



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT

February 2017

Football Lodge goes over the top!

One of the most famous artefacts in sporting history was present at the last meeting of the Football Lodge in Botley – the Loos football.

The ball was kicked into battle in 1915 by members of the London Irish Rifles, in direct contradiction of orders given by a commanding officer.

Tony Robinson, a veteran of the regiment and member of the London Irish Rifles Lodge, brought the ball and gave a talk about its extraordinary history.

The evening also saw 100 brethren witness the excellent initiation of Richard Appleton, whose proposer Bill Starkey occupied the Chair of King Solomon.

Another surprise was a 'ninja' visit by the Provincial Grand Master Mike Wilks – dubbed 'Wilksie' by the soccer-loving brethren.

David Lallana, Worshipful Master – or 'gaffer' - of the Football Lodge that was consecrated last year, and father of England star Adam, said: "The Loos Football is an incredible piece of history.

"To have it among the brethren and to hear its story was fascinating, and humbling too.

"We are extremely grateful to Tony Robinson for bringing it along and telling us about it.

"It was only our third home match since our consecration and another sell-out. We were also able to raise more than £600 for charity."

Prior to the Battle of Loos, one of the soldiers of the London Irish Rifles hatched a plan to dribble six footballs towards the German front line in a display of bravado and courage.

Their commanding officer rumbled them on the eve of the battle, and before the attack shot five of the balls, rendering them useless.

But the soccer team managed to keep the sixth ball hidden and Rifleman Frank Edwards inflated it as his comrades gave him cover.

As the whistle for the big push sounded Rifleman Edwards hoofed the ball out of the trenches and hacked it forward over No Man's Land with a shout of "Come on the London Irish".

He was wounded in the assault, being shot in both legs.

Others kicked the ball onwards until it was pierced on German barbed wire.

The London Irish Rifles achieved their objective that day and it remains their proudest battle honour.

The ball remained with the London Irish Rifles and is now kept in the Regimental Museum. It was restored in 2011 and makes regular visits to schools and also appeared on the TV shows QI and the Antiques Roadshow.

Of various footballs kicked about between the trenches in the Great War, it is the only extant one.



In form (l-r) PGM Mike Wilks, WM David Lallana and Tony Robinson of London Irish Rifles Lodge.



Building a wall. (l-r) Nick Illingsworth SD, Sean Whelan SW, PGM Mike Wilks, WM David Lallana, Richard Appleton, initiate, Bill Starkey, proposer, Tony Robinson of London Irish Rifles Lodge, Leon Whitfield JW, Paul Davis JD.

