

Once again in November we remember those who died in past wars, especially that of 1914-18, which will be especially commemorated this coming year. While some families lost sons and husbands, as listed on many war memorials, many more were nevertheless affected in numerous other ways.

The Davies Family, who came to the Isle estate in Bicton shortly before the war, illustrated this very well:

In a way typical of many agricultural workers, their life involved many moves from job to job, each with its own tied cottage. David and Amelia Davies had previously been at Betton Strange, near Shrewsbury, where he acted as 'Water Bailif' for the estate and they may have had similar responsibilities at the Isle. Of their five children, the two sons enlisted in the war. Charles, the eldest, who had at first been apprenticed to a drapers in Shrewsbury, joined the KSLI when old enough in the latter half of the War. Brother George followed, lying about his age, such was his eagerness to be involved too.

Charles survived the war but unfortunately succumbed to the great influenza epidemic which followed, while still only 21. It was one of the great tragedies of the war period which is often overlooked when thoughts are only about great battles, yet it was responsible for more deaths worldwide. At the time, it was called the 'Spanish Flu', but recent research suggests it could have been the well known 'Asian Flu' which still flares up from time to time. The 'Asian' connection could have been provided by infected Chinese labourers working at the principle military depot at Etaples, south of Boulogne. As thousands of troops passed through on the way home some could have picked up the virus and spread it far and wide. It seemed to attack younger people rather than the old, who had perhaps acquired some immunity during a previous epidemic in their own youth. Young soldiers, even if otherwise fit, were therefore vulnerable and there are stories of local youngsters also suffering while their parents remained clear.

George managed to survive all these hazards, but was nevertheless mentally scarred by it all. He was so embittered by his experiences that he threw his medals in the river, from which his sisters had to rescue them. Damage from poison gas and the general trauma affected him all his life, during which he remained a shy and nervous man who never married. He rarely talked about it, but he was known to have been taken prisoner, although he escaped and 'lived off the land' while returning to safety. He was eventually brought back to hospital in England, after which he joined the Royal Flying Corps. He was trained as an electrician and his family claimed to have had one of the first wireless sets in the parish.


Sisters at home also did their bit for the war effort, especially the youngest Nora, who was still at Bicton School. Her speciality was knitting socks for the troops and she was even allowed to keep at it during story-time in lessons and at Sunday school. In recognition of such efforts Nora was awarded several certificates which show how this charitable work was organised nationally and within the British Empire. They incidentally remind us of the contribution made by different peoples around the World (and the resulting connections which helped the spread of that flu virus!)

Meanwhile, sons of neighbouring families also went to the war, but not all of them returned. For the historian that typical turnover of farm workers makes it difficult to link names on our war memorial to particular households amongst those cottages. One of Nora's memories illustrated this

well: a woman from the Isle cottages visited their home in great distress, because her son had been reported 'missing presumed dead'. Now, since he had worked for the estate before enlisting, the landlord wanted the tied cottage back for a new tenant, so that her only recourse was to the workhouse. She hoped he might return, but was worried he would not find her. Nora's mother promised her that she would look out for him. Who this son was is uncertain. He could have been James or Richard Morris, listed on the Menin Gate at Ypres or Joseph Brown on the Arras Memorial. Further clues are needed!

After the war, Nora went to the Priory School and eventually became a teacher. While living in Bicton, before marrying Evan Williams from Shepherds Lane, she worked at Weston Lullingfields, getting there on a motor cycle. The war had certainly changed the lives of women!

This story is based on information from Nora's daughter, Olwyn Jones – if any reader has similar family memories of Bicton, please let us know.



The OVERSEAS CLUB.
PATRON
HIS MAJESTY THE KING.

1915

Christmas Day Gifts

FROM THE SCHOOL CHILDREN OF THE EMPIRE



This is to Certify.

that Nora Davies (2d)

HAS HELPED TO BRING HAPPINESS ON CHRISTMAS DAY TO OUR BRAVE SAILORS AND SOLDIERS, WHO ARE FIGHTING FOR HONOUR, FREEDOM & JUSTICE.

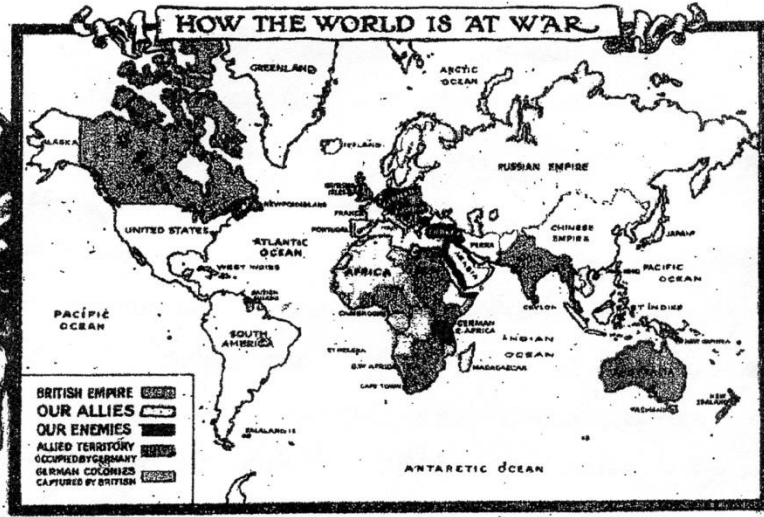
The underlying motive of the Overseas Club is to promote the unity of British subjects the world over. Its chief objects are:


- (1) To help one another.
- (2) To render individual service to our Empire.
- (3) To draw together in the bond of comradeship British people the world over.
- (4) To maintain our Empire's supremacy upon the seas and in the air.

SEAL OF THE OVERSEAS CLUB
General Buildings, Abchurch Lane, London, W.C.

HOW THE WORLD IS AT WAR






BRITISH EMPIRE

OUR ALLIES

OUR ENEMIES

ALLIED TERRITORY OCCUPIED BY GERMAN

GERMAN COLONIES CAPTURED BY BRITISH



The underlying motive of the Overseas Club is to promote the unity of British subjects the world over. Its chief objects are:

- (1) To help one another.
- (2) To render individual service to our Empire.
- (3) To draw together in the bond of comradeship British people the world over.
- (4) To maintain our Empire's supremacy upon the seas and in the air.

Presented on **Empire Day 1916**

To Nora Davies

Who has helped to send some comfort to the brave Sailors & Soldiers of the British Empire who are fighting to uphold Honour Freedom and Justice

OVERSEAS CLUB
General Buildings, Abchurch Lane, London, W.C.
Patron:
HIS MAJESTY THE KING

