

Emsworth's Servicemen in WWI

Great Britain has always maintained a small permanent, but professional, British Army which has been based on volunteering and still is. The Royal Navy was, and again still is, based on these lines. However, in an emergency or in wartime there is a need for rapid expansion of both, the troops having to be trained before being sent to the front line. At the beginning of WWI recruitment of volunteers became urgent and striking posters, many of which were produced by well-known artists and even now still easily recognised, and newspaper articles appeared urging men to do their duty.

A newspaper article of February 1915, six months after the outbreak of war, announced that Emsworth was a patriotic little town because of the 2,500 adults living in the town, over 500 had willingly “joined the colours”, that is 20% of the adult population. Until the Conscription Act was introduced in 1916 to enlist compulsorily men between the ages of 18 and 46 into the army and navy, some politicians had earlier thought it was un-British to raise numbers in this way because the British would always do what was right. The stress on the remainder of the population was immense. Old men and women had to do the work of young men, married women had to manage families without their husbands and the “home fires” had to be kept burning and these were just the physical effects.

Mentally, too, women had to shoulder much, questioning not only when, even if ever, would they see their men again, how would they manage without them and how could they cope on receipt of those terrible telegrams telling them that someone was not coming home? Imagine the suffering of **Louisa Couvell**, the mother of five sons whose husband, James, had already died at sea before the outbreak of war: her eldest son Henry served in the navy, her second son, also in the Royal Navy died aboard HMS Queen Mary at Jutland, her third son Francis died in France in October 1916 and her fourth son in the Sussex Regiment survived the war.

In Emsworth a War Relief Committee was soon founded, as in many other towns, to keep in touch with its young men and to supply them with additional comforts, such as socks, tobacco, chocolate and gloves. The Chichester area required men for the Sussex Regiment, while Portsmouth raised three battalions for the Hampshire Regiment. Men of Emsworth were found to be volunteering for both, but later in the war they were placed wherever the need was greatest. These localised recruitment schemes led to what were known as the “Pals’ Battalions” as men naturally preferred to join up with relatives and known or friendly familiar local faces. As the war progressed the weakness of this became apparent as whole towns were bereft and football teams could no longer field a side – a situation which occurred at both Havant and Chichester.

Although the French trenches of Ypres and the Somme dominate WWI thinking, in fact Emsworth men served all over the globe. **Lynton Woolmer White**, **Charles Outen** and the **Churcher** brothers were sent to India, **Harold Tier** to Jerusalem and Cairo and **John Parham** had crewed transport ships at Gallipoli during the Dardanelles campaign whilst **William Bailey** and **Arthur Sharp** served on HMS Aboukir which sank in the North Sea. Many other Emsworth men naturally gravitated towards sea-going services, in both the Royal and Merchant Navy and Royal Marines, among them **Robert Warren Johnson**, **Alfred Young** also on HMS Aboukir, **Charles Henry Berrecloth**, **Arthur Parham**, **James Cribb** and **George Thomas Booth**, a Boy Seaman 1st Class and only 16 years when he was lost at sea on HMS Hawke. These are just a few examples of many local men who had made the ultimate sacrifice. Some died later of wounds, accidents and illnesses incurred in the war. Life

for those who survived and returned home, whether they had served on land or sea, their experiences in this 'War to end all Wars' would be forever scarred on their memories.

The **Rev. Herbert Sprigg**, Rector of St. James' Church from 1893 to 1920, whose son **Henry** had been killed in Syria in 1918, had long thought that it would be fitting for an altar piece to commemorate the fallen. So, against some local opposition, a triptych depicting the life of St James the Apostle was devised. This shows:

On the left the calling of St. James by Jesus to represent the men of Emsworth who went to war;

In the middle James' mother asking Jesus for a place in Heaven for her son, representing the mothers and wives who suffered whilst their men were at war;

On the right the martyrdom of St. James representing the sacrifice of the men who died.

The idea of the reredos screen memorial did not meet with wholehearted approval, but it was done. Others commemorated their loved ones in the church in different ways. Some men of the area thought it would be more practical to endow two beds in the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Hospital to be available for the poorest in the community. This was done and commemorated by a plaque on the hospital's wall. In 2013 it was removed and is now safely stored in the Museum.

Linda Newell