

BIRMINGHAM ASSOCIATION OF

FEPOW

FAR EAST PRISONERS OF WAR

Chairman - Mr Keith Andrews, Treasurer - Mrs Margaret Walton, Secretary - Mrs Barbara James
 Committee Members - Ms Angela Lane, Mrs Annette Hughes, Rowford Bowditch, Anthony Truett,
 Richard Gibbs

BAFEPOW NEWS SHEET FOR JULY 2026

HOW THE FEPOW CHURCH IN WYMONDHAM CAME INTO BEING

The Children's Newspaper, December 8, 1951

NEW CHURCH FOR A NORFOLK TOWN

The little Norfolk town of Wymondham, famous for its 17th-century Market Cross, is to have a new church which is likely to become a place of pilgrimage.

The church is to be a memorial to people of all creeds and nationalities who died in Japanese hands during the war. The idea was conceived by the Revd. Malcolm Cowin, the Roman Catholic parish priest, who himself was in captivity in the Far East for over three years. Among the 1200 subscriptions already received are many from people who do not belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

The church is being built in the Presbytery garden and will replace the present Roman Catholic church, which was once a stable.

A Book of Remembrance is to be placed in the Lady Chapel. More than 6000 names have already been received, but those of thousands of Dutch folk and others have yet to be found. The Imperial War Graves Commission are helping to make the list more complete.

Following on from June's news sheet in which the annual service at the FEPOW Church was included, it seemed appropriate to add an item this month about how the Church of our Lady and Saint Thomas of Canterbury came to be established as such. My thanks go to our member, Phil Bradshaw, for supplying the information which he came across during his extensive research into the 196 RAMC in which his grandfather had served in WWII.

As you can see from the newspaper cutting on the left, it tells of the project that was started by the Reverend Malcolm Cowin who had himself been a FEPOW. On the next page is a copy of his experience as a FEPOW which gives a brief outline of where he was during his time on the Thai/Burma Railway.

Money was raised and in the newspaper these are described as 'subscriptions' and it is interesting to note that the cutting is actually taken from the 'Children's Newspaper'. I had not heard of this particular publication and so, out of interest, I looked it up and at the very end of this item I have included what I found.

The church was built in 1952 to a design by Donovan Purcell, as a permanent memorial to those who suffered as prisoners of war and internees of the Japanese during World War II, and is the only church of its kind in the world.

The church acts as both a 'Living Memorial', and a Roman Catholic Parish church. It is unique in being the only church dedicated to the memory of FE-POW and Civilian Internees of all Faiths and Nationalities who died in the Japanese POW and Internment Camps of WWII. A computerised data-

base of the 25,000 original names is held. An additional 6000 FEPOW (unlisted) who died before cessation of hostilities on 2nd September 1945 have been added. It was further extended to record names of FEPOW who survived the camps and have died in freedom.

On the Thai/Burma Railway – in the words of Chaplain M Cowin :-

Chaplain M Cowin (RC), Royal Army Chaplain's Department
 POW from February 1942 to August 1945

Camp 240, Non Pladuk

All that could be done to assist me in my work was done by the British Camp Commandant and his Staff, whilst I was at the above camp. The obstructive attitude of the Japanese, however, made it impossible to aid me much.

The Japanese policy regarding religion was much the same at Non Pladuk as at other camps in which I had been stationed. There has never been any question of freedom of worship; that has been forbidden. Services for the most part have been restricted to once a week, and Sunday was not allowed as a camp holiday. For long periods and with no explanation services were forbidden, and when, with the greatest of difficulty, permission was obtained to recommence them, sermons were prohibited.

No classes for religious instruction were allowed. Morning and night prayers could not be said. Permission to build churches, more often than not, was refused, and even when granted, no material was supplied by the Japanese. Interference by individual guards at such services as were allowed was not infrequent. No difference was made by the Japanese in the treatment of chaplains to that of any other prisoner, but I must add that owing to the efforts made by the British Camp Commandant and Staff at Non Pladuk I was always protected from the indignities and humiliations to which other officers were often subjected.

Although I made supplication scores of times to be allowed to visit adjoining camps where there were no Roman Catholic chaplains to minister to the men, such permission was always refused, with no explanation and often rudely. With the result that hundreds of Catholics died denied the Sacraments, the supreme consolation of their faith, and burial by a priest.

No transport was allowed for the bodies or burial parties, and the former, sown up in sugar sacks, had to be carried to the cemetery on stretchers. In the case of Non Pladuk, the cemetery was about a mile distant.

At a time when morale was low and full freedom of worship would have been of incalculable value, the Japanese went out of their way to obstruct chaplains in their work. They were completely indifferent to every kind of pleading. Throughout their captivity the prisoners of war were starved – starved of food, starved of clothing, of medical supplies, of news, of letters from home – and starved of spiritual consolation.

Taken from - **Prisoner of war** : voices from behind the wire in the Second World War
 by Rollings, Charles

An interesting excerpt from a book (*Cross on the Sword*) and a photo taken at Kanchanaburi

It was the day before Old Year's Night 1946 when the Poor Mission's next Priest In Charge arrived after a very different wartime experience. Fr. Cowin had been ministering to fellow Catholics as a prisoner of war.

He converted to Catholicism aged 21 and was an assistant priest at Newmarket before transferring to St. John's, Norwich, in 1939. He had spent little time there before WWII was declared, and he joined up as a non-combatant Chaplain attached to 196 Field Ambulance RAMC. It was his misfortune



Fr Cowin & Christian Japanese Dr.
outside the chapel built in
Kanchanaburi Camp 1942/3

to be one of nine British Army RC Chaplains caught up in the surrender of Singapore in August 1942 with other East Anglian men of the 18th Division. Originally destined to defend it, they shared instead the brutal conditions of imprisonment in the Japanese POW camps for 3½ years. He emphasised his non-combatant status by always wearing his tropical priestly cassock rather than uniform. Whilst it gained him no privileges, it was a tangible symbol for fellow FEPOW to keep faith (and hope) alive. To keep focussed on the beauty of the

future, he built an RC chapel in three different camps. Denial of spiritual succour is a tool of all oppressors, and this was evident, for despite making *'scores of applications to minister to Catholics in adjoining camps with no RC minister, the Camps Commandants' always refused him permission.'* (*Cross on the Sword* p263). The scarcity of bread and wine

If you have not as yet added your FEPOW to the list of those who survived please contact me and I will put you in touch with our member, Peter Wiseman, who is the curator at the church. If you wish to confirm that a FEPOW who sadly did not return is included then this can also be checked.

Here is the history of the Children's Newspaper:-

The Children's Newspaper (CN) was a highly successful, 12-page weekly publication founded by Arthur Mee. Aimed at pre-teens, 1951 editions featured world news, science, puzzles, and comics. For example, the October 1951 issue famously ran the headline "Can Man be Landed on Mars", covering exciting technological leaps.

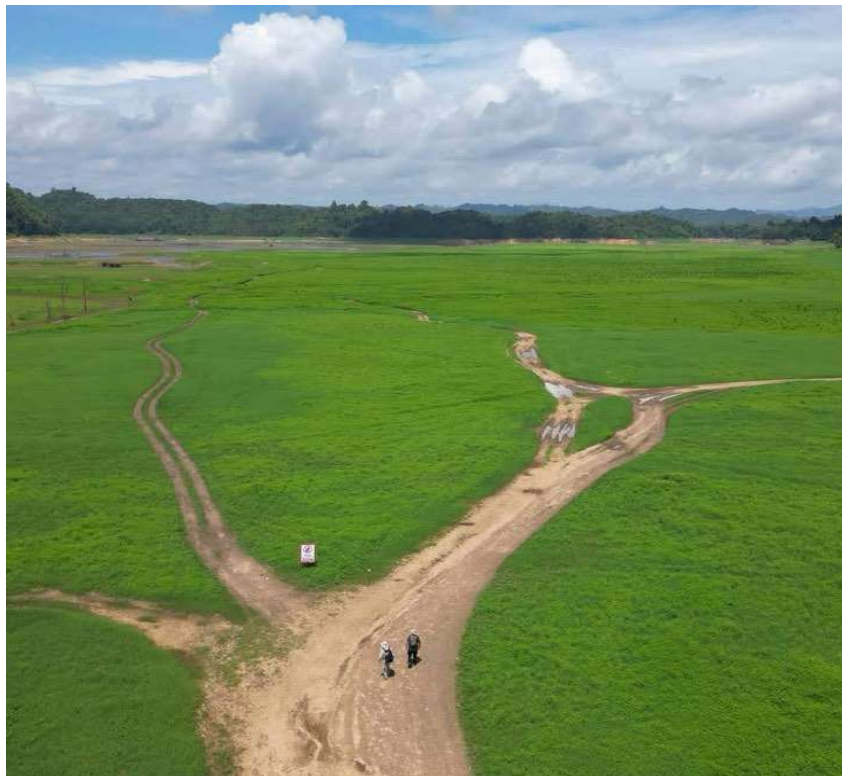
The 1950s—including 1951—were an era of transition for the publication. Following Arthur Mee's passing in 1943, the magazine was edited by Hugo Tyerman. During 1951, *The Children's Newspaper* was increasingly challenged by emerging competitors like *Eagle*, the *Junior Mirror*, and the *Junior Express*. Here are a few defining traits of what readers in 1951 found inside:

- **Global & Scientific Affairs:** Articles covered early space exploration, international politics, and significant engineering achievements.
- **Youth Celebrations:** The paper regularly highlighted stories of remarkable children achieving great things in their communities or in sports.
- **Entertainment:** Every issue included an array of photographs, short stories, and interactive puzzles to engage young minds.

Later in its lifespan, the publication introduced sections like 'Pop Spot' to boost readership. After a remarkable 46-year run of over 2,300 issues, *The Children's Newspaper* eventually merged with the educational title *Look and Learn*

ANOTHER TRIP TO EXPLORE MORE OF THE THAI/BURMA RAILROAD

It was so good to see a post on the 5th Beds and Herts Facebook page from our member Martyn Fryer who has once more visited the TBR along with Andrew Snow from the TBR Museum to explore a more northern region that is normally under water. This area has been drained by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand to enable maintenance work to be undertaken and, in the picture taken using a drone, you can see Martyn and Andrew taking a look around the area that was once the site of the Nithe Station. The area has now dried out which has provided a rare opportunity to explore the site and to look for artifacts and to study the site to verify the details that have been exposed before the dam's maintenance is completed in August and the rainy season returns and refills the reservoir.



To learn more about what has emerged from beneath the water, do take a look at MSN where there is more about this rare opportunity to see what lay below. You can do this by ‘googling’

WWII ‘Death Railway’ station resurfaces after decades submerged msn.com

While out there. Martyn also travelled to the cemetery at Kanchanaburi to visit the gravestones of his grandfather and his uncle who are commemorated there within a very short distance from each other. He has told us about these very special FEPOW that were part of his family when he and Jann came to meet us in Birmingham and they are the reason for his dedication to researching the 5th Beds and Herts and also in verifying where the camps were along the route of the Thai/Burma railway during its construction. We have been so lucky to welcome Martyn and Jann to Birmingham a couple of times and have so enjoyed listening to them describing their visits of exploration, explaining what they have found and also how quickly the land itself is being reclaimed both by the jungle and also by local landowners and farmers.



Since starting to write about Martyn’s latest trip, extremely unhappy news arrived from him to say that he was on his way back from Australia to be with his father who was extremely ill in hospital. It is with great sadness therefore that he let me know since then that his beloved father had passed away but he was there with him when he passed away peacefully. On behalf of all the friends who have had the pleasure of meeting you and Jann, Martyn, I am sending you our heartfelt condolences and sympathy and I am sure every member will join us in those wishes. May he rest in peace and I am so sad also that you will returning home soon and won’t be able to meet up with us again before you go.

IT’S ‘A FEPOW THING!’ (Some times things that happen almost seem as if we are led towards them) Have you ever had a coincidence in an unexpected place or time when something crops up linked to events or to people (FEPOWs) that are quite out of context to what you would have expected to happen? Among some of us here in BAFEPOW we have come to call this ‘a FEPOW thing’ and it has led on to chat to and learn about FEPOW links, about FEPOWs that lived closeby and who you weren’t aware of their past and so on. Well – I had a sort of ‘FEPOW thing’ in just the last few days in an unexpected chat to a consultant in the ward where he was seeing a patient in the bed opposite to my husband, George, and you will be wondering why I would stop him and ask if I could speak to him – well – he was in an extremely smart military uniform and I wondered if he was billeted at the military accommodation close to the Austin Branch of the RBL where I am a committee member. This facility had to be closed a couple of years ago because of [otential fire hazards and also problems in the piping during its fairly recent construction. I merely wanted to know if the unit had re-opened yet so I could invite those resident there to come to our club. Bet you’re still wondering what the FEPOW link could be. I told him also about my

FEPOW father and he said that he knew about what took place in the Far East in WWII and had, last year, been to a talk about FEPOW at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine by a professor and there was also a woman who spoke who had been a nurse! 'A FEPOW thing!!' I asked him if it was Professor Geoff Gill and Meg Parkes but he wasn't sure. However he said that they showed artworks that had been produced in difficult circumstances by POWs – now that seems pretty certain to be a talk about 'The Secret Art of Captivity' that was the focal point of the exhibition at the Art Gallery at the Liverpool University. Of all the military doctors I could have 'accosted' this one knew of the FEPOW and he had strong feelings about their treatment by the Japanese.

I now can attempt to invite the military medics who are living locally to come and join us at our RBL club which has been my aim since Covid and may now finally happen. (BJ)

Here is the second part of Brian Williams' advice on researching FEPOW history -

Researching Far East Prisoners of War – Part 2.

Starting Out.

When researching, firstly you must pose the research question you want answered. This is a continuous process as your research progresses. The question is:

What do I want to Know?

I suppose that before we get too deep in the mire of research, you need to decide what you wish to research. Is it an individual; a particular military unit, army, navy or air force; a particular location – you may be interested in the Battle for Hong Kong; the fall of Singapore; or even the events at a particular PoW Camp. You may wish to look at the background behind a particular event, the sinking of the *Suez Maru*, or the Selarang Incident for example. While I accept that there were also many thousands of civilian internees, their stories are significantly different to that of FEPOW and would be a topic for another day.

It could be that you simply want to know if a person was a FEPOW, or it may be that you want to learn as much as you can about an individual. Once you have found the answer to your first question, you go back and ask it again... and again... and again!

A word of warning: If you are anything like me, you will never stop asking that question. There is always new archival materiel being made available for you to search and document.

Assuming that your research is going to be centered around a single individual, (probably the greatest percentage of research efforts), so having now decided on the subject of your research, you are now ready to start your research journey

Where to start

I would suggest that your first task will be to look at what you already know. There may be anecdotal stories in the family; you may have access to family records such as birth, death and marriage certificates; any old letters or official papers in somebody's trinket box; medals, diaries and photographs; any published books that mention your person of interest¹. The list is endless and only curtailed by your own inquisitiveness.

I would also talk to any living relatives, sadly now getting fewer, or members of your local FEPOW Club. What do they remember or know?

¹ The FEPOW Family Website at https://www.fepow.family/Book_Club/ lists hundreds of FEPOW-related books. Selecting the button to the left of the book title will give you a synopsis of the book. Many of the titles can be ordered from Amazon.

Gathering this information will give you a good basis for further research.

Recording the results: This is a vital aspect of your research. It doesn't matter what format this takes, paper or computerised, just use a system that suits you.

You may decide to use a computer to store your data. You could either use a commercial software package or if you are competent enough, produce your own, eg. an MS ACCESS Database, (other databases are available!). Of course, you can always keep your records as paper files, though I would recommend keeping relevant paperwork together in sections.

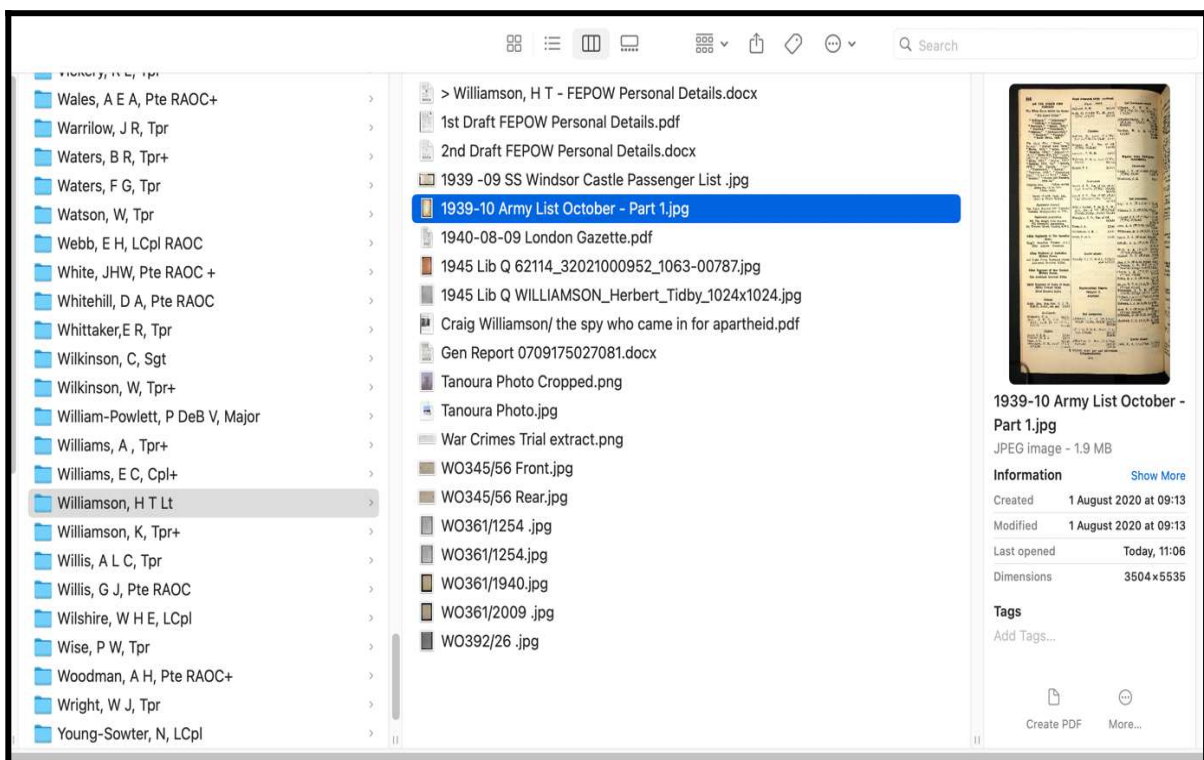
I have looked at a number of software packages and thought there were shortcomings in all of them. However, don't let that put you off if it's a method that suits you.

Whatever system you choose to record your findings, the message is that you must carefully and thoroughly document your research.

A tip: Also record searches that at first appear irrelevant to your research. They may become important later on, or this will just prevent you from repeating past nugatory searches.

To record your findings, you will need some form of Record Sheet. This can be a form downloaded from various genealogical websites, or you may wish to design your own, or you may wish to create a database. A copy of the form I use is included at the end.

For lack of a catchier name, I use what I call "Computerised Paper". This comprises a folder on my computer called 'FEPOW' which lists everyone or everything, I have an interest in. Against each entry, I have a sub-folder where I keep scans or photographs of relevant documents or objects, as shown below. This can of course be replicated in a paper-based filing system.



I would suggest that early in your research journey that you first place an order for a copy of the individuals service record. They are an important piece of data. Service records can be ordered from:

<https://www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-records-of-service>

However, these are currently taking up to a year to process; They are provided free of charge except where you need to provide a Death Certificate for anyone born after 1910, ie most FE POW, the cost of a full certificate is currently £12.50 They can be ordered from the GRO website, but you will first need to register for an account (free of charge):

<https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>

FEPOW Personal Details

Can be used to insert a photo

Surname		Christian Name/s	<i>Include nicknames or names known as.</i>
Date of birth		Place of birth	
Date of death		Place where died	
Age at death		CWGC¹	<i>If deceased as a PoW, insert CWGC details.</i>
Father	<i>Father's name and life span, eg: Frederick William Smith (1890-1955).</i>		
Mother	<i>Mother's name. maiden name, life span and marriage details, eg: Martha Agnes Smith (nee Jones) (1892-1966) Married: Cardiff, Glamorgan 1915.</i>		
Spouse	<i>Spouses name and maiden name, life span and marriage details, eg: Mary Armstrong (1922-1998). Married: Andover, Hants, 1940.</i>		
Home Address	<i>List any address found on the Japanese PoW Index Card or Liberation Questionnaire.</i>		

Can be used to insert a photo

Military History

Regiment		Army No	
Enlisted		Rank	
Date of Capture		Place Captured	
<i>Can often be found on a Liberation Questionnaire</i>		<i>Can often be found on a Liberation Questionnaire</i>	
POW Camps			
Dates		Locations	
From	To	Camp Name	Comments
<i>Details can often be found from Liberation Questionnaires or other research documents. Sometimes printed in Japanese characters on the reverse of the Japanese PoW Index Card.</i>			

Space to insert a pen picture

Source Documents

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Comments</u>
<i><u>Include: Book References, BMD², Census Returns or any other relevant documents found during your research.</u></i>		
<i><u>Include results not relevant to your research.</u></i>		

Notes:

(Insert any relevant notes you found during your research)

To be continued in the August news letter

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE BAFEPOW AGM ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8TH (BJ)

The meeting will commence at 11.30 and we hope to have finished the AGM by 12.45 so that we can have lunch at 13.00. Last years meeting concluded with some updating to the BAFEPOW constitution still needing some amendments and we hope to finalise this update. In addition there will be the annual appointment of the association’s officers and committee members and it would seem necessary that we should re-instate the role of a vice chairperson to support the chairman. We also need to find a new secretary although I am happy to share this role with another member of the group who is interested in doing so. I took on this role some time ago before the Covid lockdown and the news sheet which had been just two or three pages at most previously was only available to members who attended in person the then monthly meeting. It was during the lockdown that the news sheet increased in length so that not only were we still in contact with each other ,but we also had items of interest to enjoy connected to FEPOW history that we were missing out on being able to discuss in person. It might therefore be that the future news sheet will now reduce in size. I am not stepping down from the committee and will be willing to work jointly with someone else in this role.

If you are interested in becoming either the secretary or the vice chairperson then do contact me and if you are unable to attend the AGM, you can still put your name forward. Copies of the draft minutes and the existing BAFEPOW constitution will be available at the AGM but I am happy to email a copy in advance to you if you contact me.

WELFARE GRANTS FOR FEPOW AND FEPOW WIVES AND WIDOWS

If you need help with a grant towards hospital stays, Nursing Home Costs, alterations to the home, mobility aids etc, then please get in touch with:-

Mr Stephen John, the Java Club by email:- stephen.su.47@gmail.com

Mrs Pauline Simpson, NFFWRA by email:- enquiries@nationalfepowfellowship.org.uk

The BAFEPOW news sheet is put together by the association secretary, Barbara James, and, hopefully, it contains items of interest to all members. You are very welcome to suggest future topics or to submit items for future inclusion. You can contact me via email:- bmjames142@yahoo.co.uk or by phone:- 07954104857



