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Wheathampstead  
Parish Council

Wheathampstead  
and the Great War

# Remembrance and Hope



# German soldiers worked on local farms

Perhaps the biggest problem faced by farming at the start of the war was a shortage of labour.

Farm labourers were poorly paid, the work was hard, and many men volunteered to join the army. When conscription was introduced in 1916, farming lost many more young men because 'farm labourer' was not a reserved occupation. At the same time there was a great deal of pressure to increase production because food imports were threatened by German submarine warfare. So how did farmers increase production when labour was in such short supply?

An important local document is the Cross Farm 'labour book' that is in the possession of the Dickinson family who still farm the land. This book records who was employed each week during the war and what they were paid.

Unsurprisingly, the labour book suggests that there was a heavy reliance on the older farm-hands, men in their fifties and sixties. Unnamed 'women' and 'boys' helped out at busy times. The labour book also mentions 'two soldiers' who worked regularly from late 1917 to early 1918. They may have been on leave or, more likely, were recuperating in local hospitals.

The most intriguing part of the workforce was the 'German prisoners' who worked on the farm between January 1918 and August 1919. Up to four PoWs worked each week, sometimes at the same time as the British soldiers. There must have been some interesting conversations as they worked together in the fields.

## The end of the Great War

The end of the Great War will be commemorated in Wheathampstead in three ways: by the History Society Research Project and Exhibition, *Wheathampstead during the Great War 1914 - 1920*; by the Armistice Centenary Commemoration at St Helen's Church, *Reflections on Peace, Hope and Remembrance*; and by this special Great War commemorative edition of the Parish Council's magazine, *The Pump*.

This booklet is in three parts. In the first part, 'The village in the Great War', the items describe aspects of life during the war, such as rationing, recount the stories of some of the men of the village who served in the armed forces, and tell us of the part played by Blackmore End as a hospital for wounded servicemen.

The second part, 'Remembrance',

reminds us of the importance of remembering those who gave their lives in the conflict, including in poetic form the story of Frank Hannell, a lad from the St Albans workhouse who was fostered in Wheathampstead, attended St Helen's School, emigrated to Canada aged 15, enlisted in 1915 and was killed less than a year later.

The third part focuses on the theme of 'Hope' and how Wheathampstead, and the country as a whole, struggled to return to normal, albeit a radically new normal, and worked to create a better future.

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Labourers on a Sussex farm in the Great War, including German PoWs (in the flat hats), women and boys. Source: Imperial War Museum.



# Caring for the wounded

## TWO HOSPITALS

were established in response to the need for convalescent hospitals to care for wounded soldiers returning from the Front. One of these was at Lamer House and the other at Blackmore End house in Gustard Wood.



F.M.S Hospital Huts, Blackmore End

Gertrude Mary Vincent (née Baxendale) inherited Blackmore End when her mother died in 1909. By 1914 the house was empty. As wounded soldiers returned from the Front with horrific injuries after amputations, gas poisoning and trench foot, the government called on landed gentry all over Britain to offer their country houses to accommodate them. Gertrude Mary accepted her patriotic duty and offered Blackmore End as a convalescent hospital for all ranks of soldiers, providing 214 beds in the house and grounds. It was named the Federated Malay States (FMS) Hospital.

**"...wounded soldiers returned from the Front with horrific injuries after amputations, gas poisoning and trench foot"**

The Baxendale family had strong connections in the Malay States (a loose federation of settlements around the Malay peninsula). Gertrude's uncles Arthur and Cyril both worked there, one as a government official and the other as a rubber planter. They organised a list of patriotic resident subscribers among the British and Malay population who helped fund the establishment of the hospital which opened on 29 September 1915. Wounded soldiers were first treated at Edmonton Hospital then sent

on to Blackmore End for recuperation. It was run by the Hertfordshire Red Cross.

Gertrude Mary's youngest daughter Azalea, aged 21, was a nurse at the hospital. Others were local volunteers (VADs) including 18-year-old Eleanor "Queenie" George, daughter of a Kimpton farmer. The matron was Miss E.M. Willis with Sisters Moon, Alcock, Douglas, Smith and Miles under her command as well as at least 23 other nurses. Dr Smallwood, the local Wheathampstead doctor, was one of the Consulting Medical Officers and Dr J. Chambers was Consultant in Mental Diseases, catering for shell shock victims. The masseuse, Miss Maud Louise Smythe, had an assistant, Miss Jones.

It seems to have been a friendly sort of place. Photographs show soldiers in hospital blue on crutches or in wheelchairs relaxing on Gustard Wood Common outside their favourite pub,

The Cricketers, or going down Brogdell Hill on a motorbike and sidecar outside the newly-built St Peter's church.

The arrival of more than 200 men and support staff in the area must have been quite challenging for the locals but friendly relations were maintained with concerts, whist drives, football and cricket matches. Many of the soldiers came from the Commonwealth, mostly from Canada, and several married local girls, including Doris, the daughter of Goldhawks the butchers.

The auction of the contents of the FMS Hospital in May 1919 lasted for three days. Among the items for sale were 860 suits of pyjamas, 106 cast-iron bedsteads, a full-size solid oak billiard table, an upright Chappell piano and 120 tons of household coal.

Blackmore End house was sold in 1926 and demolished.



F.M.S. Hospital, Blackmore End, Gustard Wood.



# BOMBERS OVER WHEATHAMPSTEAD

No bombs fell on Wheathampstead during the Great War but there was an anti-aircraft battery at Gustard Wood Common, manned by soldiers from the Royal Field Artillery (Territorial Force). The guns were part of a ring of anti-aircraft batteries that made up the London Air Defence Area.

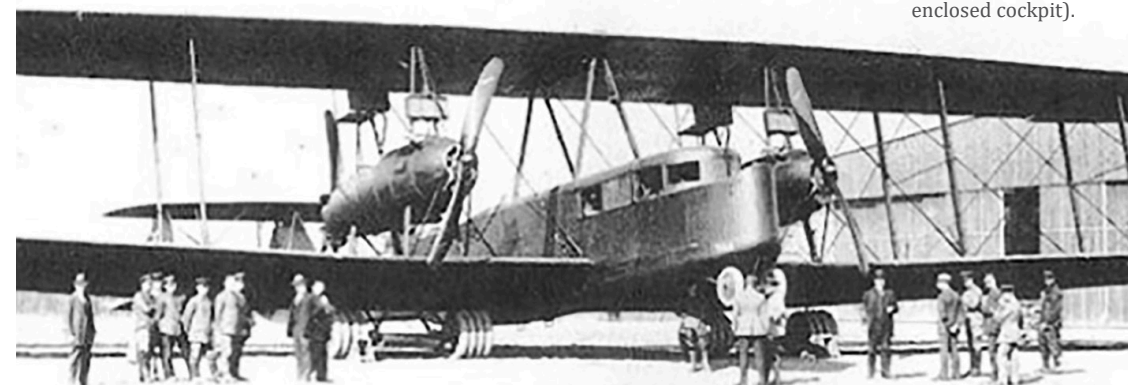
In the early part of the war the Germans used Zeppelin airships to bomb targets across England. These were largely replaced by Gotha bombers in 1917. The Germans had another surprise weapon – a huge four-engined bomber called a ‘Giant’. The first moonlight ‘Giant’ raid on London was launched on the night of the 7th of March 1918.

The raid was carried out by six ‘Giants’.

One returned home with engine trouble, three dropped their bombs on London, killing 19 civilians, and two bombers got lost. One of these crossed over Hertfordshire and dropped its bombs on Luton Hoo Park while the other flew towards Essex.

The crew of this ‘Giant’ may have realised their mistake because they turned towards London with their bombs still on board. They flew into intense anti-aircraft fire from the batteries at Harpenden, Gustard Wood and Bride Hall. The gunfire drove the bomber north-east where it dropped its bombs on farmland near Bishops Stortford. In total, 736 anti-aircraft shells were fired at the ‘Giant’ but it flew back unscathed to its base in Belgium.

A four-engined Reisenflugzeug “Giant” bomber (with puller and pusher propellers and an enclosed cockpit).



## MINISTRY OF FOOD RATIONING IN THE GREAT WAR

We usually associate rationing with the Second World War but it was first introduced in the Great War. When war broke out in August 1914 Britain was importing 60% of its food so a lot of pressure was put on the farming industry to produce more foodstuffs, particularly wheat. In 1914, only one in five loaves were made using wheat grown in Britain.

Saving food was seen as a patriotic duty and housewives were urged to use alternative foods and try new ‘war recipes’ such as ‘potted cheese’ – left-over crumbs of cheese, mixed with mustard and margarine, baked in the oven and served with biscuits or toast. Householders were encouraged to grow vegetables and fruit in their gardens. More allotments were opened and existing ones expanded, including the Marford Road allotments in Wheathampstead.

The government was at first reluctant to introduce rationing on a national scale and preferred measures such as Local Food Control Committees which operated at district level. However there were many shortages and prices rose. By 1918 there was an increasing threat from German submarines attacking food convoys and the government responded by rationing sugar, flour, cheese, milk, butter, margarine and meat. Everyone had to have a ration card and be registered with local shops. During the war Wheathampstead had a thriving range of food shops including two butchers, two bakers, several general stores, a fishmonger and two dairies.

Rationing remained in force after the end of the war; butter, for example, was still rationed until 1920.

Date: ..... **20 OCT 1918** .....

# Soldiers Three



Three Wheathampstead volunteers joined the 7th Bedfordshire Regiment in early September 1914, a month after the outbreak of war. They were 20-year-old Harry Smith, 19-year-old Sydney Arnold and 28-year-old Jim Elmore who all lived close to each other at The Folly.

After basic training they joined their Regiment on the front line in early January 1916, carrying out night patrols. Six months later the three comrades took part in the first Battle of the Somme. Despite heavy British losses all three men survived unharmed.

Early in 1917 they were in action at the Battle of Arras where Harry, who had been promoted to Corporal, was wounded by a bullet that struck him on the left index finger before passing through his shoulder. Jim carried Harry back to the lines.

Harry was admitted to the Dundee War Hospital where his finger was amputated. When he had recovered, he was transferred to the 3rd Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, stationed in Britain. His military service ended in February 1919 when he received a gratuity of £75 – £50 for the loss of his finger, £20 for his length of service, and £5 for his rank.

Syd and Jim next saw action in August 1917 at the Second Battle of Ypres where both men were wounded. Syd was wounded twice and Jim was wounded in the leg so severely that it never fully healed. The two friends were parted. Jim was transferred to the Army Service Corps as a driver on the Italian Front. Syd returned to active service in France

and was there when the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918.

All three men were awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and had arrived home by Spring 1919.

## What happened to them after the war?

Harry Smith, who had married his wife Emily before the end of the war, worked at his brother Cecil's building company "Smith Brothers" from when it was formed in the 1920s. He died in 1981 aged 87.

Jim Elmore returned to the building trade. He married Emily French in December 1933, but his leg wound caused him increasing pain as he got older and he was bed-ridden in the 1960s. Harry Smith used to come and talk quietly with him for an hour or so after chapel every Sunday. Jim died at home in 1974 aged 87.

Syd Arnold, whose brother ran The Royal Oak at The Folly, married Elsie May Sparks in 1923. He may have returned to his pre-war work as a hay and straw cutter. Later, he worked at Murphy Chemicals. He died in 1977 aged 82.

# THE DARK PAST OF A WHEATHAMPSTEAD FIELD

Several years ago metal detectorists came across a hoard of World War One cap badges and buttons in a Wheathampstead field. The finds included cap badges from the Middlesex Regiment, the Queen's Regiment badge and many embossed buttons including insignia from the Royal Artillery and Anzac forces.

How did they come to be in a Wheathampstead field? Were the fields used for army manoeuvres and training? The reason was far darker, reveals Wheathampstead farmer, Will Dickinson. "There was a shortage of compost and fertiliser in the war. One solution was to recycle damaged army uniforms that were made of natural fibres such as wool and send them back to Britain."

Where did the damaged uniforms come from? "They were cut off wounded soldiers as they were treated in frontline dressing stations hospitals," explains Will. "While it's well known that there was an extensive system to recover

anything useful from the battlefield such as brass shell casings and other scrap metal, it is less well known that textiles were also recovered and recycled."

The cap badges and other insignia were not supposed to be recycled. "In theory the uniforms were stripped of all the buttons, insignia and badges," explains Will, "but perhaps this didn't always happen when the clothes were covered in mud and blood. And this is the grisly reason why they ended up in one of my fields."



## Private Thrale's *Long walk to freedom*

Bill Thrale from New Marford joined the Machine Gun Corps as a Private in 1916. He was in the front line at Arras when his battalion was overrun during the German Spring Offensive of March 1918.

Life as a prisoner-of-war was harsh. Germany was facing famine because of the Allied blockade. In popular films PoWs are always kept in closely-guarded prison camps but in the Great War non-commissioned soldiers were often sent under escort to work on local farms and industries. This is what happened to Bill Thrale.

In early November 1918 he was being held at a camp near Bastogne in occupied Luxembourg. Conditions were grim and Bill was so hungry that he was desperate to escape. With particularly

bad timing, he absconded on 10 November – the day before the armistice – and headed west towards Belgium, helped by local people who gave him clothing and food even though they were hungry themselves.

The first that Bill knew the armistice had been signed was when he met a column of German soldiers heading east towards home. Instead of arresting him, the officers returned Bill's salute. Bill's journey is believed to have ended at Charleroi in Belgium. He was given his first decent meal in eight months and put on a train to Paris. He had walked more than a hundred kilometres.

*Based on an interview with Bill Thrale published in the Herts Advertiser.*

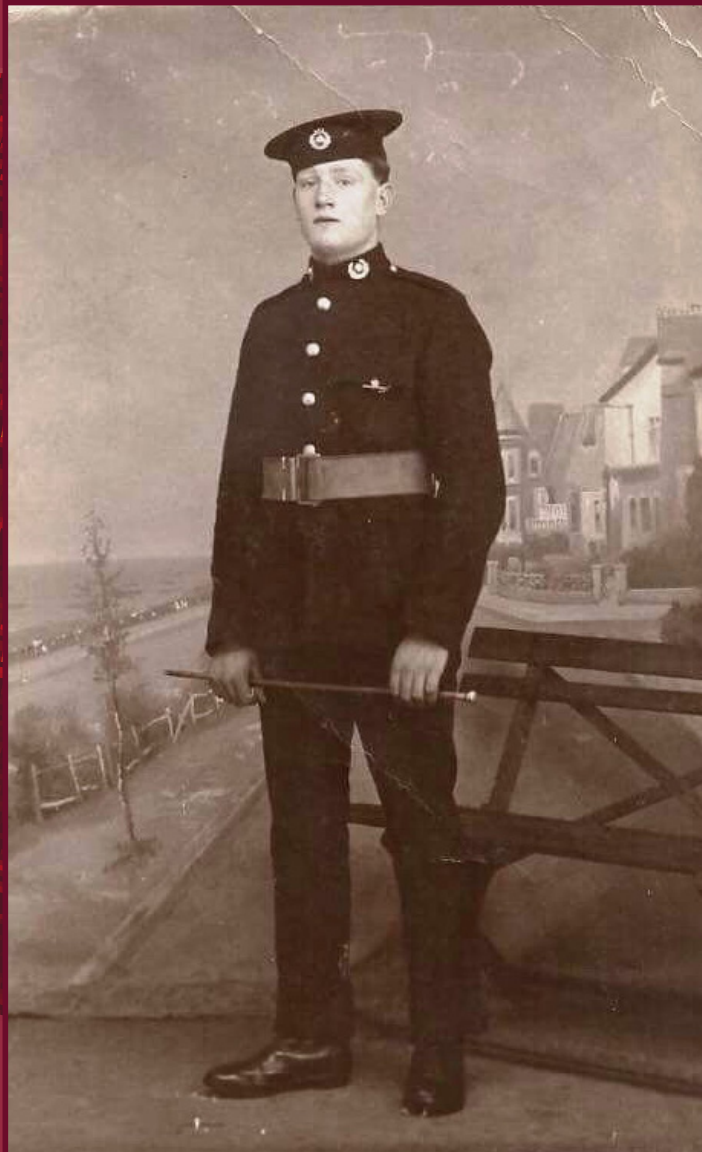


British prisoners-of-war



Three years ago, a Victory Medal was found on the Thames foreshore. It was one of many that were issued to servicemen who served in the Great War. On the rim was the inscription "19028 Pte F.A. FRENCH R.M.L.I". The Victory Medal had belonged to Francis Arthur French, Royal Marine Light Infantryman, who was born in 1899 at The Folly. How had it got there?

# LOST AND FOUND



The French family had a proud record of military service. Francis's father John was a private in the 3rd Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment and served in India and South Africa and in the Great War. His stepbrother Frederick joined the Bedfordshires before the outbreak of the Great War and was in the British Expeditionary Force that retreated from Mons in August/September 1914.

Francis joined the Royal Marine as a Light Infantryman in 1916, soon after his eighteenth birthday. When he turned eighteen he was eligible for overseas service and served on HMS Morea, an Armed Merchant Cruiser, for the rest of the war, voyaging all over the world.

Francis stayed in the Royal Marine after the war ended. In 1919 he joined HMS Colleen, a depot ship in Queenstown (now Cobh) harbour in Ireland during the Irish War of Independence. The Marine's role was probably to defend the ship and the harbour facilities from attack by the IRA. In 1922, Francis was on board HMS Marlborough, an Iron Duke class battleship, and sailing for the Mediterranean and the Greco-Turkish War. The marines' role there was to guard the on-shore diplomatic compounds and installations in Turkish-occupied Smyrna.

From September 1924 to December

1927 Francis was on shore duties in Chatham and Portsmouth. He then joined the Dreadnought HMS Queen Elizabeth, part of the Mediterranean and Atlantic fleets. In November 1929, he was posted to HMS Malabar, a shore establishment in Bermuda, where he spent nearly three years.

He stayed in the Navy until 1932 when he bought himself out by paying the regulation fee of £24. However it seems he was reluctant to break his ties with the Navy because he enrolled in the Royal Fleet Reserve (RFR). It seems likely that he stayed in Bermuda for most of the 1930s.

On 3rd July 1939, the day before his 40th birthday, Francis was awarded an RFR gratuity of £100 but war against Germany was declared two months later and within a week he was back at HMS Malabar. He returned to England in 1942 and served for several months on board HMS President which was moored a short distance upstream from where his Victory Medal was found – it seems likely that this was where Francis and his medal parted company.

In February 1946, aged 46 and after almost 30 years service, Francis French was discharged from the navy as PURMS (Permanently Unfit for Royal Marine Service).

Top left: Victory Medal found in 2015.

Bottom left: Francis Arthur French in 1916.

Right: HMS Queen Elizabeth.



# Frank who?

Frank Hannell was born in St Albans on 15 December 1893. His mother died in 1895 and he and his five siblings were taken into the St Albans Union Workhouse. In 1901, he and his brother Harry were living with foster-parents Thomas and Fanny Baigent in Necton Road.

Frank emigrated to Canada in 1908, possibly as part of an orphan relocation programme. He enlisted in

the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force in June 1915 and was killed at the battle of Courcellette in France in September 1916.

The St Helen's School logbook includes this entry on 16 November 1915:

"F.Hannel belonging to the Canadian contingent & a former scholar visited the school after being absent eight years".

The Wheathampstead War Memorial includes this inscription:



## Frank Hanwell (with a nod to Kipling and Holloway)

Me name sir?	when they honoured us all;
Hannell, sir.	The Dead.
Yes, they tell me I'm dead and maybe I fell a hero, or afraid,	We didn't run out, sir, we lay in the mud, a craterous hole, and waited for dark
Sir.	'til the limelights went down
but me blood was ever so red.	and the whizzers stopped
I don't remember where they got me,	and we heard the medics shout.
them Bosch, sir,	Them troubled lads, sir. That wouldn't
something like 'Corsellet',	fight,
me and the other men.	who rescued us while tracers nicked
I travelled a bit, you see, sir	their shirts
and fell in with the bravest lot	and opened their cheeks and the blood
of Empire men to save the King	ran out.
and the Country I never forgot;	I don't mind being dead, sir, I wasn't the
though I rode around on a horse,	only sod
Sir,	to moan about god, or whether there'd
in Vernon, British Columbia.	be a gong,
You know, that place in Canada	But. Well.
where the air is clean and clear,	you see, sir;
and the space, sir, like you've never seen,	I have one minor regret you may think
even bigger than 'ertfordshire.	odd,
They know I am dead, sir,	that forever, on that plinth, sir,
they writ me name on the stone	me name is really spelt wrong.
by special request of the Baigents.	Me name, sir?
	Hannell.

J. Johnson Smith

The author is a member of Poetry ID, the North Herts Stanza of the Poetry Society.



# REMEMBRANCE

At the end of the Great War, thoughts turned to how we should remember all those who fought. Many ex-servicemen objected to parades that glorified 'Victory'. It was no victory for those who had lost loved ones, so Remembrance Day became a day of commemoration.

In 1919 a temporary wooden Cenotaph was erected in Whitehall and thousands came to mourn. There was a two-minute silence, initiated by King George V. All activity and noise was to cease to give people time to remember. The timing of this was announced to the population by maroons or church bells and everything stopped; buses, trains, factories and shops, even the electricity supplies were cut off to stop the trams, and the ships of the Royal Navy had to stop if at all possible.

In 1920 the body of an unidentified soldier was chosen at random, transported with all honours to the

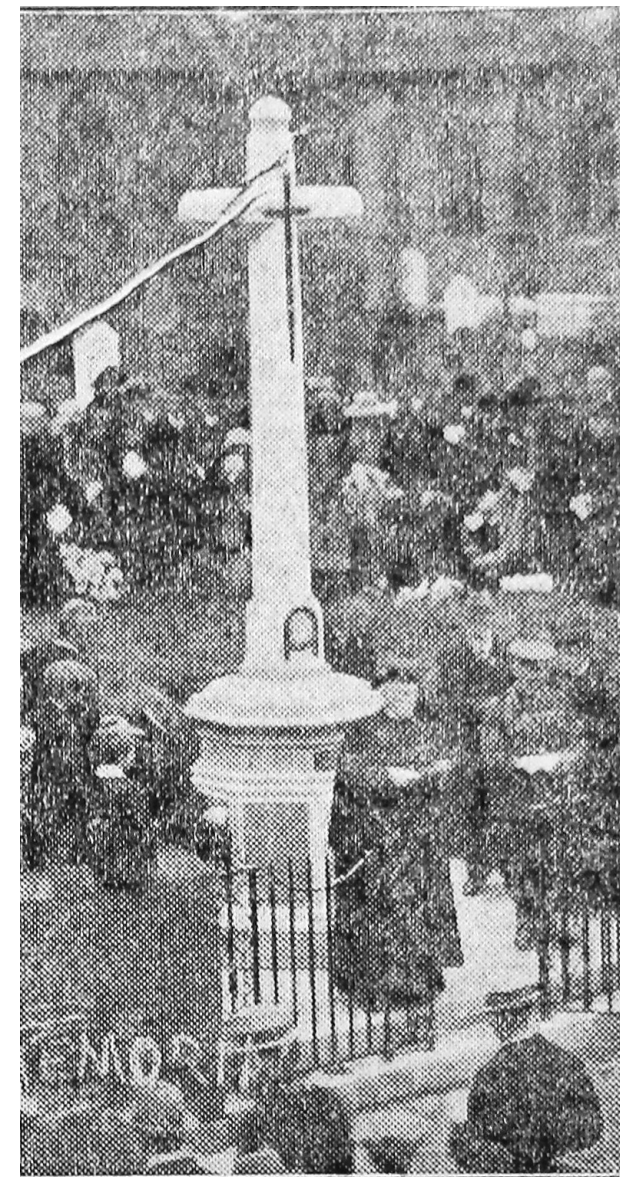
new Cenotaph in Whitehall and then to Westminster Abbey on 11 November. He was buried as the "Unknown Warrior" as a focus for national grief. More than a million people filed past the tomb in the first week.

In the same year, local war memorials started to be erected. In Wheathampstead the war memorial was built for the sum of £400, and was officially unveiled and dedicated on Sunday 31 October 1920 by Lieutenant-General the Earl of Cavan and the Reverend Canon Nance, Rector of Wheathampstead.

In 1921 the first poppies made their appearance. They were made by ex-servicemen and all profits were used to support former soldiers in need. It became everyone's duty to buy and wear one if they could afford the few coppers needed. However, in the 1920s activities on Remembrance Day seemed to turn into more of a celebration than a commemoration and ex-servicemen began demonstrating against it. They felt they were being forgotten. As a result, the day gradually returned to its more solemn aspect.

Remembrance Day events were scaled down during World War Two but after 1945 both wars were to be remembered at the eleventh hour of the eleventh month, or the nearest Sunday to that date. The observance of the two-minute silence began to lapse in the 1970s but, following conflicts such as the Falklands War in 1982, it has been revived. Later wars such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan have reinforced the meaning of Remembrance Day for later generations. Even so, not everything stops at 11.00 am and it is a personal choice as to whether to observe the silence or to attend memorial services, though the ceremony at the Cenotaph is as poignant as ever.

The people of Wheathampstead honour our fallen and we teach our children to do the same. Hopefully this will mean that all the men from this village who have fought in wars and conflicts are remembered and honoured.



[Photo by Mr. W. Plummer, 67, Leagrave road, Luton].

## WHEATHAMPSTEAD'S TRIBUTE.

The scene at the unveiling and dedication of the Wheathampstead War Memorial by Lt.-Gen. the Earl of Cavan and the Rev. Canon Nance, Rector of Wheathampstead.

# DEAD MAN'S PENNY

In 1916 it was decided that some form of memorial should be created for presentation to the next-of-kin of all the British and Empire service personnel who had died in the war. It should take the form of a cast bronze plaque, five inches in diameter, with the words "He died for freedom and honour". One million, three hundred and fifty-five thousand individually cast plaques were issued and were popularly known as the "Dead Man's Penny". No rank was given as all men were considered to be equal. Only 600 plaques were made for women, with the words, "She died for freedom and honour".

This memorial plaque is in memory of Joseph Hall of Wheathampstead who died in October 1918. He had been a prisoner of the Germans since April 1918 but did not return home after the Armistice. In the House of Commons in June 1919 Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War, was asked about the missing soldiers. His answer included: "Private Hall

was taken prisoner ... but has not been repatriated. No evidence of his death has been received but it is feared that in the absence of any recent news of him, the probability of his still being alive is small". His body was eventually found in Belgium; he is buried in Erquelinnes Communal Cemetery.



We thank Susan Tattersall and Sharon Titmuss for the loan of the plaque to photograph.

# MISSING

The notice told he'd gone away, was lost in France  
(you half-knew the truth but prayed he hadn't fallen  
to mustard gas or trapped by wire in No Man's Land).  
Our boy has crossed the sea, it said, to fight the Hun,  
not long out of short pants, a summer shy of nineteen;  
so are we desirous for particulars of our only son.  
What did you expect? A sighting of a man who could  
be him now fighting in another regiment or mending  
in a Kentish house, all memory of who he once was  
buried in French mud that was a French wood once?  
You listened but no word came. Hope faded fast  
and every fallen leaf a name appended to the civil list.  
He never made it back or even out the ranks. He gave  
his life up for the flag but his story passes down the years  
so men might learn that lines on maps are only lines on maps.  
A name in stone has fixed his place in history. Your fingertips  
can read each letter. The dust the chisel made has scattered  
but still collects in corners of eyes when the wind blows from the East.

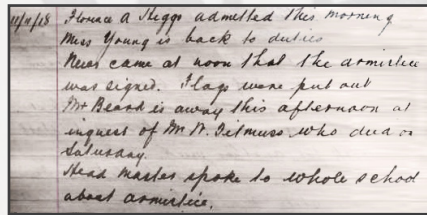
**Simon Cockle**

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# PEACE AT LAST

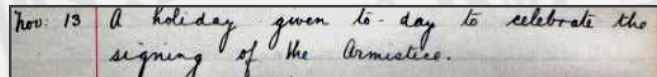
After four long years of war, news of the armistice was received in Wheathampstead on 11 November 1918—the day that it was signed in a railway carriage in the remote Forest of Compiègne, France.

The St Helen's Mixed School logbook records the event in a matter-of-fact way.



“11.11.18 ...News came at noon that the armistice was signed. Flags were put out ...Head Master spoke to whole school about armistice.”

Two days later, the Infant School logbook states:



“Nov 13 - A holiday given to-day to celebrate the signing of the Armistice.”

On the following Saturday, the Herts Advertiser printed this more upbeat report:

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1918

## WHEATHAMPSTEAD RECEIVED THE NEWS OF THE ARMISTICE

News of the armistice reached Wheathampstead a little before noon on Monday.

The tidings were received by the younger people with boisterous demonstrations of joy. In a very short time the main street was decked with flags, and people everywhere were giving and receiving congratulations. Cheers were given by the school

children and the National Anthem was sung. During the afternoon and evening more flags were hung out of windows. Songs were sung about the streets and an animation and joyousness prevailed that had not been known for years. To give additional brightness to the dull, rainy day, the fine village church bells rang out a merry peal.

The Treaty of Versailles, which finally ended the Great War, was not signed until 28 June 1919 (which is why some memorials record that the war lasted from 1914 to 1919). Outside the palace of Versailles, at ten minutes to four, the crash of gunfire told the wildly cheering crowd that the Germans had signed the treaty. They were however accepting terms that had been imposed on them almost without negotiation. For two months, they had been refusing to sign and had agreed only under threat of military occupation.

The terms were harsh (though the French saw them as too lenient), in fact so harsh that in the opinion of David Lloyd George, who as Prime Minister represented Britain at the signing, “we shall have to fight another war all over again in 25 years at three times the cost”.

He was right, except that it was only 20 years.

The real celebrations of the end of the war took place on 19 July 1919, which was designated as national Peace Day and declared a Bank Holiday. While most people welcomed this and joined in the triumphalism, others were critical and felt that the money would be better spent supporting wounded servicemen who needed jobs and homes to live in. So, while there was a huge parade in London, with the unveiling of a temporary version of the Cenotaph, there were protests and riots in towns including Swindon and Luton, where the Town Hall was burned down.

In Wheathampstead, however, Peace Day was celebrated with a parade.



# Hope for a new generation

Before the Great War there was a wide gulf between the small minority of privileged classes and the working population.

However, the structure of British society had been shifting for some time and when divisions that existed in 1913 returned after the fighting stopped, the rumblings of social discontent grew louder. The working class had become better organised, more powerful and felt it had a right to be heard. In the immediate post-war years the strict class hierarchy of Edwardian Britain declined and eventually disappeared for good.

In Wheathampstead before the war the Cherry-Garrard family at Lamer Park employed eleven servants, and the Countess of Cavan at Wheathampstead House, nine; the Baxendale family at Blackmore End boasted eighteen and at Delaport, home of Emma Upton-Robins, there were five. Countrywide after the war, the gentry found it increasingly difficult to find staff and in 1928 Lamer Park advertised several times for

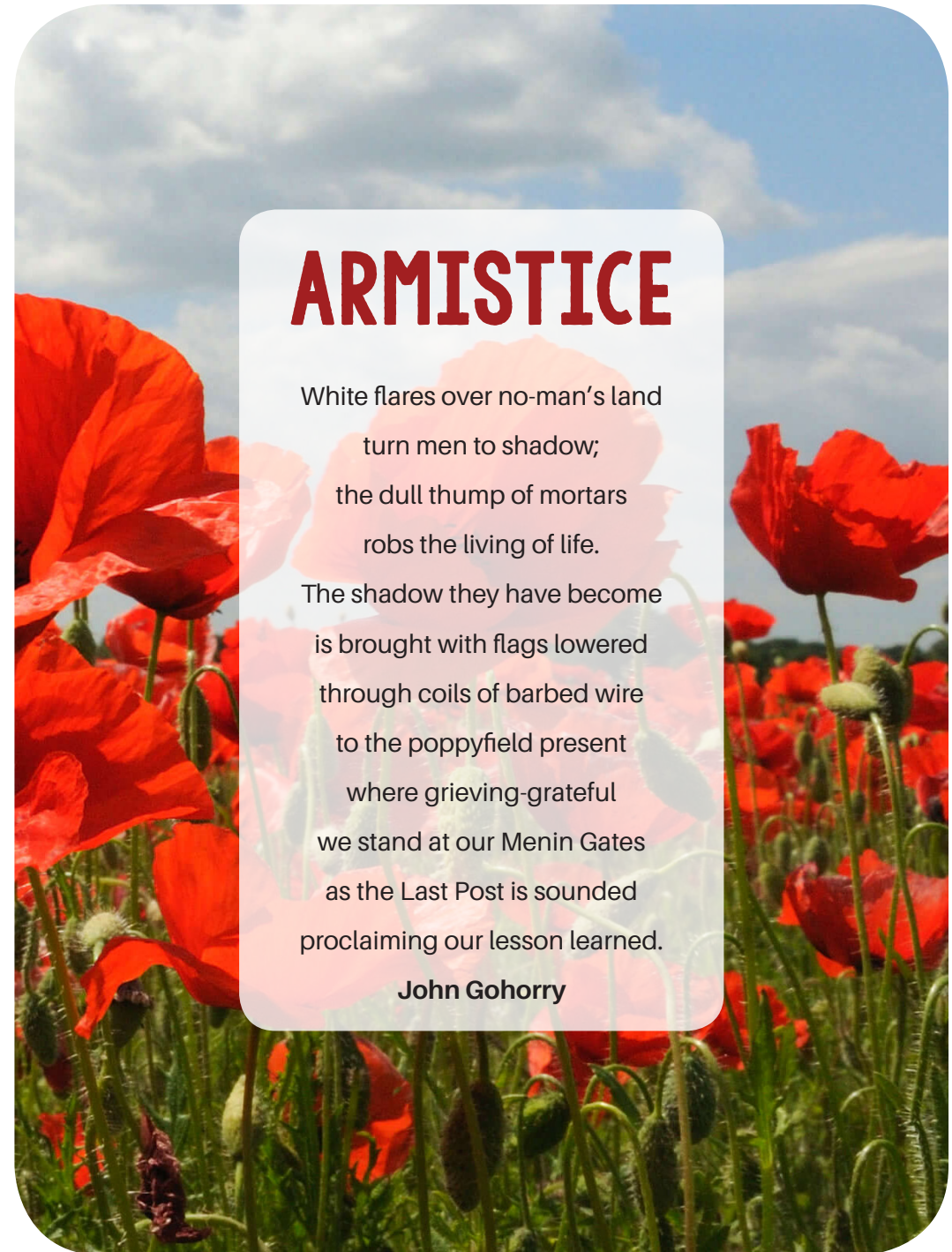
domestic servants from as far afield as Sheffield.

Women who had taken on men's roles and responsibilities during the war did not wish to return to domestic service so elite households, together with their 'hunting, shooting and fishing' society of pre-war years, were difficult to sustain. A generation of working people with new hopes and aspirations emerged.

Staff problems, the burden of taxation and the high cost of maintenance resulted in many estates being broken up and country properties being sold. Lamer House, owned by the Garrard family since the 16th century, was finally sold in 1947 and, together with Blackmore End and Delaport, was eventually demolished. Wheathampstead House survived and, after being used as offices, was converted into a private school in 2003.

**K**ITCHENMAID Wanted, strong, healthy girl, age about 18, on August 10th; girl really interested in cooking appreciated; staff 4, family two.—Mrs. Will, Lamer Park, Wheathampstead, Herts.

Sheffield Daily Telegraph, July 23 1928



## ARMISTICE

White flares over no-man's land  
turn men to shadow;  
the dull thump of mortars  
robs the living of life.

The shadow they have become  
is brought with flags lowered  
through coils of barbed wire  
to the poppyfield present  
where grieving-grateful  
we stand at our Menin Gates  
as the Last Post is sounded  
proclaiming our lesson learned.

**John Gohorry**

The author is a member of Poetry ID, the North Herts Stanza of the Poetry Society.



# HOMES FIT FOR HEROES

In the years before the Great War virtually all houses were constructed by private builders. During the war itself, house-building came to a complete standstill because of shortages of materials, labour and capital investment.

As the war was drawing to a close, it became clear to government that the country was facing an acute shortage of housing. Building costs were inflated because of the scarcity of materials combined with rising labour costs; this made it impossible for private landlords to build houses with rents that the working classes could afford.

The end of the war also saw great social changes in society; things would never be the same again. Women raised their expectations as they had shown the country what they could do, given the opportunity. Soldiers who had fought for King and Country expected something in return for the years of horror and sacrifice. The potential for social unrest, and even the perceived looming threat of 'Bolshevism', focused the government's attention on the impending problem and their national responsibility to provide homes. This gave rise to Lloyd George's famous promise in a speech made on 12 November 1918, the day after the armistice. Though summarised in newspaper headlines as "Homes Fit

for Heroes", Lloyd George's actual words were "Habitations fit for the heroes who have won the war".

The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 (the Addison Act) created legislation that permitted and encouraged the provision of publicly-funded housing for the first time. The target was to build 500,000 houses in three years. Local committees were set up to oversee developments, working largely from the recommendations of an advisory committee of central government. After some initial problems with funding, the Housing Act 1923 reintroduced subsidies and started a programme of building social housing that continued into the 1930s. Money was raised through subsidies from the Treasury who shared the cost with tenants and local rate-payers. Councils in areas of high housing need could apply for these subsidies. Bonds that promised a fixed annual interest rate of 6% raised £4 million for house-building in the early 1920s.



Brewhouse Hill Cottages today



Lea Valley Cottages today

## What happened in Wheathampstead?

St Albans Rural District Council (as it was then) accepted subsidies from central government and built twenty houses in the mid/late 1920s. There were six pairs of two- and three-bedroom semi-detached houses in Lower Luton Road, known as 'Lea Valley Cottages', and four pairs with

the same design on Brewhouse Hill, known as 'Brewhouse Hill Cottages' – there is a plaque with this name on the wall between number 24 and number 26. These houses are still there today, though the original red-brick finishes have been painted and, following the Housing Act 1980 and the 'Right-to-Buy' policy, they are now privately owned.

# LIFE MUST GO ON

This article was published in the Luton News and Bedford Chronicle on Thursday 7 August 1919.

Bull Yard  
in about  
1920



## A PRETTY WEDDING IN WHEATHAMPSTEAD

A quiet, but very pretty, wedding took place at St Helens Church, Wheathampstead, on Thursday, when Miss Florence Emily Neal eldest daughter of Mr. C. E. and Mrs. Neal of Station House was married to Lieut. Thomas Philip Latchford, son of Mr. C. Latchford, also of Wheathampstead. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. E. D. Gilbert, M.A.

The bridegroom served in the war, proceeding to France in the Herts. Territorials in November 1914. He was awarded a commission in the Royal Berks. Regt. in 1917, and was severely wounded in the retreat in March 1917. He is still unable to walk, and was married on crutches.

The bridesmaids were the Misses

Jessie and May Neal, sisters of the bride, and Miss Beryl Neal, niece. Master Frank Neal, nephew, made a pretty little page. The duties of best man were carried out by Lieut. F. Neal. The bride was given away by her father, and wore a dress of crepe-de-chine silk with a white veil, crowned by a wreath of orange blossom. She carried a bouquet of lilies and white heather. Miss Jessie Neal wore a green chartreuse silk merve dress, with leghorn hat to match; Miss May Neal had a periwinkle dress of silk, with hat to match; and Miss Beryl Neal was attired in white crepe-de-chine. Master Frank was dressed in green velvet. The bridesmaids carried bouquets of pink carnations.

A reception was afterwards held at Station House.

**Footnote: The bride was the youngest daughter of the station master. The groom was the son of the barber in the High Street.**

## Wheathampstead enters the 20th century

At the end of the war, Wheathampstead was without most of what are now regarded as essential 'mod cons' but great progress was made in the next few years.

The first sewage works had opened at the end of Meads Lane in 1876 but in 1918 many houses in the village still relied on cesspits. In 1923, St Albans Rural District Council bought two acres of land at The Meads to extend and improve the works and the increased capacity made it possible to connect more houses, such as those in Necton Road in 1924.

Installing mains water was less straightforward. Until 1926, drinking water came from wells throughout the village but, when an Act of Parliament authorised the Harpenden Water Company to supply Wheathampstead

with water, the Parish Council took exception as the cost of £12,000 would have to be paid by a special rate. A penny rate would bring in £60 a year so it would take many years to pay off the debt. At the September 1926 meeting of the Council, the chairman resigned stating, "It is an absolute waste of businessmen's time to sit on the Council". The other councillors then resigned as a body. Despite this, mains water had reached some of the village by 1929.

Some of the great houses had gas supplies before the war (eg Porters End was lit by gas supplied by the farm blacksmith) but the lamps in the High Street were fuelled by paraffin until the winter of 1920/21 when gas was supplied by the Harpenden Gas Works.

Mains electricity arrived in 1930 and the first telephones in 1938.