

Emsworth 1913 – Prelude to the First World War, and a remembrance of those who died

Christmas 1912 had been particularly wet and on Boxing Day a gale "probably the roughest ever known" whipped the high tide to a frenzy and flooded the lower part of Queen Street. Residents had to take what they could of their possessions and carry them upstairs but an entrepreneurial spirit appeared and 'pick-a-back' rides were offered at a small charge*. The road between Emsworth and Southbourne was submerged and motorists, "on the way to Portsmouth from Brighton, got as far as the bridge, and had to return to Southbourne and to Havant by way of Westbourne and Denville."

In February residents were disappointed to learn that the Rector, Rev Herbert G Sprigg, had decided to resign his post with effect from October in order to devote the remainder of his life to missionary work. He was 63 and had been Rector for 20 years during which he had served as President of the Trustees of the Cottage Hospital and had demonstrated a deep concern and offered support to the poor of the parish.

The public affairs of the community were managed by Warblington District Council at its monthly meetings under the chairmanship of Harvey Dixon, a 53 year old retired architect from Storrington in Sussex and who lived at '*Kenton*' on the Havant Road. A concern at the start of the year was the provision of allotments for use of members of the town, but at a rental price of 1s. a rod (about five metres) only eight men had indicated that they were prepared to take the allotments. By March the scheme had to be abandoned as the Clerk to the Council advised that although every effort had been made to effect economies, the lowest possible rental was "11¹/₂d. per rod for 50 years", a figure too high to attract interest from the town.

There were 12 members of the Council and in April 1913, four vacancies were open for election and were filled by Rev Charles Poyntz Sanderson, with 311 votes, George Pullen, landlord of The King's Arms, 246 votes, William Duffield, a builder, 199 votes and James Smith, a butcher 142 votes. In the 1911 Census, the population of Emsworth was 3,771 –1,643 males [women did not have the vote], of whom 941 were aged 21 plus, but it was only those liable to pay rates as property owners who were entitled to vote. The Rev Sanderson had retired as Rector of Doverdale, north of Worcester, in 1910, and lived in '*Highlands*' on Havant Road. He took a prominent part in the town's civic life including being President of Emsworth Cricket Club. In April, at the annual supper and smoking concert of the Emsworth Men's Institute "devoted to conviviality", Rev Sanderson

in a hearty speech, said "how great a boon it would be to the town if the young men took interest in the proceedings of the local authority".

At the May meeting of the new Council, now with Albert Tatchell, a retired rope manufacturer who had been born in Emsworth, serving as chairman, Rev Sanderson was appointed as the Council's representative on Hartley University Council, known today as The University of Southampton. At that meeting Rev Sanderson may have needed to express a conflict of interest. The Council had offered to build a pavilion for the Cricket Club on the recreation ground if the Club first contributed £10, an offer regarded as a slight by the Club, who went ahead and built a pavilion anyway and the Club "hoped no offence had been committed".

On Wednesday, 2 July, a beautiful day "though slight rain fell in the evening" the annual fete of the Amalgamated Friendly Societies was held. A crowd of 3,000 watched the events in Mr Silver's meadow, near the Council School. "Among the more interesting events were boot races for teams of four, ladies shying a hammer at a dummy policeman, smokers' race, and needle and thread race ... all of which created much amusement". At the conclusion of the sports Miss Woolmer White distributed the prizes and was presented with a magnificent bouquet by little Miss Griffin, "and, on the call of Mr CJ Jones, hearty cheers were given". At the usual dinner, held in the Crown Hotel, Mr Woolmer White JP, presided with Mr Harvey Dixon JP in the Vice Chair.

Woolmer White was a chemist who became Chairman of Timothy Whites. He represented Emsworth on Hampshire County Council and lived at *Southleigh Park House* with his wife Edith, whom he had married in 1883. They had two sons and two daughters. He was knighted in 1922 and died at *Southleigh*, aged 73, on 6 December 1931. In March 1913 he presided over the annual concert of the Primrose League. The League was founded in 1883 to support the conservative principles of Benjamin Disraeli, who had died two years earlier, and for whom the primrose was his favourite flower. At the Emsworth concert Mr Arthur Mant, son of James, a High Street butcher, provided humorous items. Arthur had a reputation for humour; in February at a concert in aid of funds for Emsworth Cottage Hospital he set the audience, "in roars of laughter with his humorous songs".

At the end of the year, on Tuesday, 16 December, Arthur's sister Eve, married Ernest, the youngest son of John and Fanny Cribb of Bath Road. "The tradespeople, among whom the parents of the bride and groom are well known and highly respected, displayed flags and streamers across the street in profusion ... and the majority of ships in the harbour were gay with flags and buntings". What made the wedding unusual is that Ernest was a resident of

Prince George in British Columbia, and on Saturday, 20 December 1913, the married couple left Liverpool on the *Virginian*, bound for Canada.

Perhaps the new Mr and Mrs Cribb had had time before their wedding to join the audience in the Town Hall to watch the production of "Oh Susannah", a farce written by Mark Ambient. "The acting was extremely good, and Miss Stella Kelly [the 18-year old daughter of Col. and Mrs Kelly of *Northlands*] who took the part of Aurora, the maid, was especially clever". The performance was under the patronage of Sir Frederick and Lady FitzWygram of *Leigh Park House*. Lady FitzWygram was president of the Voluntary Aid detachment of the Red Cross and within a year *Northlands* would become a Red Cross Hospital to treat casualties from the military engagements that engulfed the world.

Possibly the first local man to be killed in that conflict was the eldest son of Mr Woolmer White, Lynton, a professional soldier, cavalry officer and a Lieutenant in the Dragoon Guards, who had been attached to the 2nd Battalion, the Queen's Bays, who died of his wounds in France on 3 September 1914. He lies with eight of his platoon in Baron Communal Cemetery, about 40 miles north east of Paris. They had been in France for a fortnight and had been detailed to help strengthen the French on the River Marne, resisting the advance of General von Kluck's first army. On reconnaissance on a misty early autumn morning Lt. Lynton White's patrol was attacked by German cavalry, his corporal, land-corporal and six private soldiers were killed. Lynton was wounded and died two days later. His name appears on the memorial in Emsworth and in St James' as well as on the Havant memorial and on a plaque in St Thomas a Becket church. Nevertheless it must have been galling to the family to read in an obituary to Sir Woolmer White, in *The Times* of 7 December 1931, that he left two daughters and a son, Rudolph Dymoke White who "served in the Great War", with no mention of the son that was lost.

Lynton White was one of the first to be killed, one of the last was Rev Herbert Sprigg's only son, Henry. As mentioned before, at the start of 1913 Rev Sprigg had announced his intention to resign his incumbency, but such was the protest within the parish, church warden Ernest Hallett, managing a bank in High Street, presented a petition with nearly 1,000 signatures, that he annulled his resignation and remained as Rector until the end of January 1920. Henry was a captain in the 14 battalion of the Hampshire Regiment and was killed in Palestine on 9 May 1918. He lies with 3,300 others at the Ramleh War Cemetery in Israel.

Sir Frederick FitzWygram, who had accompanied his mother to the performance of "Oh Susannah" had joined the Scots' Guards in 1906 and was part of the British Expeditionary Force that went to France in August 1914. On 16 May 1915 he was captured at Festubert, about five miles east of the French town of Bethune. He was released at the end of the war but never recovered full health, his final illness

originated with an attack of influenza, "but other complications ensued and the end came as a result of blood poisoning" (*Portsmouth Evening News*, Friday 7 May 1920).

Three sons of the gentry were killed during WW1 and it is difficult to be specific as to how many others lost their lives; there are war memorials in St James' Church and in the Memorial Garden in Horndean Road that record the names of the fallen, but there are duplications and omissions. Using the 1911 Census there are 584 men resident in Emsworth aged between 15 and 40; that is men potentially eligible to serve in the 1914-18 war. To this number must be added 39 residents of Hermitage and Lumley to give a base population of 623. There are 149 names on the local memorials of men associated with Emsworth, which indicates an attrition of about 24%; a loss that is beyond comprehension, that affected the community in untold ways and whose sacrifice requires that we commemorate them and whose stories need to be told.

*Quotations are taken from the weekly edition of *The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* for 1913.

Philip Robinson