

Shrill blasts break the morning quiet to herald Somme commemoration

10:09am Fri Jul 01, 2016



Chris Bradwell (left) blows his grandfather's whistle.

Three shrill blasts of a first world war whistle that was carried through the Battle of the Somme broke the early morning silence in a leafy village to mark the moment that thousands of troops went over the top to certain death.



The blasts followed an overnight vigil held inside Hawksworth church that was attended by around 80 people.

The whistle was blown today (Friday) by Chris Bradwell, grandson of the late Donald (Donny) Stubbs who was born in the village.

The whistle was used as a signal for troops to depart their trenches at the start of the Battle of the Somme. It was blown at 7.30am — the time whistles were blown along the Western Front to signal the start of the Somme offensive.



One of the historical displays pictures troops going over the top.

Mr Stubbs moved to Canada when he was 20 and at the outbreak of war signed up for the 90th Infantry Battalion Winnipeg Rifles, who saw some of the heaviest fighting at the Somme, Ypres, Vimy and Passchendale.

He was taken prisoner while serving in the trenches. He survived the war and returned to Hawksworth where he lived until his death in 1957. He is buried in the church graveyard.

The event began with the Act of Remembrance, read by Alistair Henderson.

The vigil honoured three men from Hawksworth, or who had connections to the village, who went to the first world war never to return and whose names were bathed in candlelight on the memorial to the fallen inside the church.



The poppies that came from the Tower of London exhibition that are kept in a first world war shell casing.

George Howard, whose family lived in the village from 1880, a lance-corporal with the York and Lancaster Regiment, was killed in action at Hooze in Flanders on August 9, 1915.

The vicar of Hawksworth from October 1917, the Rev Albert Kerridge, had two sons, William and Albert, who both served in the war. William, who was reported missing in September, 1918, has no known grave but is commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves memorial at Vis En Artois.

Albert was taken prisoner in France in March, 1918. After Armistice Day he was found by a French officer and sent back to England.



The whistle.

He died in Fulham Military Hospital on March 18, 1919, from pulmonary consumption brought on by starvation while a prisoner. He is buried in Hawksworth churchyard with a Commonwealth War Graves headstone.

Genuine period vehicles that saw service on the Somme were positioned outside the church - a horse-drawn German army kitchen, a horse-drawn ambulance for injured horses and a drinking water bowser.

Authenticity was created with a sandbagged wall outside topped with barbed wire.

Inside there were first world war displays telling of Nottinghamshire involvement in the 1914-18 conflict.



The roll call to the fallen of Hawksworth.

Films were shown during the vigil and there were uniforms, a huge Union flag and a talk was given by the president of the East Midlands Branch of the Western Front Association, Tim Chamberlin (corr), from Whatton.

There was also a first world war shell casing containing two of the poppies from the hundreds of thousands that formed the collection at the Tower of London installation Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, that marked the centenary of the outbreak of the war in 2014.

There were recitals of war poems and those that stayed the night in the church, which included Mr Bradwell, sang songs from the trenches.

A whistle was blown by Mr Chamberlin under The Buttercross in Bingham Market Place in a commemoration organised by the Bingham and Orston Branch of the Royal British Legion.