

Visit report

'Tank Museum' at Bovington

Date 25th July 2012

This was joint visit by the Cirencester Science and Technology Society, the Hankerton History Group and The Fairford Classic Car Club.

Transport to the museum was by coach from Cirencester. We were welcomed by the visits coordinator who introduced us to Roger who was to be our guide. Roger gave us several options as to what we wished to see and the group choose the development and history of the Tank. The tour started by examining the criteria which governed the design as seen by the 'Landship Committee ' in 1914. The bulk of the committee were navel officers and inevitably the first design followed the experience they had in relation to a sea going ship. Weight did not matter, but armour and firepower did. Personnel needed in present day terms seems very excessive when 8 or 9 members of crew were necessary to operate all the features, however this was the way the Navy did it.

Roger took us through initial ideas and the testing grounds and finally to the first battle on the Somme in the First World War. Whilst many tanks broke down the effect was salutary on the German Forces, but the ground although initially won was lost again due to lack of follow up on the part of the infantry. The idea of a tank was seen to be a success and rapid development soon took place.

The first tank was named 'Little Willie' as a jibe at the Kaiser. This was followed by a family of tanks of similar design until the famous 'Liberty' tank near the end of WW1

Clearly most tank innovation takes place during wars although many ideas for armoured cars and general transport based on the tank came in the interwar period.

WW2 brought many new designs including the German Tiger series and the museum has the only one in the world which is in working order. This was captured in Tunisia. Also featured is a Panzer which has also seen battle service.

Allied forces are represented by tanks from every country which took part. USA, Canada and of course the UK. Churchill, Sherman, Matilda, Pershing, Paton are all there.

Post war and current designs are there Chieftain, Centurion, the American M60, and the Russian T72 amongst many others.

We were treated to a live demonstration of the early and current tanks in an arena with a mock battle. The Centurion was particularly impressive with its stabilised gun platform.

This is a 'World Class' museum with very sophisticated presentation and well worth a further visit.