

## Members Presentations – 2nd November 2015

Once again our Member Presentations produced a broad variety of topics and styles and displayed the wide-ranging interests of the History Group members. The first Speaker was:

**Audrey Hobbs** who gave a vivid account of the life of **Robert Dudley, First Earl of Leicester**. Using a PowerPoint presentation, Audrey gave a thorough report on Dudley's character, skills, life and career, marriages, aspirations and relationships. She highlighted his vanity, ambitions and ability and emphasised his unsatisfactory courtship of Queen Elizabeth I. There was mention of the mysterious and suspicious death of his first wife and of the subsequent relationships that Dudley had. His political involvements were also acknowledged, including his connection in the trial of Lady Jane Grey, 'The Nine Days Queen', as was his building of parts of the magnificent Kenilworth Castle in an attempt to woo Queen Elizabeth I. The total picture was of an ambitious, and at times unscrupulous, but fascinating character in a colourful era of English history.



### **Tina Jenkins – Two VC Heroes – Brothers in war, brothers in law.**

Tina gave a moving account of the lives and heroic sacrifices of two serving Officers in World War Two, who were also brothers-in-law. The first was:

**Flying Officer Leslie Manser VC**. This young man's early flying career and swift rise to a post of responsibility was explained, followed by a thrilling retelling of his involvement in the bombing raid on Cologne. Captaining an Avro Manchester MKI aircraft, L7301, on the night of 30/31st May 1942, he successfully fulfilled his mission, but his aircraft was damaged by flak as he returned homewards. With exceptional courage, he continued to pilot his plane into Belgium, but realising that he would be unable to return home, ordered his crew to bale out. He continued to fly alone, until his plane crashed. He was just 20 years of age.



His brother-in-law was **Captain John Randle VC**, who had married Manser's sister. His moving story was played out in the Army, serving as a Captain in the Royal Norfolk Regiment. On 4 May 1944, during the Battle of Kohima Ridge, in India, he was responsible for attacking the Japanese positions on a nearby ridge. Captain Randle took over command of the Company which was leading the attack when the Company Commander was severely wounded. Despite serious injuries, Captain Randle, with utter disregard of the obvious danger to himself, charged the Japanese machine gun post single-handed with rifle and bayonet. Although mortally wounded by numerous bursts of machine gun fire he reached the bunker and silenced the gun with a grenade thrown through the bunker slit. He then flung his body across the slit so that the aperture should be completely sealed. Captain Randle was 26.



The bravery shown by this officer could not have been surpassed and by his self-sacrifice he saved the lives of many of his men and enabled not only his own Company but the whole Battalion to gain its objective and win a decisive victory over the enemy. This was known as

the recapture of 'The Norfolk Bunker' in the Battle for Burma. It was said in memory of all those who fought and died in the battle: "When you go home tell them of us and say 'for your tomorrows we gave our todays' ". This is known as 'The Kohima Epitaph'.

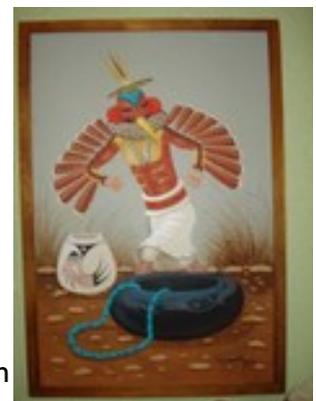
There was an emotional and stirring postscript to this heroic story as Tina told the group of her personal interest and involvement in this event. Her father was a very good friend of Captain Randle's, having met him at Oxford University, but he was also a fellow commissioned Officer in the Royal Norfolks, and consequently was also at the battle of Kohima. Tina's father was himself awarded the MC for his part in the battle. After the death of Captain Randle, his widow was invited to be Tina's Godmother. Thus, Tina was involved in and connected with the lives of two exceptional heroes, who symbolised the sacrificial spirit and bravery of those serving in World War 2.

This was followed by another moving account of the life and death of an outstanding example of courage in war – **Nurse Edith Cavell**

. **The talk was given by John and Jenny Rand.** Starting with her early years, John and Jenny traced her education, career, influences, gifts and skills until Nurse Cavell served in Belgium during World War I. With her passion for and dedication to nursing, she was noted for training Belgian nurses to the high standards employed by British nurses, using Florence Nightingale's pattern as her model. She was also known to be completely impartial and with high moral principles, treating German 'enemy' wounded as well as Allied soldiers. However, she also aided wounded Allied soldiers to escape from Belgium and for this she was captured, imprisoned and eventually executed by the Germans. John and Jenny highlighted the conflict that Nurse Cavell had: her part in the Red Cross as a nurse being a neutral role, while her 'underground activities' gave her a partisan function. Her courage and devotion to duty moved the audience, especially the recounting of the last part of her life.



By contrast, **Nita Crutch** followed with a talk entitled 'Life on the Reservation. She recounted in her unique way, spiced with some distinctive humour, a US 'Road Trip' that she and her husband had taken, in a Winnebago, from Kansas to California. They had stayed on an 'Indian' Reservation and had had the privilege of meeting the renowned Navajo artist 'Jimmy Yellowhair'. Nita brought some examples of his art, including a portrait of her husband, to the meeting and interpreted the symbolism of the portrait for the audience. She explained, in a vivacious style, what life was like on the Reservation, the customs and culture of the Navajos and the impact (not always positive) of the 'White Man' on Indian life. Nita finished by highlighting what the consequences were of the White Man's interference with the Navajo's settled life and its consequences, namely the destruction of Indian culture. (Shown is an example of Jimmy Yellowhair's art).



**Carole Clements** concluded the meeting by her PowerPoint presentation on

**Bishop's Rock Lighthouse.** In her talk she covered such topics as the location of the lighthouse, its structure and cost, and some information about the architect and the glass makers, who manufactured the lanterns. This was a local firm, Chance Brothers based in Smethwick. The original optics are still in use.



The talk was supplemented by some very good photographs, maps and plans. Carole also included some personal reminiscences of her experience of travelling to and being in the lighthouse and brought a sample of pink granite (the rock on which the lighthouse is built) for the Group to handle. Carole regaled the group with stories of the lives of the lighthouse keepers, the renovation of the lighthouse and how the lantern worked as well as details of the interior and the construction of the Helipad. There was some laughter as Carole recounted the BBC's documentary on the lighthouse: 'Christmas at Bishop's Rock'. The filming was expected to last a few days, but the bad weather prevented the film crew from returning to the mainland and they ended by staying from November – January !!!

In thanking the Speakers, Elaine's summed up by noting their different styles of presentation and varied content, the contrast between some highly emotional subjects and some more lighthearted topics and the hard work all the Speakers had put in to their research and presentations.

Heidy Hague.

## **Carol Clements – Bishop's Rock Lighthouse.**

Location, structure, architect, cost, good photos. Personal reminiscences. Sample of pink granite. Life of lighthouse keepers. Renovation of lighthouse. How lantern worked. Dangers of winching off so wanted 2 years duty in lighthouse. Bit of humour. Lives of lighthouse keepers and visitors. Chance Brothers and optics. Details of interior. War years. BBC documentary on Christmas on Bishop's Rock. The crew stayed November – January !!! Helipad plans in 1968. Nearest A&E at St Mary's is 7 miles away. Modernisation. Breeches buoy rescue – photo. 1976 helipad finished. 1977 – part automation. 1992 – full automation. Now Charles owns the lighthouse. Used for races eg 'Tall Ships'. Lightbeam has range of 24 nautical miles. Chance Brothers based in Smethwick. The original optics are still in use.