

ST. JOHN'S -WIMBORNE'S OTHER PARISH.

The Parish of St John the Evangelist was formed on the Eastern side of Wimborne in 1876. A new parish was needed because of the new building arisen in the Eastern part of the town since the arrival of the railway in 1847. It was bounded to the south by the River Stour, and stretched eastwards roughly from Poole Corner to just west of Leigh Common and northwards towards Colehill.

In 1914 the huge railway bridge stretched across the river near Canford Bridge, heading northeast over Leigh Road. There was little building north of Leigh Rd, apart from around the Rowland's area and St. John's Hill. But south of Leigh Rd many of the smaller roads we know now were at least partly in place by 1914- Avenue Rd, St. Catherine's, Crescent Rd, Eden Grove, Station Rd and Terrace ,New Borough Rd etc. St. John's Church and School was in place, as was the Baptist Church in Grove Rd, and the Coach and Horses Pub in Poole Rd. The Griffin Hotel, since demolished, was in Station Rd.

In 1914 there was mains water to the area, and gas was piped by the Wimborne Minster Gas Co., but electricity did not arrive until 1929. There was a gasometer near Greenclose Lane, just north of Leigh Rd, (see fields in

pic). Both local and national news arrived via newspapers-there was as yet no radio.

Patterns of employment.

Wimborne sat at the heart of a large network of railways, so the railway was a very important employer in the town. In the 1911 Census over 30 railway employees lived in Station Rd, Terrace and Eden Grove alone. There were also businesses which depended on the railway-the Griffin Hotel, 2 Temperance Hotels, 2 Refreshment Rooms, a Timber Merchant, and 2 Agricultural Implement Makers. There was a Railway Station Omnibus between the Station and Wimborne Square which met every train. Some jobs depended on the twice-a-week Agricultural Markets near the Station.

Kelly's Directory for 1915 shows 94 businesses in the parish ranging from 1-person dressmakers, tailors and boot repairers at home to a bakers, 2 butchers, 2 grocers, dairies, a florist, a photographer, even a Post Office in New Borough Rd. Medium size businesses were provided by the Griffin Hotel, Stevenson's Nurseries, the Market, and the Eclipse Brewing Works. But the railway was far and away the largest employer in the parish.

Sadly, from 1914, the railway was needed for another purpose-for taking away men mustering for the forces, and all too soon for bringing in the wounded men bound for the Red Cross Hospitals in the area.

By 1920 there were 18 fewer businesses in the parish. Some were explained

by change of owners. Mostly the missing businesses were small businesses, with just few new ones. Still operating were the Griffin Hotel, the Malting Co.the Market, the Refreshment Rooms, Elmes the Coach Builders, Ensor Auctioneers, the grocers and the butchers.

Particularly once food rationing was introduced, the country needed the contribution of this largely agricultural district together with the important distribution network provided by the railway.

St. John's School

The current headteacher of St. John's School, Mrs. Anstey, kindly let me spend a morning reading the school log kept by her predecessor. Miss Christopher , who lodged in Avenue Rd. There was surprisingly little direct mention of the war during the 4 years- perhaps the staff were trying to keep things as normal as possible for the children. In October 1914 there is a note that "lessons are brought forward by 25 minutes to economise fuel and light." An early sign of the war affecting normal life.

On 27th of November the school was closed. "2,200 troops were billeted on the town-all elementary schools are closed to accommodate the troops" writes Canon Fletcher in the Minster Parish magazine. "Children have promised to be good while at home and help their mothers." (!) The school reopened after 6 weeks after having been cleaned and disinfected.

There were frequent closures for days or weeks at a time because of bad

weather or illnesses. One can imagine that children got soaked walking to school, probably without the decent rainwear we take for granted, and maybe nowhere for clothes to dry properly. Illnesses like diphtheria, chicken pox, scarlet fever, whooping cough and ringworm were mentioned-they were more serious then, without the vaccines and antibiotics and the NHS we take for granted for our children.

Empire Day, although celebrated before the war, took on an increasingly more serious and patriotic aspect during the war. There were patriotic displays for parents, marching in the playground, recitations and patriotic addresses. After the Americans joined the war, a Fourth of July Independence Day was celebrated.

In November 1917 the children collected 39 bushels of acorns and 13 bushels of chestnuts, all destined for the Munitions Factory at Holton Heath. On 25th September 1918 an aeroplane landed in a field quite close to the school, and some teachers took the upper section of the school for "closer examination." The children went with the teachers to "see the machine rise."

The school was closed for 3 weeks in November and December 1918 because of so many cases of influenza-what we now recognise as Spanish Flu. Armistice Day gets no mention, but there was a special Empire Day Celebration in 1919, with a salute and march-past, and 1 week extra holiday in summer.

St.John's Church.

At St. John's Church next to the school, there were 22 marriages during the course of the war. 10 of the bridegrooms were soldiers, most of them in the last 2 years of the war. Of the brides, only 1, a missionary, gave any occupation at all, suggesting that they undervalued their contributions to society .

Men who died.

We don't know how many men served in the Forces during the war, but we know that about 30 men with connections to the parish died in or as a result of war service. This is the Memorial Tablet in St. John's Church. 7 are buried in Wimborne Cemetery, 2 elsewhere in the UK.

Others are buried from France, across the continent as far away as Iraq. At least 6 bodies were never found. There were 2 lots of brothers- Northovers and Isaacs. Not all were raw recruits. Some men were already regular Army or Navy. Of course, normal life went on. There were 7 police officers at the Police station, then in Poole Rd. Of Superintendent and Mrs Ricketts' sons, they might have imagined that their son Harold, who moved to London as a police officer would be safer than their son who was in the Army. Sadly, Harold drowned while he was on his honeymoon in Teignmouth in Devon, trying to save people from a rowing boat overturned in the river. A plaque to his bravery is in Postman's Park in London. His brother in the Army survived.

I have been able to find out a little about a few of those who died in the forces. Sgt. Major John Moloney, was previously in the Boer War, was killed in action in Belgium after leading the last horse from a building set alight by shellfire. He was killed by a shell as he led the horse away.

Able Seaman John Page was killed on HMS Hampshire off Orkney by a mine explosion which killed most of the crew, along with Lord Kitchener and his staff. Petty Officer Upton Selway of Crescent Rd, whose mother was a district nurse, died of pneumonia while serving with the Royal Navy Aircraft Kite Balloon Section.

Cpl. Percy Hodgson was given the Military Medal for gallantry. He was killed in action in France. Sgt Major James Osman, son of the Manager of the Gasworks, died in hospital soon after the war, leaving a widow, Agnes, of Leigh Rd. Private William Shergold of the Tank Corps. was killed in action in France after winning the Military Medal. His parents lived in Grove Rd.

Some wandered very far from Wimborne. Gilbert Furber was born in Toxteth and adopted by a family named Wakeford in Leigh Rd. He began work at the WH Smith bookstall at Wimborne Station. He transferred to Weymouth Station, then to the WH Smith shop in Paris. He married a Frenchwoman, and later joined the French Foreign Legion, and served in the Dardanelles and Egypt. He transferred to the York's and Lancs Regiment as a Lieutenant and died of wounds at the Western Front, aged only 26.

Life's other tragedies don't stop for war, Private Walter Webb was killed in

action in 1918. Canon Fletcher notes his death in the Minster magazine, adding that ...” he was for 6 years a butler at High Hall. It will be remembered that a short time ago the cottage occupied by Mrs Webb and her children was burned to the ground.”

One of many tragedies was part of an international incident that was splashed all over the national news. Stoker Arthur Long, whose parents lived in Avenue Rd. served on Submarine E13. On its way to the Baltic Sea , the Submarine ran aground on a sandbank, the Island of Sandholm, just off Denmark . Denmark was a neutral country in the Great War, and followed international maritime rules allowing the sub time to try to refloat. However, 2 German torpedo boats fired on the helpless sub, killing 15 of the 30 men, 1 of whom was Arthur Long. Denmark was so outraged by this German breach of the rules of neutrality that it sailed the bodies of the men back to Hull, giving them full military honours. They were met by solemn processions in Hull, and the then Queen Mother, who had been a Danish princess, sent a wreath of white flowers for every coffin. Some, including the coffins of Stoker Long and Walter Wilcox from Holt, were returned to their homes for burial. Arthur’s coffin left his parents’ home in Avenue Rd. for his funeral service at the Baptist Church in Grove Rd. The Salvation Army band played, wounded soldiers and VAD nurses from the hospitals and civic officials attended. Children from St John’s School lined Leigh Rd, and as the coffin was taken to the Cemetery, shops in the town were closed and blinds

were pulled down. Stoker Long was awarded the Russian Order of St. George.

This is a photo of Sgt. Reginald Isaac. His parents, Frederick and Elizabeth lived in Station Terrace. Before the war, Reginald was a grocer's apprentice. He was killed in France in May 1918. By the time this photo was taken he may have already known that his brother John had been killed in action in France in July 1916. 2 brothers from 1 family. So many sons from so many families. One can imagine treasured photographs like these sitting on so many sideboards throughout just St. John's Parish for years to come, after the war. There were also the effects of wounded and traumatised men returning home. Reginald looks scared, but resolute nevertheless. He went to the war anyway. The business, civic, and religious life of the parish continued, but the grief for many families must have been quietly overwhelming. No wonder that we never forget.

