

The Battle of the Somme – 1916 documentary film

Faringdon Peace group needed no reminder of the horrors of war but at their July meeting, to coincide with the anniversary, showed the original 1916 documentary film 'The Battle of the Somme' which follows the build up to and the start of the battle. Over 20 million tickets were sold within 2 months of its release and while the real scenes of dead and wounded caused controversy at the time, in discussion afterwards the Peace Group felt that the film presented a rather sanitised version of the battle in which 19,240 soldiers died on the first day.

Much of the film shows smiling Tommies eating, drinking, receiving medical care, transporting munitions and firing towards the enemy – all reassuring scenes for the home audience. German prisoners in contrast looked scared and nervous, though well treated. We also saw soldiers waiting in the trenches and going over the top. One wonders how many of them came home again or even survived that first day.

We finished by listening to the poem 'Hero' by Siegfried Sasson.