

# Stanley's WAR

A documentary-drama telling the story of a Suffolk man's bravery in the First World War is one of several community projects commemorating the 100th anniversary of Armistice

WORDS: Jayne Lindill ♦ PHOTOS: Permission Tim Curtis

The true life-changing experiences in the First World War of Stanley Banyard, a farm hand from Ramsholt who served with the Suffolk Regiment on the Western Front, have been told in a new drama-documentary film.

Made by Woodbridge-based director Tim Curtis, the film was commissioned by peninsula2018.org, one of several Wilford Peninsula community based projects to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Armistice, and to raise money for the Suffolk Royal British Legion Poppy

Appeal and the Suffolk Punch Trust. The film has been funded by donations from local residents, Suffolk County Council and the Scarfe Trust.

*Stanley's War* dramatises stories of love and sacrifice, following the lives of Suffolk people during the First World War. The film recounts how Stanley Banyard saved the lives of his comrades, lost in no-man's land, using skills learned as a boy from a Suffolk gamekeeper.

It also portrays the First World War experiences of the Pretty family, factory owners in Ipswich,

including the forbidden romance between Major Frank Pretty, 4th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment and Edith Dempster, later Edith Pretty, of Sutton Hoo fame. The film also depicts the tragic story of Lieutenant Donald Pretty, 4th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment who was killed in action.

Director Tim Curtis, who also filmed and directed *Life on the Deben*, explained that the film came about when Fanny and Patrick Jacob asked him to come up with an idea for a film to show as part of peninsula2018.org. "We spent weeks researching



**ABOVE RIGHT:** Stanley Banyard and his sister

**LEFT:** Another day of filming

**RIGHT:** Edith consoles Frank when he receives bad news about his brother.





and looking for Suffolk soldiers' memoirs and letters to base the film on. We visited record offices and museums and the Suffolk Regiment Museum in Bury St Edmunds, all to no avail. We met with Taff Gillingham, a well-known military historian specialising in Suffolk's First World War history. He couldn't help either. He explained to us that, "The trouble with the Suffolks is they didn't write much down."

Tim struck lucky when two Suffolk women, Jo Smellie and Judy Foulger, who were doing their own research into east Suffolk's part in the war came up with the memoirs of Stanley Banyard, a farmhand from Ramsholt who, in 1914, walked





seven miles to Woodbridge to sign up.

“The memoirs were just what we were looking for, quite detailed with events and places and experiences of Stanley Banyard’s war, from start to finish. He talks about the mud, the lice, the Germans and the terror. But the account that really stuck out was when his commanding officer gets Stanley and his fellow soldiers lost in no-man’s land just as the explosives they have set are about to go off at a German tunnel.

“As a young boy, Stanley had been taught by the local gamekeeper, Arthur Hunt, who is buried in Ramsholt Church graveyard how to navigate from the stars. It took Stanley a bit to convince his commanding officer, but he finally led them all back to the British trenches and relative safety navigating from the stars. Stanley is adamant in his memoirs that Arthur Hunt saved all their lives that night.” Having stumbled across Stanley Banyard’s story, Tim and the team decided it would be good to contrast it with that of a wealthy Suffolk family, the Prettys whose sons, Frank and Donald went to war with the 4th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment.

Stanley’s War is presented and narrated by journalist John McCarthy. He and Tim travelled to northern France to follow in the footsteps of the Suffolks on the battlefield and the trenches around Loos and the Somme, and paid emotional visits to the cemeteries of the Suffolks who gave their lives for their country.

Making a documentary film with period drama scenes on a low budget and a tight schedule was a huge challenge, for



the team, says Tim. “All the locations, costumes and props had to be sourced and chosen with that period in mind. We had to customise the Sorrel Horse pub in Shottisham inside and out, luckily with the great support of publican Gary Miller.” Battle scenes were filmed at Trench Farm just outside Ipswich, a network of British and German First World War trenches built by historian Taff Gillingham and his team.

At its peak *Stanley’s War* had a cast and crew of more than 30 people, plus two Suffolk Punch horses from the Suffolk Punch Trust, two hunter horses, a donkey, called Lucy, and Boris, a sausage dog lent by Fanny Jacob, creative project lead for *peninsula2018*, for the village scenes.

“For such an ambitious project everything went pretty smoothly,” says Tim. “I’m very pleased that we’ve produced an outstanding film that commemorates Suffolk’s World War One contribution.” ♦

**TOP:** Filming the trench scenes. Tim Curtis is centre.

**ABOVE:** Ploughing with Suffolk Punches at Ramsholt

## WHAT & WHERE

Copies of Stanley’s War the film can be purchased online from [stanleyswar.co.uk](http://stanleyswar.co.uk)

Information about *peninsula2018* at [peninsula2018.org](http://peninsula2018.org)