



## Medals

With the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first World War armistice about to be commemorated, Kyrle Probus Club members were given a topical reminder at their meeting on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November, about the amazing stories of courage and gallantry which permeated the four years long horrific conflict.

Club member Geoff Blake, who titled his talk “Medals on Chests”, said “You may not be surprised to hear that 628 VC’s were won between 1914 – 1918”.

The first Victoria Cross of that war went to Private Sidney Godley of the Royal Fusiliers. “The war had only been going for 18 days and the retreat from Mons was gathering speed and urgency. Godfrey single-handedly held up the German advance at the Nimy Ridge for two hours with a machine gun and a bullet lodged in his skull. He was taken prisoner when he ran out of ammunition,” Geoff said.

The one Herefordshire-born man who won a VC in the war was Allan Lewis, a Lance Corporal in the Northants Regiment. He was born at Witney-on-Wye. “On the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1918 he was in charge of a section held up by two machine gun posts at Ronstoy,” said Geoff. “He crawled forward alone and throwing bombs to silence them succeeded in capturing the gunners. Three days later he acted equally courageously under heavy machine gun fire, and was killed in action.” For these days of combined bravery he was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. A bronze statue has just been unveiled in Hereford in his memory, designed by Jemma Pearson from Shropshire.

Women are eligible for all gallantry awards, including the Victoria Cross. Though no woman has yet won a VC, it might happen now that women can serve in the front line.

“Quite a handful of George Crosses have gone to some amazingly courageous young women,” Geoff said.

Violette Szabo, an SoE agent, was one of them. She used to stay with her aunt and uncle in Wormelow as a child, and then as a young woman. She was twice flown out to France in a Lysander, under cover of dark, to help the Resistance. She eventually captured and tortured in Ravensbruck by the Gestapo, but refused to reveal the name of any other agent with the French Resistance people.

Violette was shot in January 1945. Her four-year-old daughter Tania received her mother’s posthumous George Cross from King George VI at Buckingham Palace. The King said to her: “This is for your mother. She was a very brave woman.”