor-Hill, C. Newton, R. Perry, H. Vaugh, P. Wilson and R.Cook.

3. Stats - Present – 19, Meal - 4, Drink - 6, ONS - 0.

4. No new members.

5. Matters arising from previous meeting – None.
   Research questions – None.
   Library requests – Librarian J Scott informed members that we now have a copy of 'The Worcestershire Regiment in the Great War' by Stacke.

6. Functions/Visits – None to report.

7. Committee Points –

   Members were informed that Wing Commander G. Pitchfork, who was due to have attended the MIniconvention, was recovering successfully at home from Cerebrovascular disease.

   M.Harrison gave a short summary of our recent Miniconvention – There were 28 attendees - It was a great success in the quality and variety of all talks/presentations and in that the event made some £200 profit for Society funds.

   Mark Platt has started to issue members with their BMS 2019-2010 programme cards.

   Recruitment drive for new members – agreed to fund a BMS table at the next Stratford-upon-Avon medal/militaria fair [J.Scott, D.Seeney, C.Davies and J.Carver offering to man the stall Sunday 27.10.19].

   There is a Local and Family History fair/event at the Midland Art Centre ['MAC'] Edgbaston 28.9.19 – We propose to be represented at that function too - Currently, this one is 'work in progress' but if there are any volunteers to promote the BMS at this fair, please could you let your Secretary know.

   M. Harrison will review membership application forms and information leaflet [M. Harrison – already actioned].

8. Tonight's Topic : 'Like Father Almost Like Son'.

9. Next meeting: 5.9.19 - 'An Anthropoid in Wales' by Martin Harrison'.

Like Father Almost Like Son

Above: Lt. John Eric Wight [left] and Fl. Lt. Ronald Derek Gordon Wight nicknamed ‘Widge’ [right] .

Above: Cigarette case and medals of Lt. John Eric Wight.

Roger’s talk had focussed on the two pilots with the surname ‘Wight’ - one WWI and one WWII. Initially, they were thought to be linked and were actually sold as a father and son set of medals in

1994 – further information, correspondance and research as a result of an internet website hit in 2004 established there were, in fact, two RAF servicemen with the name of 'J.E. Wight' in 1918 – one had been a pilot [in 9 Squadron] and the other a technician. The initial link between the two medal groups was incorrect as our speaker established later that he had a case of the wrong 'Wight'.. These unrelated pilots surname Wight and their stories in both World Wars were nonetheless remarkable..

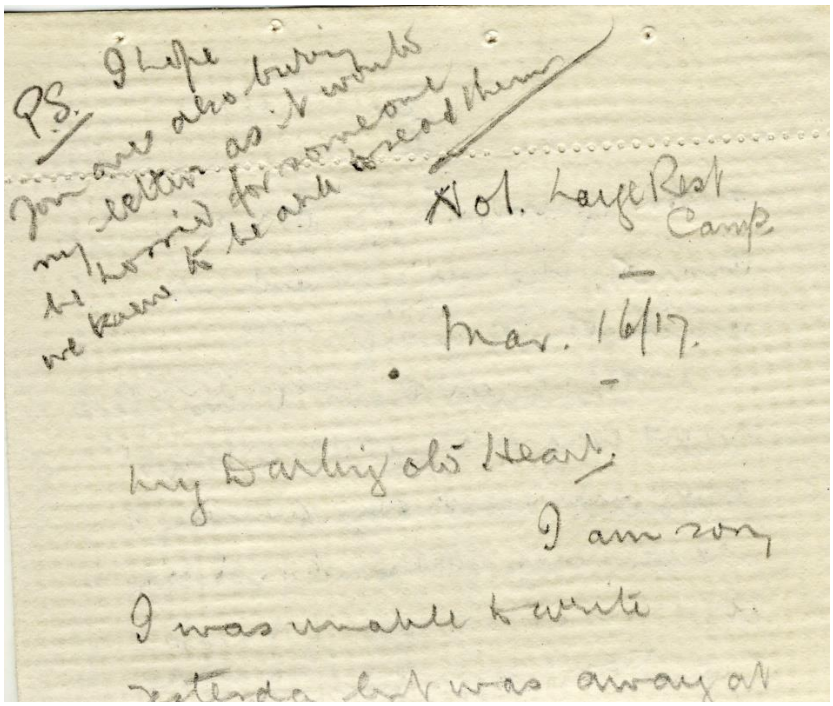
Above: Inside of the silver cigarette case showing signatures of aviator names. 'Dunk' has signed in the left lower corner [see text].

The Great War medals to Lt. John Eric Wight [RFC and RAF] had been sold with a cigarette case the inside of which was engraved with the signatures of squadron members. In 2004, following the website hit, our speaker had been offered and bought the photographs and original correspondance about J.E. Wight the RAFC/RAF Technician! — One signature on the cigarette case was the name of 'Dunk' – Amazingly, there was a photo [see below] which showed 'Dunk' sitting on his RE8 biplane [Still not much more is known about him!.

The other nicknames on offer were ‘Poached Eggs’, ‘Hornet’, ‘Vaseline’, ‘Cough’, ‘Mac’, ‘Cocoa’, ‘Sloc’, ‘Split-pin’ and ‘Acetone’!!

Wight wrote regularly to his wife Edith – some of his correspondence recounted the topic of venereal disease [VD] and even details of a visit to the ‘demi-mondes’ where Wight ‘saved his fellow Officers from going off the rails’ by insisting they leave the scantily clad women and return to base [to quote Wight]..!!

Of the various letters, one was stated to have been destroyed owing to an outbreak of Mumps whilst another had been annotated ‘I hope you are burning my letters as it would be horrid for someone we know to know to be able to read them’…[see image below]



In WWII, Flight Lt R.D.G. Wight [also known as ‘Widge’] had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross [DFC] during the battle of France where he had shot down 10 enemy aircraft.

Above left: DFC and WWII medals to Flight Lt RDG Wight. Above right; 'Widge' wearing DFC ribbon.

A matter of weeks later, he was killed in action [KIA] 11.8.1940 whilst leading a group of three Hurricanes against an attacking force of sixty Me 110's during the Battle of Britain. The RAF had lost 25 pilots that one day in August,1940: the most on any day in the Battle of Britain.

The two other pilots with 'Widge' on that day were 'Butterfield' and 'Snowden' – Butterfield, Distinguished Flying Medal [DFM] was KIA in the same action as 'Widge' but Snowden despite crashing on 11.8.1940, escaped with minor injuries and survived the war. However, Snowden was to die in a flying accident delivering newspapers in 1947.

Snowden wrote a touching short note of condolence to 'Widge's parents describing the action in which 'Widge' and Butterfield had both been killed . [Please see next page to view Snowden's letter dated 22.8.1940].

22.8.40.

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Wight,

I was very touched by the kind thought which lay behind your gift of cigarettes, for which I am very grateful. I should like to be able to reply telling you that we have news that your son is, by some miraculous chance, safe, but I am afraid this is not so.

Your grief, which I share, may be offset somewhat by the knowledge that he died in an extremely brave fashion, as he would have wished to die. He was leading a formation of three machines to attack no less than sixty Me 110 twin-engined fighters. He sailed unfalteringly into the middle of them, and I caught a glimpse of him shooting one down before I pressed home my own attack.

The third member of the formation, Sergeant Butterfield, D.F.M., was also killed. I escaped with minor injuries, which are now healed.

Yours sincerely,

E. G. Snowden

R.A.F.V.R.

There was documentation on Wight's body when he had been washed ashore. This had been returned to Wight's family through the Red Cross. Also established with the paperwork was that Wight had once owned a rare 'Aston-Martin Ulster' car [which is now on the island of Jersey] and that Wight's mother had postcard correspondence from Flight Lt R.G. Ker-Ramsey of 'The Great Escape' fame. Their connection was that Wight and Ker-Ramsey had trained as pilots together.

Above: at Stalag Luft 3, Ker-Ramsay on left, other airman unknown.

Wight had had some close escapes in his flying career such as this one described in the letter to his mother of 4th August,1939.

4.8.39

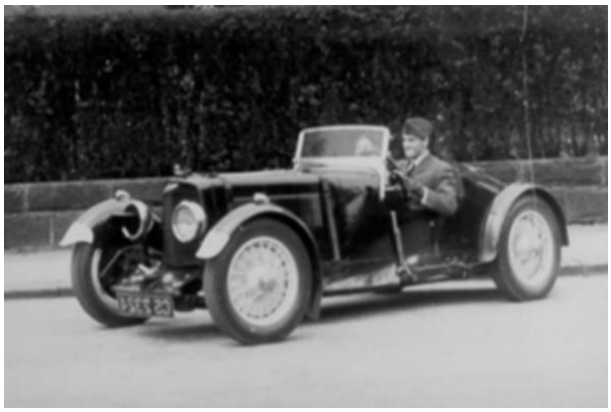
Letter to mother

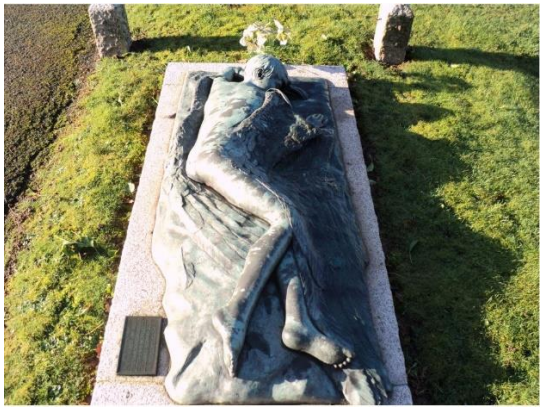
By the grace of God I 'got away with it' again yesterday, taking off on an engine test my engine cut out just in the one place in which I could do practically nothing about it, i.e., 15 feet off the ground & within 300 yds. of the North Road. I had only started to get my undercarriage up, so I knew I had to crash. It's slightly downhill there, so I held the aircraft down to keep up my speed, until I got to the road, which is about five feet above the 'drome there, and then pulled it up over the top. Unfortunately my undercart hit the bank, but I bounced over the road o.k. which was what I was aiming at, missing a car by inches, and crashed in the next field. I undid my straps, and then she went up, & to my horror the hood catch had broken, & the hood was jammed half forward. By this time the cockpit seemed to be full of flame, so by some means or other I got the hood back & then ran like hell away from her, as she was due to go up with a bang when the petrol tanks got hot. I got off with some nasty cuts, one of them on the head, and all my eyebrows & eyelashes burned off, also slight burns on my face. But another five seconds & I wouldn't have been able to get out. By the time anybody got there I was standing under a hedge smoking a cigarette, and it was damn funny to hear their comments and congratulations when they saw me. They all thought I was still in there, as they said she had caught fire before she stopped. One thing it taught me is that I've got a good many friends on this camp. Even one of the waiters this morning made a point of saying how glad they all were that I'd made it. And the doc said this morning "funny thing, your pulse coming back in the ambulance yesterday was perfectly normal". Don't tell me to save any more! By the way, I'm thinking of buying a second-hand Frazer Nash they've got near here. Should be rather fun.

He had a forced landing as described below.

> First, I've had another forced landing, in that, whilst diving through clouds at 300 m.p.h. the other day, my propeller blades suddenly flew off the boss! However thanks to the high speed and the grace of God I 'made' the aerodrome O.K., and put it down without breaking anything. Luckily, too, I had managed to throttle back the engine before it got too high revs, so it didn't seize, and Harker of Rolls was at Wittering when I arrived. He was very pleased, as they've had four other cases, and in each case the engine had seized, so that a 'war' was going on between Rolls and the airscrew makers. This, of course, wins the war for Rolls! The war was about which had failed first, the engine or the airscrew. Other flying news is that I broke my own personal height record by going up to 32,500' the other day, and staying there for half an hour. I was so cold up there that I exceeded 500 m.p.h. on the dive down! Dick has broken three aircraft in the last fortnight, one with a collapsed under-carriage, one on its back, and one bent wing tip while landing. All carelessness, too!

Wight bought the Aston Martin Ulster from the family of another pilot Lancelot Dixon who'd been KIA. Roger showed the image of Dixon's tombstone which was a depiction of 'Icarus' carved by his mother. Icarus was a Greek mythological figure who could fly but flew too close to the sun thus melting the attachment of wings and falling to earth. Dixon's tombstone is in Hay-on Wye.





Above left; 'Widge' in the 'Ulster' with number plate 'CS 2324' - bought for £200.

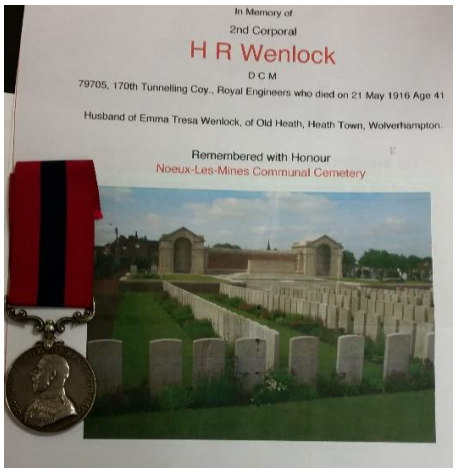
Above right: Lancelot Dixon's tombstone in Hay-on -Wye.

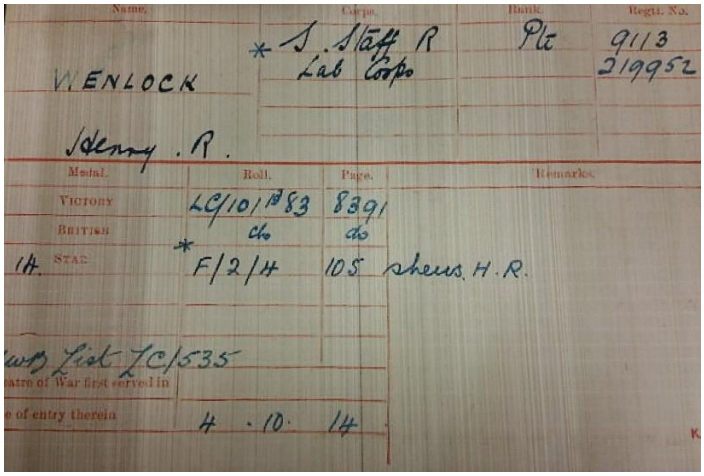
Below: Widge's Ulster photographed in 2007 on the island of Jersey [with Jersey number plate].

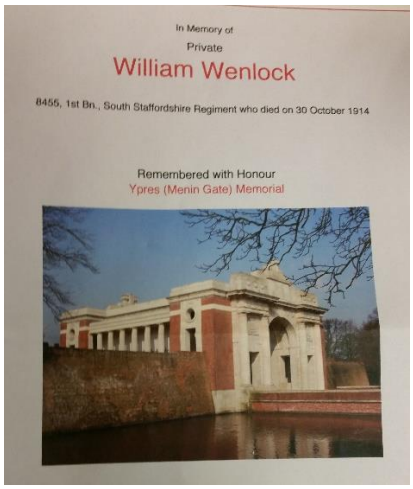
Above; Headstone of Fl. Lt. RDG Wight at Cayeux-sur-Mer Communal Cemetery, Normandy. France.

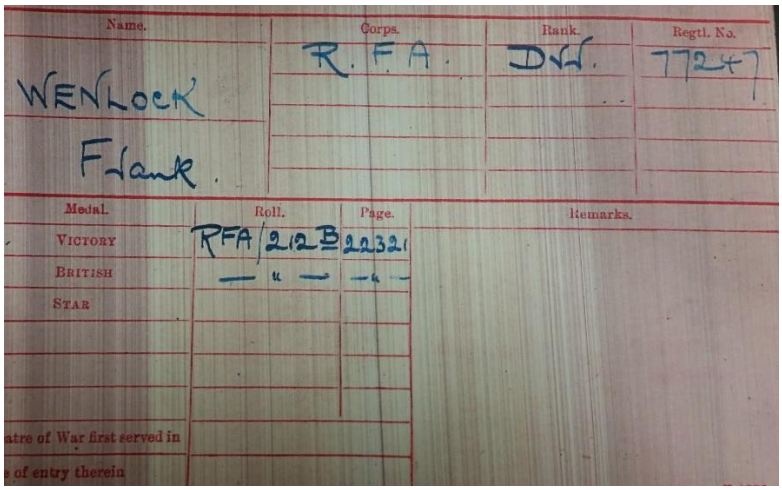
Other medals presented.

Several items relating to the Wenlock family were shown – One was a Distinguished Conduct Medal [DCM] to 79705 2nd Corporal Harry Russell Wenlock.









Clockwise from top left - DCM obvers and War Graves Commission Certificate for Harry Russell Wenlock, Medal Index Card [MIC] for Henry Russell Wenlock, MIC for Frank Wenlock and. War Graves Commission Certificate for William Wenlock.

Originally, Harry R Wenlock had joined the South Staffs regiment in 1912 but as he was a miner by occupation, he'd transferred to 170th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers. The citation for his DCM was discussed – he'd quickly sunk a shaft close to an enemy tunnelling unit 21-22nd August, 1915 thus destroying their activity. He had been killed in May 1916 as a result of gas poisoning in a rescue attempt.

The Trio to 9113 Private Henry Russell Wenlock 1st South Staffs Regiment was shown.

The 1914 Star/Trio to both HR Wenlocks' nephew 8455 Private William Wenlock was next up – He'd been killed 30th October, 1914 and, with no known grave, is commemorated on the Menin Gate at Ypres. Another relative 77247 Driver Frank Wenlock Royal Field Artillery [RFA] had been KIA in Mesopotamia and is commemorated on the Basra Memorial.

Finally a no clasp Ashantee 1901 medal to Private Suleman No 476 3/West African Frontier Force [WAFF] was shown. There was also an 2 clasp [Benin 1897 and Benin 1899] East and West Africa Medal to the same name but a different soldier.

Above left: Ashanti 1901 Medal [Obverse] to Suleman. Above right: Reverse of same medal.

Finally, on behalf of the Members, BMS secretary thanked Roger for his excellent talk and all contributions. Meeting declared closed at 20.43hrs.

My thanks to Roger Bragger for allowing me to use parts of his powerpoint presentation in this summary.

Chris Davies

BMS Secretary. Typed 28.8.19