

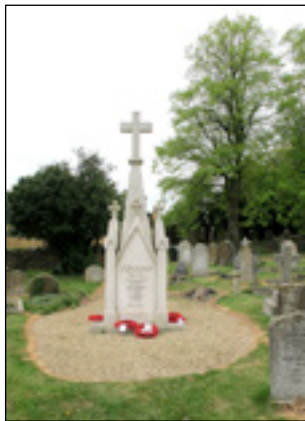
Deddington in Times of War

What preoccupied Deddington in 1900?

A hundred years ago nobody in Deddington celebrated the beginning of a new century. A whole year of birth, life and death had to be endured before the new century was marked in 1901. (Is it possible that we have been a trifle premature with our splendid Millennium celebrations? And are the famous bugs laughing and preparing their main attack for 2001?)

What occupied our predecessors in January 1900 was the war in South Africa. Television was still to come, but people knew how to keep in touch with the latest news on the front. The *Parish and Deanery Magazine* reports: 'Mr Potts of the *Banbury Guardian* office has made a very kind offer to the neighbouring clergy. He has a number of lantern slides of different places in South Africa connected with the war, and will be willing to lend them to any clergyman who, in applying to him, will undertake to defray the costs of carriage and be responsible for their safe return. We are very glad to make this kind offer known, and to thank Mr Potts on behalf, not only of the local clergy, who will be sure to avail themselves of this opportunity, but also of the many people to whom the pictures will be of such great and even painful interest.' 2000

The War Memorial



At a public meeting on March 31st, 1919, it was decided to commemorate the 'Fallen in the War' by a monument. At a follow-up meeting in May a large majority favoured a memorial site in the middle of the pathway in the extended churchyard. By June 13th 32 local ex-servicemen had personally collected the sum of £171 12s.1d.

The design the parishioners chose was by Mr Smithin, to be executed by Messrs Smithin and Cambray in Portland stone and to stand 12'6" high, surmounted by a cross with four lions at its base. The estimated total cost was £230.

The unveiling and dedication of the memorial took place on the afternoon of Sunday August 6th, 1922. The unveiling was performed by Major General Sir Robert Fanshawe KCB, DSO, who had been associated with some of Deddington's men in the War. The Vicar, the Revd T Boniface, dedicated the memorial, assisted by the Revd T Buckingham (Wesleyan) and the Revd J Carter of Oxford (Congregationalist), the two latter giving addresses. The Parish Church, Wesleyan and Congregationalist choirs led the hymn singing, accompanied by a band.

Relatives and friends of the fallen, together with the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars and ex-servicemen from the parish, placed a number of beautiful wreaths at the foot of the memorial. The proceedings, well arranged by a subcommittee, were somewhat marred by rain. The service ended with 'The Last Post', 'Reveille' and the National Anthem, after which a muffled appeal of bells was rung.

2000

The Nine Crosses

The names on the nine old wooden crosses on the north wall of SS Peter & Paul Church are fading fast. Before the inscriptions disappear altogether, and



because much interest has recently been shown in the crosses, I decided to consult the writings of the Revd Thomas Boniface, Vicar of Deddington at the time of the First World War, who never failed to record in the *Deddington Deanery Magazines* the happy news of parishioners returning from the war, but also the sad news of a parishioner's death in action. Our nine crosses, temporary markers of graves, were probably brought into the church by relatives of the fallen when the wooden crosses were replaced by beautiful grave stones. Sadly only nine have

survived. The visitor to the church may like to read the names inscribed on the crosses and think of the local sons whose simple memorial has survived in the Parish Church.

The inscriptions on the crosses read as follows:

'Pte L. French Australia 11th Bn AIF: Loder French, elder son of Mr and Mrs French enlisted in the Australia infantry while living out there. He was sent with his regiment to the Dardanelles where, after enduring the hardships of that terrible expedition, he contracted enteric fever. He died, after discharge from hospital in Cairo while staying with his parents. He was awarded a military funeral in Deddington churchyard.

Spr W. D. Hancox, RE, died in action on 1st July 1916". A sapper in the Royal Engineers and the second son of Mr and Mrs David Hancox, he was a bell ringer in the Parish Church and on receipt of the news of his death, the bell which he rang was muffled and tolled. He had been captain of both the cricket and football clubs.

Spr A. E. Hancox, RE. Sapper Edward Hancox, youngest brother of the above was wounded in action on 24th July 1917 and died the same day. He was the third son of Mr and Mrs Hancox to have been killed in the war. Edward's portrait has been placed with those of his two brothers who, like him were ringers, in the belfry of the Church. (Sadly, the wooden cross of the third brother has not survived in church. He was W. Rufus Hancox who was killed in action on 13th August 1916. He was a Corporal in the Ox & Bucks Light Infantry.)

The name of **Alfred Castle** is the most difficult to decipher on his old cross. The son of a Clifton family, he died of an illness in a Bristol hospital, aged 33, on 17th November 1918.

"Pte B. Wheeler, Canada died on 18th November 1916". Bernard, son of James Wheeler Jun., was a resident in Canada for several years where he joined the Army and came to England to serve his King and country. He died in a military hospital in Kent and was buried in Deddington on 23rd November.

"Pte O. A.J.H. Dore, Training Reserve," died on 6th October 1918. He was the only son of Mr and Mrs Dore and had only recently joined up. He died from pneumonia in hospital on Salisbury Plain.

"Pte F. Tustain, 1st Bn Coldstream Guards. Guardsman F. Tustain was killed in action on 29th September 1916. His brother. Lance Corporal M.J. Tustain was killed in July of the same year, his cross has not survived in church.

2nd Lieutenant R.P. Bull, 1st Bn Northants Regiment: Ronald Page Bull, killed in action on 1st November 1918 was one of the last local soldiers to

die before the end of hostilities. His death was announced in the *Deddington Deanery Magazine* in December 1918, together with the news of the signing of the Armistice.

[The name of **Pte Alfred Ell**, 12th Battalion, The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, is missing from this list. He died from his wounds in hospital in Chichester on 3rd March 1917 age 37]

Nine crosses, nine names, nine destinies on which to reflect next time we pass by. 2001

Outbreak of WWII

It would need a huge amount of research to mention names of 'Village Bobbies' who policed Deddington over the years. Maybe the following remembrance by Ron Canning will encourage more parishioners to dwell for a moment on their own recollections of encounters with the law!

It was Sunday 3rd September 1939. The vicar of Deddington, the Revd Dr Maurice Frost had come to the end of his sermon preached from the pulpit. The choirboys in the stalls, by now a bit fidgety, suddenly heard the heavy oak door, leading to the south porch, creak and slowly open. That event alone, happening in the middle of a service would enthral the most pious of choristers. But greater things were to happen. There, in the open door, stood PC Reg Butler with his helmet tucked reverently under one arm. Hardly daring to breathe, the boys watched him slow march along the centre aisle towards the chancel. He seemed to will his big boots to tread as noiselessly as possible, not wishing to disturb the sanctity of the church.

On the steps to the chancel, priest and policeman met and exchanged a few whispered words. A deadly hush hung over the congregation while the policeman almost tiptoed back down the aisle to the door which he closed with the greatest of care. Congregation and choir now turned their full attention to their vicar who stood head bowed for a moment, then stepped to the centre of the nave to inform his parishioners that 'Great Britain is at war'.

Ron hardly remembers singing the closing hymn, but to this day he remembers clearly the moment in church when war was declared, and he still sees his elders who at close of service stood together in little groups fearfully speculating on a future that would change most of their lives.

2003

On Eggs and Vegetables

The reader of today's *Deddington News* may not be aware of just how much the volume of this worthy publication has increased over the past years (10½ pages of news and comment, plus 2½ of adverts), together with the number of copies which stand to date at 1060 a month! But, if the reader is a member of the duplicating team, the following announcement in the *Deanery Magazine 1916* might lift her heart! 'Owing to the war, paper is now three times its usual price, and for that reason the size of our Magazine has had to be reduced and the print is one size smaller ...'.

But apart from having to reach for one's magnifying glass, the Great War brought other responsibilities to those left behind in our village – the National Egg Collection. 'The eggs are collected locally and are forwarded to the Central Depot, London, to be sent out to our wounded soldiers and sailors in the British Hospitals, France, also to London and Provincial Hospitals, and are

urgently needed.' In April 1919 parishioners are informed of the closure of the Egg Depot. 'Eggs collected in Deddington (1915–1919) numbered 7,787 and from Hempton 2,185.'

A notice printed in October 1916 is headed: 'Vegetables for the Fleet' and proclaims: 'In connection with the collection of vegetables for the Fleet, which now include other parishes besides our own, Dr Jones arranged a small show in September, when some excellent stuff was exhibited in Colonel Murray's coachhouse, and a few prizes given to the best collection of vegetables. All exhibits were forwarded to the Fleet.'

And finally, in October 1918 we read: 'Arrangements have been made again this year for the school children to collect blackberries for the Government'! Sadly there is no explanation on how 'the Government' made use of all those blackberries. Suggestions are welcome!

2001

The Women's Land Army



'For a healthy, happy job, join the Women's Land Army'
(1940s slogan)

The heroic achievements of British agriculture during World War II must not be forgotten. The objective of a plan drafted in 1936–37 was the production at home of foods most needed in wartime. Yet during the war some 98,000 men had left the land to enrol into the armed forces. Somebody had to step into the breach and none were better organised than the

Women's Land Army, colloquially known as the Land Girls.

Imagine my pleasure when, over a welcome cup of tea, a dear, only too modest, Deddington friend chatted to me about her two years' service in the WLA and showed me a letter of thanks signed by the Prime Minister, and her brand-new shiny commemorative badge. This is a long overdue official thank you for war work, to surviving members of over 80,000 young women volunteer labourers on the land. My friend, together with another Land Girl, shared work on a big estate tending a large market garden, looking after six Jersey cows, poultry and generally supporting two elderly estate workers, the only regular staff left who had not been called up. The girls were quartered above a stable/barn, did their own cooking on a single electric ring and even had water laid on into their quarter (the men had to make do with an outside tap).

Once a fortnight the girls took turns with weekend leave to visit their parents, but each felt duty-bound to return on the earliest milk train on Monday morning to lighten again the 'on duty' girl's heavy burden. Luckily, healthy food was always in good supply which eked out their 7s.6d a week pay. My friend showed me her original WLA badge worn on her issue uniform of green jumper, beige shirt, tie, hard-wearing trousers, Wellington boots and a warm coat. Sadly I could not persuade her to dig out some old photos from the attic. She said 'I was only one of thousands doing my bit for my country. Yes, it was hard work and we learned a lot, and also had some fun. We two Land Girls got on famously and are still in contact with each other to this day.'

The WLA badge has been specially designed by the Garter King of Arms and bears the royal crown. Both the original and the commemorative badges show a gold wheat sheaf on a white background surrounded by a circle of

pine branches and pinecones to indicate the work of both the WLA and the Women's Timber Corps, known as Timber Jills. The WLA was disbanded in 1950. Land Girls and Timber Jills we salute you!

'The Last Parade': 60th Anniversary of the end of WWII

Sunday 10th July was a most memorable day for Ted and me. We were able to share with thousands of veterans of WWII, by invitation of the Prime Minister and Her Majesty's Government, the Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey in the morning and touring 'The Living Museum' – exhibits scattered over a wide area in St James' Park London, depicting the experiences of the war generation.

Stepping through the grand west door of the Abbey, bags searched and car keys bagged (for obscure reasons), we were escorted to Poets' Corner where a television screen had been placed to let us see the many processions on their way to the North Lantern, the Quire and Sacrarium – alas, not high enough for us to see from the 10th row when all were bidden to stand! But when seated we could see everything and everybody, and hear the most majestic organ play, sometimes accompanied by the choir, sometimes trying, but failing, to outdo the powerful singing of that chosen elderly congregation. Surely 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation' has never sounded with such conviction from old soldiers, who, united in memories of very stressful times, outdid each other in raising their voices in song. The fanfares by the state trumpeters of the Blues and Royals as always sent shivers down my spine. To be part of this gathering of veterans, Royalty, the Government and representatives of many religions, presided over by the Dean of Westminster and addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, had to be the highlight of that day – with the sound of the bells of the Abbey church being struck simultaneously ('fired') on our way out. What an impressive clangour, apparently used on occasions of great celebration.

Before seeking shelter from the hot sun to relax with an iced drink in the NAAFI (Navy Army & Air Force Institute), we chatted with many present-day soldiers, all dressed up in 1940s uniform. They demonstrated weaponry, re-enacted gruesome work done in primitive field hospitals, deciphered codes, gave gas mask training and generally turned back the years for the many visitors, many of them able to relive their own experiences. Old soldiers proudly wore their medals which, together with their regimental ties, gave those in the know a clue as to which campaign they had been involved in.

Ted and I had also, on cue, stepped out into the Mall to see the magnificently groomed horses and soldiers of the Sovereign's escort trot by, followed by the Queen and Prince Philip waving from an open carriage on their way to Horse Guards Parade. But now, many of us 'fêted' veterans (we were even given free ice cream from a stall) had decided to retire to the NAAFI and watch the show on Horse Guards on a huge television screen to end a great, and never to be forgotten visit to the capital. It was absolute bliss to kick off my shoes and settle into a comfortable armchair in the comparative cool shade of the huge NAAFI tent.

2005

The complete collection of Ruth Johnson's writings, which originally appeared in Deddington News between 1990 and 2010, can be found [here](#)