

Way We Were

ISSUE 100



First World War tank number 119, generated huge interest in Market Square, Hanley, when it arrived in 1918.



'Tanks' for your money towards the war effort

After being introduced into the First World War battle arsenal, tanks were taken on a tour of the country to encourage people to invest money in them.

A tank known as 'Old Bill' was lined up to appear in Stoke-on-Trent. Attempts to break the deadlock on the Western Front had achieved mixed results the previous year. Casualty figures of The Somme are well documented but General Haig had a plan - he saw the potential of the untried tank, using them to limited effect in September 1916.

Just over a year later, sufficient numbers of tanks were available for a dramatic and dynamic attempt to smash through German lines.

Two tanks were included in the Lord Mayor's Show in London in early 1917 and the reaction of those watching was duly noted by the Government.

The tank-led victory at Cambrai in November 1917, with an advance of more than five miles on a front of six miles, quickly resulted in two tanks

To launch our countdown to the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, Lee Dent and Richard Pursehouse, of The Chase Project Military Research Group, reveal why tanks arrived in the Potteries

being sent to Trafalgar Square to drum up interest.

The success of these two tanks in persuading people to invest in these 'war winners', as Prime Minister Lloyd George described tanks, quickly led to Tank Weeks across the country as towns and cities vied with each other to raise ever higher amounts in subscriptions in War Bonds and War Savings Certificates.

Eventually there were more than 150 of these events across the country, with Glasgow raising the highest amount - £14,500,000.

On the last day of 1917, tank 119, named 'Old Bill', arrived in Birmingham. The Bishop of Birmingham had called on the second city to raise enough to pay for one day of the war - more than £6,500,000. The Tank helped Birmingham to a final

figure of more than £6,700,000. The same Tank was scheduled to come from Birmingham to the Potteries on January 7, 1918. The arrival of Old Bill was not a smooth one. The intended position in a Stoke side street was deemed unsuitable. The suggestion the tank could tour each part of The Potteries was impractical.

Mr Tilney, of the National War Savings Committee in London, wrote to the *Staffordshire Sentinel* on January 3, stating the canal bridge at Stoke was a factor against the tank standing in Stoke.

Market Square in Hanley was agreed on instead, a decision endorsed and supported by several mayors as well as all the local war savings committees.

As the impending arrival of one of the 'new and potent engines of war' drew nearer there were several articles in

local newspapers explaining war bonds were loans secured by the British Empire. There were various types available with different dates of maturity (1922, 1924 and 1927) and the interest was a generous five per cent, double that paid in Post Office Savings. The premium was not subject to income tax or excess profits tax.

Other newspaper reports stated when the tank would be open for business, and that a tent was to be erected inside a strongly barricaded perimeter around it, where would-be investors could purchase war bonds.

Mr Tilney from the National War Savings Committee, would have an office inside the tent to ensure the smooth running of the operation, focussing on war bonds sales of £50 and upwards, as would the Postmaster of Stoke-on-Trent, Mr Albert Berlyn, who would focus on lower denominations and war savings certificates, valued at 15/6d (around 75 pence today).

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Even snowfall couldn't freeze investment in the Tank Bank



The Tank Bank, which had visited the Potteries in 1918, in Leicester.

Military historians Lee Dent and Richard Pursehouse talk about how people in the Potteries helped pay for tanks during the First World War

MONDAY, January 7, 1918, saw the arrival of the tank known as 'Old Bill' from Hanley railway station at just after 11am.

It passed along Trinity Street, where the crowd strained for a glimpse of 'this weird mechanism of destruction' and heeded the warnings from the police to stand well back.

At one point, due to the slippery surface of the road, 'Old Bill' almost brought down the sun-blind of the stationers Messrs W Timmie and Son.

The officer commanding the tank, Lieutenant S T Brocklehurst, led the procession.

He and the rest of his crew had 'returned from the front only six weeks previously, after heavy work in the tanks there'.

Lt Brocklehurst was accompanied by two officers from the 1st North Staffordshire Battalion of the Staffordshire Volunteer Regiment.

The Volunteers were to provide a guard of honour for 'Old Bill' in 24-hour relays, beginning with the Hanley Company on Monday, followed



The Tank Bank in the Potteries in 1918: Tank 119, 'Old Bill', and crew. Lieutenant Brocklehurst is second on the left.

by Longton's, Tunstall's, Stoke's, and finally Newcastle's Company.

A light snow shower didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the crowd as it strained to listen to a speech from the Mayor of Newcastle, Mr Gradwell Goodwin.

The Mayor declared that last week the same tank as he stood on now had raised more than £6,700,000 in Birmingham and that he believed

the people of the Potteries would do their best.

The tank was declared open for business and one of the first payments of £60,000 was made by the Mayor of Stoke, Alderman Robinson, on behalf of the Corporation of Stoke-on-Trent.

Other payments during the day included the Potteries Electric Traction Company (£14,000) and Shelton Iron Steel and Coal Company Ltd (£25,000).

There was also Prudential (£10,000) and Pearl (£10,000), with additional payments of £15,000 by both companies four days later, and Stoke Football Club (£200).

Mr Alexander Poyser joined his War Savings Committee colleague Mr Tilney, having been with 'Old Bill' at Bristol and Cardiff prior to Birmingham. In an interview with *The Sentinel* he declared that he hoped the public would fully support the Tank Week.

Local dignitaries and mayors were not the only ones seen by the crowd on top of the tank. Stoke's Mayor, Alderman Robinson, held a ceremony for Military Medal holder William Blurton of the Royal Garrison Artillery (Trench Mortar Battery), who came from Howard Street in Longton.

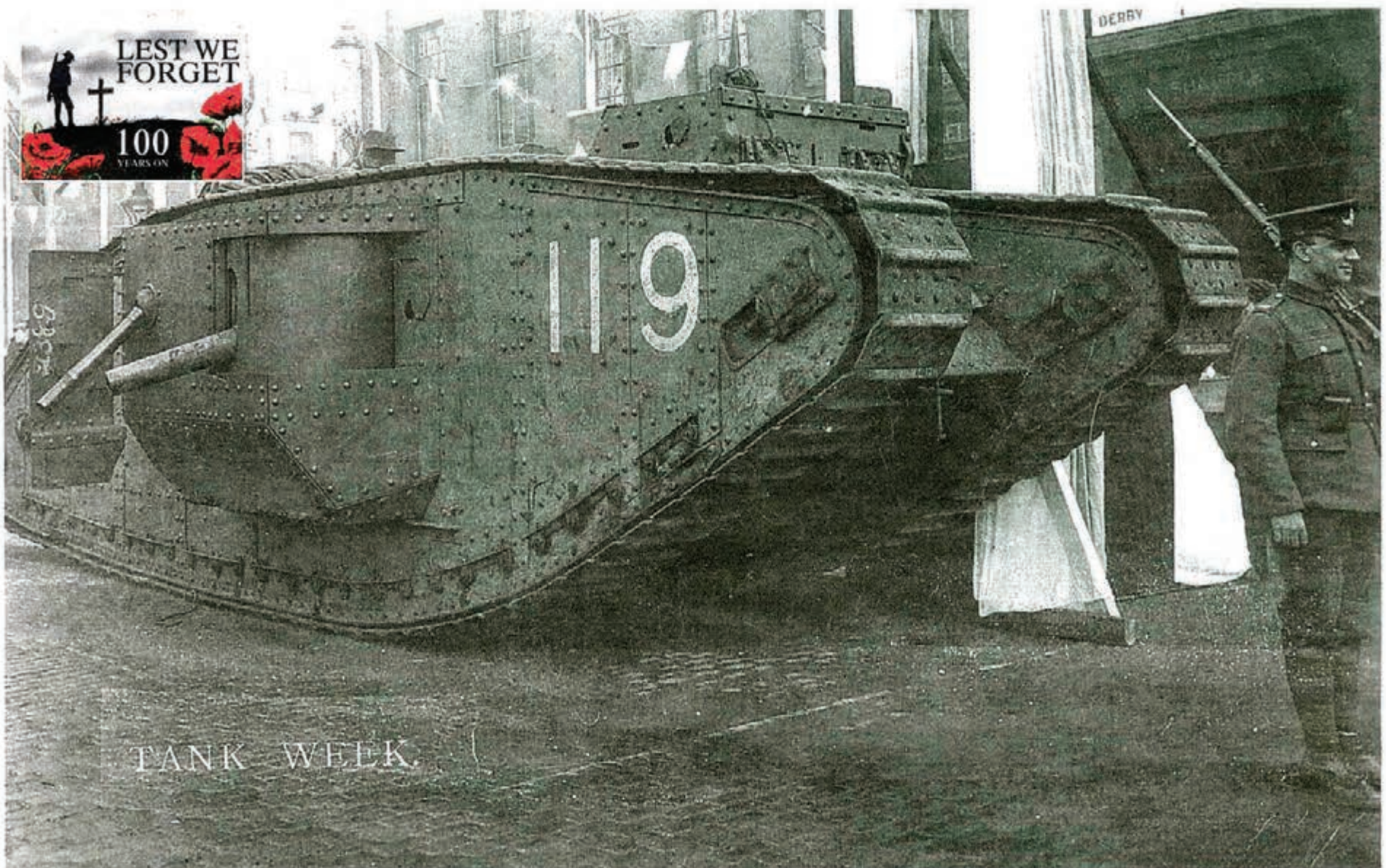
His leave had been extended in order to be at the Tank Bank, where the Mayor pinned the medal on his chest.

As with the first Tank Bank in Trafalgar Square, several aeroplanes flew above the six Potteries towns on the Thursday, and dropped some 3,000 discs with the printed message 'Dropped from the sky by British aeroplanes', as well as a dispatch for Lt Brocklehurst.

Overnight a biting wind, snow and frost had frozen taps and pipes in homes across the area.

By Wednesday morning the tank was described as 'frozen fast to the ground'.

As the temperature rose, Mr Alfred Chew, from Hanley, declared he would buy a War Savings Certificate for every child born in the



TANK WEEK

Tank Bank number 119, 'Old Bill', which was a familiar sight in the Potteries, is pictured while it was visiting Nottingham in 1918.

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Pilots from a Midlands aerodrome were invited to the tank known as 'Old Bill' in Hanley, along with their Officer Commanding, Major M H Nethersole.

Three of the Royal Flying Corps pilots were named, Captain Wood, Lieutenant Openshaw, and Lieutenant McArthur. They were collected in a car by Mr Alex Poyser, who was accompanied by Lt Brocklehurst, the Tank Commander, along with his wounded brother, Private Brocklehurst of the Artists Rifles, who had come over to see his brother and the tank.

As the week drew to a conclusion, funds started to come in from outlying towns such as Leek (£67,550) and Uttoxeter (£22,000). Longton contributed £50,000 (additional funds eventually raising their figure to more than £130,000) and there were cheques from firms such as Messrs Settle, Speakman and Co of Alsager for £20,000.

There were further exhortations to invest. The Principal of Birmingham

University (a native of North Staffordshire) drew an analogy with Boadicea's chariots 'with scythes sticking out of the axles' advancing on Romans, not unlike the tank, but instead of scythes it had 'guns - guns at the sides and guns looking ahead.' *The Sentinel* even reported that two trawler owners in Hull had offered to present a tank to the Government to be named City of Hull. Perhaps *The Sentinel* thought this story would provoke a similar act in The Potteries.

One letter in *The Sentinel* commented: 'I fail to find the names of a large number of wealthy firms', and goes on to state that the newspaper should print a Roll of Honour of those that had invested and a name and shame 'Money Bags Conchies List'. A large advert in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* asked "Have YOU fed him?" These blunt comments managed to bring the figure invested at the tank over the £1 million mark as *The Sentinel*

went to print on Saturday afternoon. The Mayor of Stoke hoped the Potteries would beat Cardiff, whose total two weeks before was £1,020,000. He also

commented that North Staffordshire was not a rich area, and whereas other towns and cities had received single payments of £250,000 or more, after Stoke-on-Trent Corporation's £60,000 the Potteries' largest single amount had been £35,000, from Parker's Burslem Brewery Ltd.

'Old Bill' left for Leicester from Hanley Station at 2130 hours on the Saturday, after an enthusiastic send off from the vast crowd in Hanley Market Place.

The Mayor of Stoke gave a final speech congratulating everyone who had invested, especially those who had done so for the first time. The final figure for the week was £1,156,119.

In comparison, the amount raised by tank banks at Derby at the end of January 1918 was £1,284,000, and Leicester, the following week after the Potteries, raised more than £2 million. Coventry raised £1,370,000, Nottingham £2,635,000 and Leeds £1,521,000.

For two other towns, then within Staffordshire county boundary, the amounts raised were Wolverhampton (Old Bill Tank) £1,410,000 and Walsall £832,000 (although for a four-day period around Easter as the council decided not to open for Good Friday).

One tank was offered as a prize for the highest figure per capita raised for War Bond sales generally, which was won by West Hartlepool, which raised more than £37 per person.

A shadow was cast during Tank Week in the Potteries after the Minnie Pit explosion occurred at Halmerend, which took nearly 160 lives.

But despite this tragedy, the people of the Potteries had made a magnificent effort investing in War Bonds and War Savings Certificates - enough to pay for more than 230 tanks.

Ironically, Germany did not see the potential of the tank and built less than 20 of its own lumbering version, the A7V.

Just over 20 years later, their tank-led Blitzkrieg would sweep across much of Europe.

It could be argued that Prime Minister Lloyd George's claim that the tank was a 'war winner' is somewhat exaggerated. The tank was certainly a major contributor to the financial ability of Britain to continue fighting.

More importantly, the Tank Banks showed the soldiers at the front that those on the home front were doing their best to help get them back home quickly by buying war bonds.

War bonds would buy tanks, which cost around £5,000.

Tanks would overcome the German defences and barbed wire. The war would be won. Their husbands, brothers, sisters, sons and

daughters could come home. The logic was obvious and the citizens of the Potteries flocked in their thousands to queue for their War Bonds and Certificates.

In March 1918, Stone held its own 'Tank Week' (without a tank) and raised nearly £50,000. So too did Stafford, which raised more than £127,000 and had constructed a wooden tank at the local Siemens factory for the purpose.

As an interesting addendum, the Potteries held a 'Feed The Guns' week beginning on the day of the Armistice, November 11, 1918. Despite the cessation of hostilities, the week managed to raise more than £1,220,000 in War Bonds sales.

■ If anyone has any additional information or photographs of this important chapter in the Potteries Great War experience, please contact the authors of The Chase Project by emailing thechaseproject@gmail.com

■ Please also send letters and photographs relating to the First World War to Colette Warbrook, including your full name, address and telephone number, at Features Desk, The Sentinel, Forge Lane, Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 5SS, or email waywewere@thesentinel.co.uk

