

1918, The Survivors

Once again in November our thoughts turn to past wars, especially the 'Great War' which finished one hundred years ago. Then, the nation looked forward to welcoming the troops home, while also thinking of ways of remembering those who had died.

In the following years, stone monuments bearing their names appeared in prominent positions in many communities, especially village churchyards and town parks. Here in Bicton, however, the public memorial took the form of a clock in the church tower, while the 'role of honour' with 11 names was carved into a panel of fine marble safely inside the building. Even more unusually, an extra wooden panel here listed the 47 who also served overseas, but returned.

Although such valuable records are safe from the weather, they can be easily overlooked by parishioners who now visit the church in decreasing numbers. Moreover, with the constant movement of population fewer relatives and descendants who might have a special interest now live in the area. Hence the need to publish them here and offer some explanation of the names. The casualties have already appeared (Nov 2010) and now it is the turn of the survivors, some of whom also suffered mental and physical scars. Some may also have succumbed to Spanish Flu.

As only to be expected, most served the locally based King's Shropshire Light Infantry, both as regulars and new recruits or had been part of the local 'territorial' Shropshire Yeomanry. Inevitably, the majority of casualties came from such K.S.L.I. ranks.

At this time, the 'officer class' was usually supplied by public schools and landed gentry, represented locally by Charles Wingfield of Onslow and Humphrey Sandford of the Isle.

The Wingfield family already had a tradition of military and public service and Charles was actually co-opted as Mayor of Shrewsbury in 1914, before being commissioned in the K.S.L.I. in 1916. He served on the Western Front rising in rank and commanding his battalion.

Humphrey Sandford had been experiencing life in the Australian outback in 1914, but returned to join the Shropshire Yeomanry, with whom his father had served in the Boer War. While a Lieutenant in France and Palestine, his riding skills would have been appreciated, but he had to be invalided out after suffering from the effects of gas.

As casualties mounted across all units new recruits were often deployed where most needed to maintain numbers, so that local lads found themselves serving in a variety of other regiments e.g. North Staffordshire, East Surrey, Kings Own Royal Liverpool, Royal Welsh Fusiliers etc.

At the same time, authorities may have appreciated special skills found amongst rural workers, especially for dealing with animals. Thus Len Cooke escaped work at Grange Farm but found himself working with mules in the Military Transport instead (Nov 2011). Others joined the Royal Army

Veterinary Corps. Royal Engineers could also make use of skills developed in practical farm and estate management.

As the war progressed, flying became increasingly important and saw the evolution of the Royal Flying Corps into the RAF. Recruits often came from existing fighting units and these included Len Cooke. He was also being promoted to Lieutenant at this time, reflecting how the losses sustained by the traditional junior officer class were giving more opportunities to other ranks. Flying also had its own risks, but the war ended soon after he started.

Now everyone was returning home to carry on their normal lives. Charles Wingfield at Onslow continued local public service, which now included charitable work with ex-servicemen. However, all this was cut short by his death in 1923, age 49, during an operation at a local nursing home.

Meanwhile, Humphrey Sandford, now 27, after a brief spell farming in Kenya, married Shropshire girl Mary Pickmore and joined her brother at his farm. To cut a long and interesting story short, he eventually returned to the Isle and lived until he was 100, in spite of that gas attack. By contrast, Thomas Roberts of Montford Bridge died, age 40, only eight years after the war. Had his health been undermined by it?

Len Cooke, likewise set off farming 'in the colonies' in order to delay returning to the Grange until his father died, allowing him to be his 'own boss'.

Frank Yewbrey returned to his young wife and continued as cowman at the Woodlands. The Cassels boys returned to Bicton House, which was big enough to accommodate an additional wife and new family. Others could also now settle down to married life and varied employment, perhaps inspired by war experience. William Naylor of Lower Calcott, railway clerk; John Edward Owen, now of Condover, baker; and John Edwards of Montford Bridge, chauffeur. George Henry Davies of the Isle learned to be a electrician while serving, but the general trauma of the war so depressed him that he never married (Nov 13).

George Dudley also served, but is not on the list, perhaps because he did not go overseas. Nevertheless, his experiences probably prompted him to set up his own milk rounds, later based at the Villa.

Otherwise, many others moved on out of the area leaving little trace in local records or memories. There must be many more war-related stories out there amongst descendants, which we might hear about some time.

Some local war stories supplied by such families have already been used in our history essays, offprints of which are available, while they have also been added to the County's website:

www.shropshireremembers.org.uk

List of officers and men of this parish
who served overseas in the Great War

Archerlancie Geo.R.	R.A.F.	Lawrence W.	M.T.
Allman Philip	M.T.	Leedham W.	K.S.L.I.
Beaman R.W.	R.A.F.	Morris J.	K.S.L.I.
Brown H.	R.A.F.	Morris T.	K.S.L.I.
Brown W.R.	K.O.R.L.	Morris Wm.	R.W.F.
Cartwright F.	B.E.A.	Naylor W.G.	R.A.V.C.
Cassels C.E.	K.S.L.I.	Naylor J.	R.A.V.C.
Cassels R.	K.S.L.I.	Owen J.E.	N.Staffs
Chambers J.R.H.	S.N.A.	Owen P.	R.A.V.C.
Chambers Wm.	Cheshire Reg.	Price W.E.	R.W.F.
Chidley W.H.	Gren. Guards	Pritchard W.	Cheshire Reg.
Cooke Lt L.J.	R.A.F.	Ratcliff A.	S.Y.
Davies A.	K.S.L.I.	Roberts T.J.	S.Y.
Davies G.H.	K.S.L.I.	Richards S.	R.E.
Edge A.	K.S.L.I.	Roderick O.	K.S.L.I.
Edwards W.	K.S.L.I.	Sambrook A.R.	R.C.A.
Edwards J.E.	R.A.F.	Sandford Lt H.	S.Y.
Fyfe G.E.	R.E.	Thomas F.B.	R.G.A.
Griffiths E.	North Staffs.	Thomas J.E.	R.E.
Hall F.	R.A.F.	Tipton F.	K.S.L.I.
Hancock J.B.	Welsh Reg.	Webb E.	K.S.L.I.
Huwitt A.H.	E. Surrey Reg.	Wingfield Maj, C.R.B.	K.S.L.I.
Hughes H.	R.A.S.C.	Yewbrey F.	K.S.L.I.
Johnson R.	S.Y.		

Transcript of panel in Bicton church