

After the War was over

As the current 'plague' rumbles on, one wonders where its lasting effects might be. How many pubs and high street stores will close? We can but wait and see.

As each November comes around, we commemorate past wars, often focusing attention on memorials. One in Bicton is safely inside the church, but its more public face is the clock in the tower, still ticking after 99 years.

In such ways, the effects of those wars are still with us, both locally and globally. Although wars brought many personal tragedies, they also prompted the desire to make a better world. 'A land fit for heroes' was the cry in 1918, leading to improvements in such things as housing and education.

One example of all this was the building of the first 'council houses' in our area in 1921. Already, before the war, responsible rural estates and 'company villages' such as Port Sunlight and Bournville were demonstrating better standards of housing for their workers. After the 1919 'Public Housing Act', local authorities, including Atcham Rural District Council, were able to follow these traditions with their own 'rural cottages'. Small groups can still be seen in Montford Bridge (The Crescent), Shelton and Ford (Welshpool Road) proudly displaying their date. Next year will be their centenary and perhaps we ought to have a celebration. Their basic structures were well built, although many details have been modernised since.

Meanwhile, how were lives changing? The photographs taken by Ernest Lewis, reproduced often in these pages, sport many people before the war. The grown up girls all seemed to be wearing long dark skirts, voluminous white blouses with high neck, all topped by wide-brimmed hats. Tight waists may have been squeezed by hidden corsets, illustrated in some journals.

During the war many women took on men's jobs, including farmwork, which required more practical clothing, including shorter skirts and even trousers. Although liberated from corsets, food rationing kept them all slim. A 'landgirl' lodging at Milnsbridge is said to have upset Mrs Lewis by revealing so much ankle in front of her husband Ernest.

The post-war look adopted by such youngsters was almost a total rejection of the old styles, so well illustrated by TV period dramas and those family albums. Thus female shapes became more 'cylindrical', as unsupported busts flopped out of sight, necklines plunged while one-piece dresses obscured any waists: Hats seemed inspired by the German 'stahlhelm' worn in the trenches.

With the loss of so many men, matchmaking by the girls had to be more competitive, with glamorous ideas from Hollywood films, which were becoming available in the Empire Cinema, Mardol. A new dance hall at Morris's cafe in Pride Hill also helped after 1927.

With peace, in 1918, the return of men meant that women had to 'return to the kitchen'; however, the government had much appreciated the role of country women here in managing food supplies, including the presentation of seasonal surpluses. Extra sugar ration was even offered to help.

All this encouraged the formation of 'Women's Institutes', following their success in Canada, including our local group in 1924. One can fully understand how 'Jam and Jerusalem' reflected the mood of the times, ie. practical effort and hope for a brighter future.

After abortive struggles before the war, women were at last allowed to vote, making use of it in 1922. They could also be called for Jury Service.

As 'swords were being beaten into ploughshares', many of the technical advances stimulated by the war were now available to civilian life. The expansion of motor transport heralded the beginning of the life with which we are now familiar. As more activity returned to the Holyhead Road local services were established along its length. For instance, Haywards started their garage across the river at Montford Bridge and even developed Severn House as a hotel. On this side, the People's Refreshment House Association took over both the Wingfield Arms and the Four Crosses offering services outside usual licensing hours.

By 1920, 'Midland Red' were running a local bus service into town, while Corbets were running tractor ploughing demonstrations at Uffington. As a stunt an ex-serviceman drove a car to the top of the Wrekin.

Amongst the trenches, telephones were important for rapid communications and now they were being installed at home, even in rural areas. The post office at The Yews at Montford Bridge added a manual 'exchange' to its services, before automatic switched were invented.

The next war likewise prompted some permanent changes including the establishment of the National Health Service, which has been in the news so much!

After years of wartime economy, fashion designers launched a 'new look' of longer skirts consuming more fabric!

On the serious side, we are still trying to finish the stories of WWII victims on the Bicton memorial: the seamen Brown, Edmunds, Green and Griffiths. Any help would be appreciated.



ARDC

1921

*The Crescent c.1965*

*Morris and Co.*



*1927*

*Glamorous advert*