

**MALPAS
and the
GREAT WAR
1914 - 1918**



David Hayns

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**PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR ON THE
SEVENTY FIFTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ARMISTICE**

**STOKE COTTAGE MALPAS CHESHIRE
NOVEMBER 11TH 1993**

ISBN 0 9520548 1 7

MALPAS.

PRIVATE RESIDENTS.

Armistead Rev. Lawrence M.A. (rector), The Rectory
 Barnes Henry, Ebnal
 Biantern Thomas, Rock ho. High st
 Bradley Arthur, Church street
 Cooke Mrs. High street
 Cox Misses, Church street
 Clutton Miss, Rock cottage
 Danbury Miss, High street
 Danily Matthew Henry, High street
 Ethel-ton Mrs. The Bolling
 Gore Major H. A. The Groves
 Houghton Richd. Johnson, The Lodge
 Hughes Walter, Ebnal
 Huxley W. Sydney, Oakville
 Jarman Miss, The Groves
 Lanceley George, The Cross
 Leigh Albert, Church street
 Mate Mrs. Church street
 Mitchell Rev. Ernest G. (Congregational), The Manse
 Mitchell Jn. Southwood, The Orchard
 Parker Mrs. Church street
 Paulin George Alexander, Prospect ho
 Rasbotham Mrs. Assheton, Ebnal grnge
 Richards John, Rock villas
 Smith William J. Walter, School ho
 Stevenson Mrs. Church street

Edge & Sons, coal merchants, Malpas Railway station
 Edge John, tailor, Church street
 Edwardes Henry, teacher of music & organist, High street
 Edwards John, stone masn. Church st
 Fletcher Alice & Sons, drapers, Church street
 Fletcher Arth. insurance agt. The Cross
 Farber Lloyd, blacksmith, Old Hall st
 Gill Walter, tinman, Church street
 Hesketh Harvey Thomas, confectioner, The Cross
 Hewitt Joseph, painter, High street
 Hewitt Leonard, shoe ma. Church st
 Hughes J. & Son, shopkprs. Church st
Huxley T. G. & Co. builders & contractors, Old Hall street. T N 4
 Huxley John, jun. tailor, Church st
 Independent Order of Oddfellows (J. W. Wycherley, treasurer; William Parker, sec)
 Joinson Wm. plumber, Church st
 Jones & Mercer, painters, High street
 Latham Rebecca (Mrs.), draper, The Cross
 Leigh Albert L.R.C.P.Lond., M.R.C.S. Eng. surgeon & medical officer & public vaccinator for the Malpas Shocklach district, Tarvin union, & Malpas district of Whitechurch union, Church street
 Leman John Samuel, accountant, Chester road
 Lloyd Frank & Sons, cattle auction, Malpas Railway station
 Logan C. E. horse slaughterer & manure manufacturer (T N 7); & at 17 Canal side, Chester
 McCaffry Hugh, farmer, Hollow wood
 Madeley John J. hair drssr. Old Hall st
 Malpas Gas Co. Limited (John Whittingham Wycherley, sec.), Church st
 Malpas Social Club & Institute (Wm. Sidney Huxley, sec.; Leonard Fletcher, librarian; Jsph. Williams, caretaker)

Tomkin Frederick, High street
 Vipan Algernon Joseph, Church street
 Welch Frederick William, Rock villas
 Welch John Brookes, The Fields
 Williams John, Old School house
 Williamson Miss, High street

COMMERCIAL.

Early closing day, Wednesday.
 Aingworth Edith (Mrs.), Wyvern Family & Commercial hotel; excellent garage & bowling green; headquarters of Automobile Association. Tel. No. 12
 Allman Elizabeth (Mrs.), farmer, Cross-o'-th'-Hill
 Appleyard Jane (Mrs.), huckster, Crosshill
 Arthan Job, farmer, Old Hayes
 Austin Joseph & Philip, carters, Belle Vue
 Baker James, blacksmith, Church st
 Barlow Ann & Mary Elizh. (Misses), dress makers, Church street
 Barlow Edward, boot & shoe maker, Well street
 Barlow Elizh. (Mrs.), farmer, Well st
 Barlow William O. news agent, mail contractor, High street & Well st
 Barnes Henry M.R.C.V.S. veterinary surgeon, High street & Ebnal

Morgan Gilbert, outfitter, High st
 Mullock Thos. insur. agt. The Hollies
 National Provincial Bank of England (branch of Whitechurch) (open on thursday from 11 till 3 p.m.; James Ernest Bacon, manager); draw on head office, 15 Bishopsgate, London E C
 Nevitt Frederick, farmer, Ebnal bank Parsonage Thos. frmr. Whitegate frmr
 Paulin George Alexander L.R.C.P. & S. Edin., L.F.P.S. Glas. surgeon, High street. T N 5
 Price John, farmer, Crosshill
 Prince James, farmer, The Hough
 Public Hall (Arthur D. Calcott, hon. sec.; Robert Lowe Greenshields, hon. treasurer), High street
 Randall James Lowndes, land steward to W. W. Tyrwhitt-Drake esq
 Read Chas. W. butcher & grocer, Ebnal
 Reeves Albt. Edwd. farmer, The Moss
 Reeves Albt. W. hair drssr. Church st
 Reeves Jsph. butcher & frmr. High st
 Reeves Richard, farmer, Moss farm
 Reeves Wm. Hy. tobaccoist, High st
 Richards Mary (Mrs.), refreshment rooms &c. Church street
 Ridgway Joseph, farmer, Wrexham rd
 Rigby John, farmer, Ebnal
 Robinson Henry, farmer, Ebnal bank
 Salt Smith Augustus (Mrs.), grocer, High street
 Sutton Florence (Mrs.), shopkeeper, Old Hall street
Taylor A. J. motor & cycle agent, & motors for hire; Michelin motor tyres stocked (T N 17); & at Whitechurch
 Taylor Harriet (Mrs.), baker, Church st
 Taylor John, farmer, The Leys
 Taylor William, gardener to Mrs. Assheton Rasbotham, Ebnal
 Thelwell Agnes (Miss), cowkeeper, Well street

Batho George, carter, Mastiff lane
 Battarbee Frederick, wine & spirit merchant, Church street
 Bentley William, cycle agent, tax collector, assistant overseer & clerk to the Parish Council, The Cross
 Billington J. H. Limited, coal merchants, Malpas Railway station
 Boughey George, butcher, Church st
 Bradbury Walt. butcher, Church st
 Bradley Samuel, Red Lion hotel & posting house; omnibus to meet all trains; funerals completely furnished, Old Hall street & coal merchant, & livery stables, Malpas Railway station
 Bussey Jsph. fishmng. &c. Old Hall st
 Calcott Arthur Drummond, watch & clock maker, High street
 Carter Thomas, farmer, Well street
 Cartwright Francis George, Crown P.H. Old Hall street
 Cemetery (A. J. Vipan, clerk to the joint committee), Station road
 Chesworth Charles & Son, furniture removers, Lydgate
 Cooper Harold R. farmer, Preston hall
 Cornes Henry, farmer, Old Hall frmr
 Dobson Emma (Mrs.), grocer, High st
 Dodd Chas. Johnson, frmr. Church st
 Eaton Albert John, plumber, High st

Tomlinson Charles, registrar of births, deaths & marriages for Malpas district, Whitechurch union
 Vipan A. J. clothier, outfitter & boot dealer, & clerk to the Joint Cemetery Committee & deputy registrar of births & deaths Malpas district, Whitechurch union, Church street
 Walgate & Leake, drapers, Church st
 Walker Joseph, chemist, Church st. T N 17
 Weaver Geo. journalist, Old Hall st
 Weaver Henry Leigh, farmer, Church st
 Whitechurch Provident Co-operative Society Limited (J. Holland, manager), Church street
 Wigan Coal & Iron Co. Limited, Malpas Railway station
 Williams Ann (Mrs.), grcr. Church st
 Williams John, corn mer. High st
 Wycherley Jn. Whittingham, saddler, Church street

MALPAS AT THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

Extracted from Kelly's Directory of Cheshire 1914

INTRODUCTION

The years of the Great War were a period of profound change for every community in this country as well as in every other country which was involved in the conflict. This book looks at the effects on just one rural community, remote from the action of the battlefield but which nevertheless suffered the loss of many of its menfolk, underwent the changes in agriculture brought about by the need to increase food production, and experienced the final 'sting in the tail' caused by the influenza epidemic which preyed so viciously on a population weakened by wartime frugality. Day to day awareness of the war was heightened by such factors as food and fuel rationing during the final twelve months; and through relatively minor inconveniences, like the darkening of the town's gas lamps against a threat of aerial attacks which, in the event, never reached this side of Britain. Longer term there was a widespread change in the landowning structure of the area, after centuries of relative stability. The break-up of the Tyrwhitt-Drake Estate and the selling-off of a considerable portion of the Cholmondeley lands during the years following the war were a reflection of a national trend, which had in fact started before 1914. The reasons were complex but included such factors as the loss in action of many sons of landowning families; the higher wages demanded by farm workers returning from the war; and the increase in death duties brought about by the 1919 Budget. In May 1920 'The Times' declared that "England is changing hands" and, as a result, many former tenants became farmers or smallholders in their own right.

For those who would like to put the story of Malpas into its national context, I thoroughly recommend Dr Pamela Horn's 'Rural Life in England in the First World War'. This present book does not aim to be an academic study but has been written for those who live in Malpas or share an interest in the town's history. To many of them I am grateful for the help they have given me in reconstructing this story of the war years. A full list of acknowledgements appears at the end of the book but I would like to record particular thanks to Les Boughey, Ben White, the late Bill Jones and the late John Cornes. Their memories, shared with me at various times, have done much to help bring Malpas history back to life.

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'THEY JUMPED ON TO THEIR CYCLES'

Malpas answers the Call to Arms

1914 started in much the same way as previous years for the town of Malpas. As in many rural communities, everyday life was barely ruffled by national events, nor even by events in the county town of Chester, fifteen miles away. Those with market business would make the weekly five mile trip to Whitchurch, just over the border in Shropshire. They travelled on horseback, by carrier's cart, on one of the new cheap bicycles or by train from the station at Hampton. Only a few better off members of the community had been able to invest in motor cars, although they were becoming more commonplace. The local council was even considering erecting a 'Danger' notice on the old market cross, as a warning against "the excessive speed of motors" - maybe between 10 and 20 mph!

On the evidence of contemporary photographs, Malpas looked an idyllic place. However, the records show us that the town had its fair share of everyday troubles and tragedies. In February the Sanitary Inspector was becoming concerned at the number of cases of scarlet fever in the area; there was industrial unrest, when not only the roadmen employed by the Rural District Council put in for increased wages as well as a bicycle allowance, but also the local members of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners were called out on strike, demanding a rise in wages to eightpence halfpenny (3½p) an hour; and in May the town reeled at the tragic news of the suicide of Captain Ethelston, of The Bolling in Church Street, following depression brought on by a hunting accident. Many paid tribute to the popular Captain, and the annual Malpas Agricultural Show, of which he was a patron, was cancelled as a sign of respect. The family name still lives on with the Ethelston Football Cup, much coveted by local clubs, and until recently the large field behind The Bolling was known as 'The Captain's Field', one time venue for local sports and celebrations.

The life of the town centred around the church, chapels, schools, public houses and, of course,



Malpas Infant School children leading the procession
on King George's Coronation Day 1911
(Mr. L. Boughey)



Malpas Infant School in 1912
(Mr. L. Boughey)

the Jubilee Hall. Strange to think that the Jubilee Hall, which nurtured so many new organisations and so enriched the life of the town, had been built less than thirty years previously to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. It was also the meeting place for the local administrators - Malpas Rural District and Parish Councils - as well as being the social hub of the town, housing activities as diverse as lectures on poultry keeping, practices of the Malpas Rifle Club and dances organised by Mr Joseph Bussey. Bussey's annual Jubilee Hall Ball, boasting such attractions as the Crewe Steam Shed Band, was a highlight of the year for the working folk of the district. Other important social gatherings, including dinners, parades and annual sports, were provided by the 'Tontine'. The Tontine, a legacy of the four friendly societies active in Malpas during the nineteenth century, provided insurance against sickness, against hard times, and against the threat of the Whitchurch Workhouse for members of the working classes.

On July 18th 'The Times' carried many columns about the problems in Ireland; reported that the King was to review the Fleet at Spithead that day; published the race card for Sandown; and advertised its own scheme to help solve 'the Servant Problem'. "The Times some months ago instituted its scheme whereby Lady Experts assist Ladies to obtain able and reliable Servants."

In the 'Whitchurch Herald' the same day the editor wrote "...but for the sustained efforts of willing helpers the picturesque little 'city on the hill'...would at this moment have lain a heap of ruins". On July 14th the Malpas, Cholmondeley and Whitchurch Fire Brigades had been stretched to their limits to control a massive fire which had broken out in the builder's yard belonging to Thomas Huxley, in Old Hall Street.

Two weeks later the local paper reported happier news from Malpas. Mr 'Billy' Smith, headmaster of the Alport Boys' School, married Florence Duckenfield of Tushingham School House. On the same day that Malpas townfolk were reading the report of the wedding, alongside a report of the church Sunday School's annual 'treat' at Stockton

Hall, Germany declared war on Russia. Also in that issue of the 'Whitchurch Herald' was an advertisement for the Annual Tontine Dinner and Athletic Sports at Hampton Heath, to be held on August 15th, at which entertainment would be provided by Whitchurch Excelsior Prize Morris Dancers and Whixall Silver Band. The celebrations never took place.

Five weeks previously, on June 28th, the parishioners of nearby Tushingham had been making their way to Old Chad Chapel for the traditional annual rushbearing service. As their cartload of rushes moved across the fields to Old Chad, over 1,000 miles away in Yugoslavia a car drove through the streets of Sarajevo. The car carried Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria. It never reached its destination, stopped by the assassin's bullet which history was to see as the spark that set the world aflame.

On August 4th, Messrs Frank Lloyd and Sons held their weekly sale of pigs, sheep and cattle at Malpas Station Smithfield "when there was the usual good attendance of buyers, and trade for all classes was good". That evening, shortly after the Malpas Parish Council had finished its monthly meeting in the Jubilee Hall, Britain declared war in response to Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium. In London the crowds turned out to cheer Prime Minister Asquith's decision. In Malpas the townsfolk went to bed, unaware of the events that were rocking the capital.

But when the news reached Malpas the next day, the scene so moved George Weaver, local correspondent to the 'Whitchurch Herald', that he sent in the following report:

"Except for the newspapers and the enhanced price of many commodities there would be little to indicate that a war was in progress so far as Malpas is concerned. In the town and the immediate district there are a few members of the Cheshire Yeomanry, one or two 'terriers', and a sprinkling of reservists, each and all of whom answered the call to duty with remarkable promptness ... The men in several instances who had come into the town to hear the news, saw the proclamation posted up on the post office doors,

and without a word they jumped on to their cycles, and left to fight for King and country."

John Cornes, out in his father's turnip fields from early morning, did not hear the news until late that day. John Boughey heard much sooner. He was a footman to the Wolley-Dod family at Edge Hall, which boasted a telephone through which the news would have been relayed immediately from London. His younger brother Leslie vividly remembers John bursting into the family's cottage in Tilston Road and announcing, "England's at war with Germany - I'm going to join up!" Despite his mother's pleading with him not to go, he soon enlisted with the Royal Horse Artillery, with whom he served in France. Arthur, the oldest of the Boughey boys, was already in the Merchant Navy but with the outbreak of war he soon transferred to the Royal Navy.

And so began a flurry of meetings, parades and exhortations to all eligible men to enrol for military service. Before the war, Britain's regular army had numbered less than a quarter of a million, posted around the world, with smaller numbers of reservists and Territorials. By September 15th over 50,000 men had answered Lord Kitchener's legendary call to arms - "Your King and Country need You". Malpas men had not been entirely unprepared. In 1907 permission had been given for use of the upper room of the Jubilee Hall as an indoor rifle range "on the understanding that no damage is done to the property", and early in 1914 it had been prophesied that the shooting carried on there "would be valuable to the defence of England". On September 7th Lord Arthur Grosvenor, a veteran of the Boer War at the turn of the century, headed a procession of motor cars which conveyed twenty-two recruits from Malpas to Chester, sixteen of whom enrolled. Presumably some of the others were medically unfit, as was a very high proportion nationally of the men who sought to enlist - a sad comment on the state of the nation's health at the time.

Two days later Canon Armitstead, the Rector of Malpas, presided at a meeting in the Jubilee Hall for those interested in "drilling the manhood of the town", to fit them "to move about and fall

into formation with military precision".

By the middle of November around fifty men from Malpas had enlisted, some to go initially to training camps, others to be thrown into the front line of battle at Mons, the Marne and Ypres. A number of sons of local landowning families had enlisted as officers and became early casualties of the war. Captain Philip Godsall of Iscoyd Hall was captured on the retreat from Mons in August; Brigadier-General Wolley-Dod was wounded in the Dardanelles campaign; Captain Walwyn, son in law of Mr and Mrs Greenshields, was wounded in the first few weeks of the war and came to recuperate at 'The Beeches'; and Captain Hugh Sandbach, of Cherry Hill at Chorlton by Malpas, was killed in action at Longido, East Africa, in early November. Captain Godsall eventually escaped from the Germans and, after many adventures, returned to a hero's welcome in 1917. Meanwhile, the men who had enlisted in the ranks were suffering the terror of the front line, many of them to die unspeakable deaths, others to be invalided back home with wounds, both physical and mental, that were to scar them for the rest of their lives. Men such as my own grandfather, an RFC despatch rider, who was badly gassed and was never able to work properly again up to his death in 1954. Gilbert Murray, a contemporary writer, spoke of "the hundreds of thousands of human beings involved in such horrors of pain and indignity that, if here in our ordinary hours we saw one man so treated, the memory would sicken us to the end of our lives".

'CHRISTLIKE WORK'

The Malpas Red Cross Hospital

As the casualties began to arrive back in this country it soon became obvious that existing hospitals would not be able to cope. All over Britain numerous country houses were offered for use as hospitals and convalescent homes. By November a number of wounded soldiers had already arrived at Higginsfield House, Cholmondeley, and in December Mrs Ethelston, widow of the lately mourned Captain Ethelston, announced that she was opening 'The Bolling' in Church Street as a Red

Cross hospital. Local people immediately rallied round to help, some like Isabel Wycherley enlisting as VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurses and members of the Malpas Men's Ambulance Detachment volunteering as orderlies. It must have been a salutary experience for both women and men, emptying bedpans, disposing of fearfully soiled dressings, comforting the wounded and trying to come to terms with their dreadfully mutilated bodies. The hospital received many generous gifts in kind and acknowledgements of these were printed regularly in the local paper. Everything necessary for the comfort of the wounded seems to have been forthcoming, from vegetables, fruit, eggs, milk, chocolate and puddings to pyjamas, gramophone records, cigarettes and pipes. Ben White, then a boy of seven, remembers one local resident who acquired the nickname 'Woodbine Willie' because of his regular gifts of cigarettes to soldiers at the hospital. Tom Mercer (after whom 'Mercer Close' is named) and Joseph Bussey, who kept a fishmonger and game butcher's business in Old Hall Street, were to prove tireless workers on behalf of the troops, both at home and abroad. Between them they set up a local fund to provide daily papers and a regular supply of postage stamps to the patients at The Bolling.

The first group of soldiers began to leave the hospital in February 1915 but were soon followed by new arrivals from France, probably casualties of the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle (March 10th-12th) which took such a heavy toll of the British forces. With a massive increase in the number of wounded in April and May, victims of the second Battle of Ypres, it was obvious that the Malpas hospital would have to be extended. Further rooms in the house were adapted as wards and Messrs Mercer and Bussey purchased a tent for additional accommodation. Not all of the patients survived, despite the dedicated attention they received, and some of them were buried with full honours in Malpas Cemetery. One such was Private Robert Stewart, a native of Glasgow, who had enlisted in the Seaforth Highlanders. He was wounded by shrapnel at Ypres in April and died at The Bolling during the following month, leaving a widow and child.

As the wounded men began to recover they were allowed out into the surrounding area. Les Boughey and Ben White remember the sight of them wandering around the town and occasionally calling at the Alport School, dressed in their blue uniforms with white shirts and red ties. Some of them even went to work on local farms. Perhaps one of the saddest local war stories is that of twenty-six year old Cammille Versyck, a Belgian who had probably convalesced at Higginsfield House and then went into farm service at Bickley. One night he was drinking at 'The Wheatsheaf' in Nomansheath when he thought he heard another man refer to him as a German. Slightly the worse for drink, Versyck took offence at the supposed insult and stabbed the man with his penknife. He was arrested, charged at Broxton police station and sent to Shrewsbury Gaol on remand. This experience, on top of the horrors he had been through in at least four battles on the Western Front, proved too much for him and he hanged himself in his cell before he could be brought to trial.

Les Boughey, at the impressionable age of six, heard firsthand accounts of some of those horrors of war. In 1916 he broke his leg in the playground at the Infants School. His mother heard his screams of pain all the way from the school as he was carried home up the Tilston road, on a blackboard which Miss Baker, his teacher, had pressed into service as a makeshift stretcher. Doctor Paulin was called to the cottage and promptly anaesthetised young Les before dumping him in his car and rushing him to Whitchurch Cottage Hospital. There he was placed in the only available bed, in a ward full of wounded soldiers just returned from the bloodbath of the Somme, that unspeakable episode in which 19,000 British troops were killed on the first day of action alone. One local man injured there was Mr Kilby Jones of Edge, who carries the scars of a wound in his skull right up to this very day. After Les Boughey had come round in the hospital, the soldiers took great delight in relating to him the macabre incidents they had witnessed, until the nurses realised why the poor boy was having such violent nightmares and promptly removed him to alternative accommodation. It was to be seventeen weeks before Les returned home to Malpas, in a car



Leslie Boughey aged four
dressed in the infant fashion of 1914
(Mr. L. Boughey)



Isabel Wycherley, who nursed at the
Malpas Red Cross Hospital, in her VAD Uniform
(Mrs. V. Marsh)

provided by Mr Greenshields. This is the first car ride he remembers, having been unconscious on the 'outward' journey!

In November 1918 Mrs Ethelston was summoned to Buckingham Palace to receive the Order of the British Empire, for her war work. The Malpas Red Cross Hospital finally closed in March 1919. The following September Mrs Ethelston put The Bolling on the market, thus severing her connections with a house that must have held such a mixture of memories for her. Mrs Mary Lockett, the present day owner of The Bolling, still has preserved the citation which reads: "During the Great War of 1914-1919 this building was established and maintained as a hospital for British sick and wounded. The Army Council in the name of the Nation thank those who have rendered to it this valuable and patriotic assistance in the hour of its emergency...".

'HUMAN GENEROSITY AND MORAL IDEALISM'

The Belgian Refugees

Even before the first wounded soldiers had arrived at The Bolling, another group of war victims had fled here from abroad. Following Germany's invasion of Belgium in August 1914, the event which precipitated Britain's entry into the war, over a million Belgians sought refuge in other countries. Around 100,000 of them embarked for Britain and, according to the official records, between 600 and 700 of them came to Cheshire. Local communities were circulated with requests for accommodation and a hastily formed Malpas committee agreed to take two families. Mr Greenshields, of 'The Beeches', offered the use of the bungalow (now called 'Hilbre') which he had recently built to replace an old black and white cottage on the corner of Tilston Road and Overton Lane. A second house was made available at Sunnyside, by the Rural District Council.

It was estimated that it would cost fifty shillings (£2.50) a week to support the two families. The first major fund-raising event, a whist drive and dance in November, was something of a disaster because the date clashed with

Whitchurch Dairy Show. However, the necessary funds were easily covered by the first round of voluntary subscriptions, which were additional to offers in kind of such necessities as coal, bread and vegetables.

William Grunfeld, a Belgian tailor, and his family arrived on October 23rd. They settled in quickly at the bungalow and three days later Wilhelm's son Adolf (with his name anglicised to 'Greenfield' in the register) was admitted to the Alport Boys' School. Unfortunately he was not in the best of health, possibly due to unhappy experiences in Belgium, and by the following January he was withdrawn from school as the doctor had certified him unfit to attend. The second family (named 'de Voss'?) arrived soon after the Grunfelds and presumably moved in at Sunnyside. The father of this family had been a dock worker in Belgium and no doubt was welcomed onto a local farm where, like Wilhelm Grunfeld, he soon found work. The family from the bungalow visited the Boughey family at their Tilston Road cottage and Les, who was only four at the time, remembers being fascinated by their unfamiliar language and foreign ways.

One writer has described the manner in which the British received the Belgian refugees as "a sign both of timeless human generosity and of the moral idealism of the first part of the war". It is to be hoped that Malpas continued its warm hospitality since in other parts of the country, once the novelty had worn off, as the same writer expresses it, "many an unfortunate Belgian found himself in the position of the much-adored kitten which has grown into an unwanted cat". We know that the two families were still in Malpas in June 1915 but the records do not tell us how long they remained after that.

'LABOURING TO PROVIDE COMFORTS'

The Malpas War Effort

While the people of Malpas rallied round to support the Belgian refugees and the wounded soldiers at The Bolling, it was only natural their greatest concern should be for the young men of the town who had enlisted for military service, some of them overseas, others at training camps in this country. Local ladies set up a sewing group and the post office workers - of whom there were many in those days when Malpas was an important main post office - held a 'Cinderella' dance (finish at midnight!) to raise funds to support the ladies in their "excellent service in the interests of the soldiers in England and at the front". The sewing group soon expanded into a bigger enterprise which became known as the Malpas Soldiers and Sailors Comforts Parcels Fund. A varied programme of regular events was arranged to support the fund and when, in January 1916, Tom Mercer and Joseph Bussey sent off the latest batch of parcels to the front it was reported that the postage had cost over two pounds, therefore "it is safe to assume that the parcels have not been few in number"!

A joint secretary of the fund was the Rector "who is one of the most enthusiastic workers in the cause of carrying some ray of comfort and home-touch to the boys now fighting on land and sea", and another faithful supporter was a Mrs Smith "who had knitted a very large number of socks". Money was raised in many ways for the fund, which was started by selling off a cheese donated by Mr William Hough. Further contributions came through such efforts as whist drives and dances in the Jubilee Hall; an entertainment on the Rectory lawn, featuring artistes from the large army training camp at Prees Heath; and auctions of livestock, including calves, pigs and ducks. Perhaps the most enterprising was the 'multiple auction' of a pig in 1917, which was re-sold eighteen times to raise a total of sixty four pounds! Even the wounded at The Bolling made a contribution. At a rummage sale in the Jubilee Hall "golliwogs made by the soldiers met a ready sale".

Also in need of financial support were many families whose menfolk had gone off to the war, leaving them without their main breadwinners. Their situations in many cases improved with the development of a properly regulated system of 'separation allowances', and with increasing opportunities for women to take up paid work. Nevertheless, for the first year or two of the war, some sort of voluntary aid was seen as necessary and within two days of Britain entering the war the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) called for the setting up of a National Relief Fund. Within a fortnight of the Prince's appeal Malpas had formed its own Relief Committee, with Mr Danily as treasurer. Matthew Henry Danily (named after the famous seventeenth century theologian who was born at Iscoyd, and after whom 'Danily Court' is named) had been headmaster of the Malpas Grammar School, which closed around 1900, as well as being the postmaster who built the present post office frontage onto Beech House in the High Street.

One of the earliest contributions to the Malpas fund was the sum of £1.2s.10½d (114½p) raised at a meeting of the Malpas Brotherhood, a men's society formed by Mr Danily in 1908. At first there was considerable support for the Prince's Fund throughout Cheshire but the contributions to it seem to have decreased considerably by the end of 1915, up to which time Malpas had contributed about £265. The county did not make many claims on the fund and only four communities - Buglawton, Hollingworth, Lower Bebington and Macclesfield - requested relief, to a total sum of £510.

SAVINGS SCHEMES AND OUTINGS TO OLDCASTLE

Supporting the National War Effort

As the war situation deteriorated towards the end of 1916 it became obvious that Britain would need considerably more finance to hold its own, both at home and on the battlefield. Early in that year the Government had proposed a War Savings Scheme in which everyone would be entitled to participate. In December 1916 Canon Armitstead presided over the launch of the Malpas and



The Alport Schools, probably just before the First World War.
The boys are on the playground which is now the front lawn.

(Malpas Library)



Alport Girls' School around 1914
(Mr. L. Boughey)

District War Savings Association. Mr Smith, headmaster of the Alport Boys' School, was appointed treasurer and took up his post every Saturday evening in the Jubilee Hall, from seven to eight o'clock, to sell War Savings Certificates. By the end of the following July, £1227 had been paid into the scheme, representing 1,583 certificates, and in February a 'satellite' scheme was set up at Tallarn Green, adding to the 34,000 Associations with over three million members nationwide. By June 1917 the Malpas Association had started to diversify its activities, and played a part in the food economy campaign by sponsoring food exhibitions and cookery demonstrations at the Jubilee Hall.

While the adult members of the community were 'doing their bit' in various ways, including support for the Red Cross hospital, their efforts on behalf of the Malpas Comforts Parcels Fund, contributions to the Prince of Wales' Relief Fund and participation in the War Savings Scheme, the schoolchildren were also helping in a very practical way.

Bill Jones, Ben White and Les Boughey all remembered afternoons spent near to home, where the Springfield estate now stands, and farther afield at Oldcastle, Wychough and Overton Common, collecting blackberries. This was at the request of the Ministry of Food and the fruit was used to manufacture jam for the troops. Bill Jones also remembered that Miss Wright, his teacher, would encourage them to collect crab apples at the same time, for her own jelly making! In one week the Alport Girls' School collected nearly 250 pounds of blackberries. These were packed in regulation baskets provided by the Ministry of Food and sent from Malpas station to an army jam factory. In return the school would have received a cheque in recognition of their efforts, calculated at threepence (1½p) for each pound of blackberries.

In September 1917 Mrs Rasbotham, one of the school managers, visited the Alport boys to ask them to collect horse chestnuts. The boys were not slow to respond and, inevitably, their first target was the magnificent tree on the Alport lawn which had been planted as a memorial to a former headmaster.

It had been discovered that horse chestnuts contain a chemical, also present in flour, that was then essential in the making of munitions. Therefore the 'conker collection' helped to conserve valuable stocks of flour for bread making. By this stage in the war the shortage of flour had caused the quality of bread to deteriorate markedly, with the inclusion of many additives.

Another early campaign involving schoolchildren was the 'National Egg Collection' for wounded soldiers and sailors. The Rector regularly visited the Alport Schools to encourage the pupils to participate in this scheme, returning later to reward their efforts with 'egg collecting certificates'.

'NO LONGER ANY OPTION'

Recruits, Volunteers and the Tribunals

As the war intensified, so did the drive to recruit men for the armed forces. Despite the response to Lord Kitchener's early appeals, many more were urgently needed to replace the thousands upon thousands lost during the first year of the war in such battles as Mons, the Marne, Ypres and Loos.

For a time Malpas seems to have been singled out as a community slow to answer the call for recruits after the first wave of men had left the town in 1914. A 'Working Man', as he signed himself, wrote to the local paper to criticise in particular the farmers and tradesmen who were holding their sons back, on the grounds that they needed them to keep their businesses running. "If the fathers will not go," he complained, "their sons ought to go and help the working men and the gentry who are dying on the battlefield." In fact, this was only a local reflection of the national situation, where there was conflict throughout the war over the difficult question as to how businesses, including farms, which were essential to support the war effort, could continue to function if key workers were taken for the armed forces. In the same paper (May 1915) Wyndham Lewis of Bettisfield Park wrote to support



Troops marching through Malpas. These are probably some of the party of 800 officers and men of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers who visited Mr. & Mrs. Greenshields and their wounded son-in-law, Captain Walwyn, at 'The Beeches' in October 1914

(Mr. L. Boughey)



Malpas men in camp in 1914 at Langley Park, Loddon, Norfolk. On the extreme right is Lawrence Wycherley and next to him is Evan Langley from near Barmere

(Mr. F. Wycherley)

Lord Kitchener's appeal for 300,000 more men. "Don't," he pleaded, "let us wait for so degrading a term as conscription."

In the previous month a meeting called by Mr Sandbach, with a view to forming a Volunteer Corps in Malpas, had not been very successful. However, by July the Corps was established and growing steadily. By October it numbered about twenty five men, fully equipped with service rifles, who drilled in the Jubilee Hall on Monday evenings and route marched on Saturday afternoons. Ben White remembers them also drilling in a field at Kidnal, under their commander Mr F W Wolley-Dod, of Edge Hall. As well as being distinguished in its record for service abroad, the Wolley-Dod (formerly Dod) family has a strong tradition for supporting local volunteer forces. Edward Dod was a captain in the Royalist garrison at Cholmondeley during the Civil Wars; a later Mr Dod commanded the local volunteers around 1800, during the time of the Napoleonic Wars; and the late Major J C Wolley-Dod commanded the Hampton Home Guard Company during World War II. Some of the Malpas volunteers in 1915 were veterans of the Boer War, at the turn of the century, among them George Chesworth of 'The Lydgate'. Known as 'King' Chesworth, he is commemorated along with Arthur Caldecott of Oldcastle, in a Boer War poem published in the 'Whitchurch Herald' in March 1901. It starts:

When the last Yeoman draft went forth,
To conquer or to fall,
Foremost of townlets in the north
Rose Malpas to the call.

By June 1915 Malpas was again rising to the call. "Recruiting, which it is alleged has not been of the best character in Malpas, was tried in a somewhat new style on Sunday and the results were very satisfactory. Just as the public were returning from their various places of worship a rallying bugle call, given by a boy scout from Crewe, rang through the town, and was mistaken by many as the call of the Fire Brigade, who use a bugle. The townspeople rushed out, and many gathered in wonderment round the Cross to find that it was a surprise gathering for recruiting for the army." Whether the boy scout had blown his bugle in genuine innocence or whether it was a



'King' George Chesworth who had fought in the Boer War as a member of the Cheshire Yeomanry. He joined the Malpas Volunteer Corps during the Great War. This photograph of him in his Yeomanry uniform hangs in the clubroom of the Malpas Bowling Club and Institute.

crafty recruiting ploy, the fact remains that by the end of the day at least ten men had answered the call to the colours.

During the following month Herbert Asquith's new coalition government passed the National Registration Bill, which required all men between the ages of 15 and 65 not already enlisted to register their occupations. As the cabinet minister Walter Long stated, when he presented the Bill to Parliament: "The Bill does not propose to compel any ... to serve either in the field of battle or in the factory ... but it will compel them to declare that they are doing nothing to help their country in her hour of crisis." George Richardson, Clerk to the Rural District Council, was instructed to carry out National Registration in Malpas and, after attending a training session at Shrewsbury, managed to complete most of the task during the second half of August - a total of 425 extra hours of work for him!

National Registration was to provide the basis for a further round of recruiting under what became known as 'Lord Derby's Scheme', in October 1915. Lord Derby, the Under-Secretary for War, was instructed to put into practice a plan whereby every adult male between 28 and 41 was personally asked to attest - that is, to undertake to enlist when called for - subject to the promise that attested men would be divided into the single and the married, each of these groups being subdivided into twenty-three classes according to age. Each class would be called up as required, starting with the younger single men and leaving the married men until all the single had been called. Certain occupations were reserved or 'starred', such as munitions making, coal mining, railway work, the merchant service, public utility services and some branches of agriculture. There was a great campaign, including door-to-door interviews of all eligible men, launched by a special appeal from King George addressed to 'My People'. Men working in munitions were issued with a special badge to show that they were exempt, and this included some from Malpas who travelled daily by rail to the munitions factory at Queensferry. Among them was Thomas Boughey, father of Les, who had worked previously for Thomas Huxley the builder.

Lord Derby's Scheme did not produce the required results. Out of two million single men who had not enlisted before its commencement, only 343,000 effectively attested. An innovation which resulted from the Scheme was the setting-up of local tribunals to hear the cases of those who wished to apply for exemption from call-up, on whatever grounds. Although many people might particularly associate tribunals with the 1939-1945 War and the much publicised cases of conscientious objectors applying for exemption on religious or moral grounds, this was not a major issue during the first World War, although about 16,000 cases of conscientious objectors were recorded. Herbert Asquith declared that "the voices of a small minority who advocated peace were like the twittering of sparrows in a thunderstorm". Perhaps this should be considered against the words of one who became converted to pacifism during the course of the war, who argued that "if the sufferings of these men (i.e. the conscientious objectors) were not physically so terrible as those of their comrades in the trenches, they were at least sufficiently great to deter any 'shirkers' and cowards from attempting to evade military service by calling themselves conscientious objectors". The subject of war resistance was, and still is an emotive subject. However, it seems unlikely that the notorious 'white feathers', regarded as an accusation of cowardice, were ever handed out to men on the streets of Malpas.

The Malpas Local Tribunal met for the first time in January 1916, dealing with about 20 cases in person, out of 80 cases which had been notified. The setting-up of local tribunals, which continued their work until the end of the war, was soon to be followed by the Military Service Act which took effect in early 1916, fulfilling the prophecy of an editorial in the 'Whitchurch Herald' the previous November: "The time will soon have gone by when it will be open to men to enlist of their own accord ... they will no longer have any option." The Military Service Act heralded the introduction of conscription, thus ending the right enjoyed by men for many generations to decide for themselves whether or not to enlist for the armed forces. It also heralded the setting-up of a second level of tribunals, designed

specifically to hear appeals against call-up under the terms of the Act.

Who sat on the panels for these tribunals? Who were the men - never women - who were to decide the fate of those seeking exemption? They were local councillors, retired military men, influential landowners and others regarded as being of standing in the community. And, as a member of the Tarvin Rural District War Agricultural Committee pointed out, many of the local tribunals consisted chiefly of farmers. It must have been very difficult for them to take a totally objective view when a skilled farm worker was in front of them. Who, anyway, would really want to be responsible for sending a man into the hell of the battlefield? How very difficult it must have been too for some members to take a totally objective view, if they had already lost sons of their own in the early days of the war. They must have turned many times to the Military Representative required to be present at each sitting, to help them make their final judgement.

Typical cases which came before the Malpas tribunals included many farmers pleading exemption for their sons; craftsmen such as blacksmiths, wheelwrights and millers appealing for their skilled workers; a threshing machine proprietor appealing for his driver; and both the Cholmondeley and Drake estates asking to retain key forestry workers. Some exemptions were granted; some were given a 'stay of execution'; and some exemptions were conditional, such as that of the blacksmith's assistant who was allowed to stay, so long as he made a specified number of horseshoes each week for the army. Even in these trying times, a dry sense of humour was apparent, such as in the case of another local blacksmith who had been invalided out of the forces early in the war, then subsequently called for examination eight times. "It is very annoying," he complained to the tribunal, "to be called up so often." "Yes," replied the military representative on the panel, "the whole war is annoying"!

The authorities were relentless in the pursuit of those who attempted to evade conscription. If those on the official lists of eligible men failed to present themselves at the recruiting office,

they might find their names published in the 'Whitchurch Herald', with a notice asking for information on their whereabouts. Others deserted from their training camps and sought refuge back in their home areas. There are a number of recorded cases of the police hunting out deserters in the Malpas area. One of them was finally besieged in the Dutch barn where he was hiding out, tracked down by a sharp eyed constable who had noticed marks on the barn supports, caused by the fugitive climbing up to the roof. His brief spell of freedom ended abruptly as he jumped straight into the arms of Sergeant Meredith.

It is estimated that, from Malpas town and the immediately surrounding parishes, just over 300 men served in the armed forces during the 1914-1918 War. Of these, over fifty died either in action or as a result of their wounds. A similar dreadful toll, ripping the heart out of the community, could be recounted for most other towns and villages across the country. It is not the purpose of this book to tell of the military experiences of the Malpas men who went to the war. Maybe their stories will be told some other time. Perhaps a fitting epitaph for this 'lost generation' can be found in the words of Wilfred Owen, the Oswestry born war poet, who wrote of spending childhood days in Malpas parish with his aunt at "Broxton, by the hill":

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?
..... no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs -
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

(from 'Anthem for Doomed Youth')

Wilfred Owen himself was killed in action only seven days before the end of the war.

WHEN DORA STOPPED THE STATION BUS

Life on the Malpas Home Front

While the men of the town went off to the war, so Malpas did its best to continue with some sort of normal daily life. As the war dragged on there were increasing shortages of food, fuel and luxuries but in agricultural communities like Malpas these were far less apparent than in the towns. At times it might almost have been easy to forget there was a war on, were it not for the missing menfolk. Never could there be any real comparison between their situation and that of those left behind. One writer describes the hardships on the 'home front' as "the flickering of a match compared with the hell of the Western front".

Ben White, living just out of the town at Kidnal, could not recollect any shortages and Les Boughey says that his family never went hungry, particularly as "there were always plenty of rabbits". But he also remembers his brother John coming home on leave from the front, still covered in the mud of the trenches. Mrs Boughey would throw his lice-ridden uniform straight out into the back yard while John crouched by the fire with his head in his hands, muttering the names of his fallen comrades and occasionally whistling, as if in imitation of "the shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells". John Boughey, and all those like him, must have found it so difficult to relate to the tranquillity of Malpas after the continuous pandemonium of the battlefront.

Right at the beginning of the war the Defence of the Realm Act, known as 'DORA', had introduced restrictions at home and given the government very wide-ranging powers to impose further restrictions. Initially this resulted in such minor inconveniences as early closing of shops and public houses, the latter being no bad thing since drunkenness was a great social problem before the war. The Royal Family set an example by declaring all of their households 'dry' for the duration of the war and by 1918 the consumption of alcohol had dropped by half. Prices of food in the shops increased sharply. By the time that rationing was introduced, early in 1918, the cost of living had

doubled, although wages had also risen quite considerably.

The introduction of petrol rationing under DORA, during the final year of the war, more or less coincided with the introduction of Sam Bradley's first motor-bus service from Malpas to the station, replacing his previous horse-drawn vehicle. Shortly after its introduction the service was stopped, under government orders, leading to a complaint in the local paper about the hardship this would cause to the munitions workers who travelled daily to Queensferry. How petty such complaints must have seemed to the local families whose men were serving abroad, such as the family from Old Hall Street who, in the same month that DORA stopped the station bus, heard of the death in action of their son in France.

Although ration cards were not actually introduced until 1918, the Malpas Food Control Committee first met in August 1917 to "consider the equal distribution of sugar", deciding upon an allocation of two pounds for every 56 meals, working out at about half a pound per head per week. In the following March householders were required to register with local shops, if they wished to remain eligible for their ration of basic foods. The list of rationed foods soon came to include tea, sugar, butter, margarine, lard, 'butcher's' meat and bacon - but not rabbits! In July fuel rationing was introduced and the Rural District Council set up a Household Fuel Control Committee, appointing George Weaver as the town's controller. The coal ration varied from 50 hundredweight (2.54 tonnes) for a cottage per annum, to 20 tons (20.32 tonnes) for a house of twenty rooms. However, in Malpas which was dependent on distant sources of fuel, the shortage had occasionally been felt much earlier on, such as in October 1915 when the Alport Schools could not be heated because no coke was to be had at the railway station.

Families looked for ways to supplement their food ration and, in season, Malpas children frequently walked the four miles to Bickerton Hills to gather bilberries, or scoured the local hedgerows for damsons. The bilberry crop was so heavy in 1918

that some children sold off their surpluses and earned themselves four to five pounds each, a bonus for which their families must have been extremely grateful.

'LADS UNDER MILITARY AGE REQUIRED'

The Labour Shortage

Perhaps the greatest strain on the community came through the shortage of male labour, particularly on the farms. Even as early as January 1915 some farmers in the Malpas area were threatening to give up dairying and to turn their land over to less labour intensive fatstock farming. As the eligible men enlisted for the forces, so advertisements started to appear in the 'Whitchurch Herald' seeking youths and men "ineligible for the army", "under military age" or "over military age". The Rural District Council frequently voiced its concern over the shortage of men and was obliged to release, for work on the farms, the men it employed for work on the roads. In the Summer of 1917 the Surveyor complained bitterly about the shortage of roadmen and the fact that "in consequence of the dry weather the roads were breaking up".

The desperate situation called for desperate remedies. It was suggested that schoolchildren should be allowed to help and in June 1915 Mr Smith recorded in the school logbook that attendance was poor owing to pupils absenting themselves to help with the hay harvest. However, although it was widespread in other parts of the country, the practice of granting 'exemptions' from school attendance for boys to help with agricultural work does not appear to have been common in this area. The Alport logbook records only one such exemption, for two months in the Summer of 1916.

Other national initiatives aimed at easing the labour shortage were the National Service Scheme introduced in March 1917, "by which a new industrial army of volunteers was to be created to fill the vacancies caused by conscription of workers for military service", and the employment of German prisoners of war for farm work. The

National Service Scheme was not a great success and, so far as prisoners of war were concerned, Malpas was too far from the main Cheshire POW depots at Cuddington (Northwich) and Hatherton to be able to make use of them.

'THE BEST SORT OF GIRL'

Women on the Land

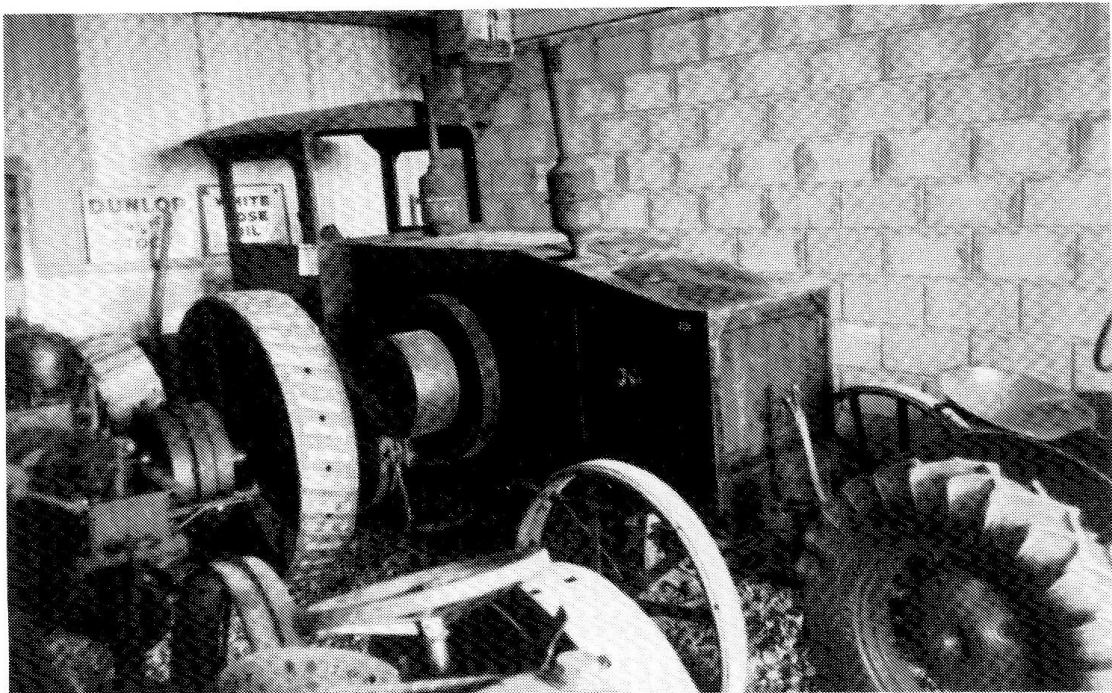
But there was another possible solution. If the men were away, why could not women be employed on the farms and in industry? A lady special constable had actually been observed already in Malpas in January 1915, causing surprised comments, but when the Rural District Council received a letter, in the following August, suggesting that women should be allowed to work on the farms they were adamant "that no necessity had arisen in the Malpas district ... so far". This was in spite of losing their roadmen to the farms! As late as 1916 there was still strong resistance to the suggestion. At a local tribunal in June of that year, when "the Chairman advocated more general adoption of female labour on the farms" the farmers who were appealing to keep their male workers "did not seem to take to the idea readily".

Twelve months later the Rural District Council still decided "to take no action in respect of the employment of women ... which the County Council asked the Malpas Council to co-operate with them in doing". But the formation of the Women's National Land Service in 1916 and the Women's Land Army in the following year signalled a shift in attitude. By July 1917 it was reported that "hay harvest was in full swing in the Malpas area with labour being supplemented by men from local army camps and female labour", and in December it was admitted that "the objections which were very common among farmers last year to female labour on the farms show signs of wearing off, if we may judge from the number now to be seen acting in various capacities in agricultural life". By 1918 one third of the total Cheshire agricultural workforce consisted of women, who were reminded by the Land Army Handbook that: "You are doing a man's work and so you are dressed rather like a



'The best sort of girl'
Gladys Boughey (sister of Leslie)
aged 16, in the uniform of the
Forestry Corps

(Mrs. O. Williams)



One of the few surviving 12 25 Mogul Tractors. This one is now in the collection of Mr. John Bownes of Whitegate. The first tractor ever seen in Malpas was of this type (see page 30)

man; but remember that just because you wear a smock and breeches you should take care to behave like an English girl ... show that an English girl who is working for her country is the best sort of girl."

The war did much to liberate women from former constraints. Although Mrs Pankhurst and her suffragettes ceased their protests during the war years, and instead turned their attention to a woman's 'right to serve', the Representation of the People Act in 1918 finally gave the vote to all women householders, and wives of householders, over the age of thirty. In Malpas, in March 1919, "with the appearance of women for the first time as electors, there was a distinct revival of interest in the Parish Meeting for the triennial election of the Parish Council". Also during the war, the Women's Institute had spread from Canada to this country, the first WI in Britain being formed in Anglesey in 1915. Malpas formed its own Women's Institute in the early 1920s, with a programme that included evening classes in craft work, mathematics and English, demonstrating the determination of country women to assert their rightful place in a previously male dominated society.

'NO SUCH MUSIC AS THE HUM OF TRACTORS'

The County War Agricultural Committee

In 1915 the Board of Agriculture requested each county council to set up a County War Agricultural Committee. Cheshire's Committee first met in October 1915 and immediately set up ten District Sub-committees "to take such action as may be considered most advisable to stimulate increased food production by villagers as well as by farmers, and to encourage in every possible way cottagers and allotment holders to live on the produce from their gardens as much as possible, and to increase their production of potatoes, pigs and poultry". Malpas came under the Tarvin and Whitchurch Union (Cheshire part) Sub-committee, which later was sub-divided further into three smaller districts: North Tarvin, South Tarvin and Malpas. Malpas also had a direct interest at county level, since the Rector, Canon Armitstead,

was a member of the main Cheshire Committee.

Opinions seem to have been mixed regarding the effectiveness of the County War Agricultural Committees. They did have considerable powers and were able to direct farmers as to how they should use their land. Where farmers would not comply with their instructions, the Committees had powers to actually take over the running of farms. In Cheshire the Committee did take over around twenty farms, as well as cultivating a similar number of areas of under-utilised land. None of the holdings taken over were in the Malpas area, suggesting that local farmers were performing satisfactorily. The Committees were also involved in a number of other initiatives including: schemes for the loan of army horses for farm work, rather ironical in view of the fact that many of the horses had been requisitioned by the army from the farmers in the first place; the organisation of soldier, Irish and prisoner-of-war labour; the encouragement of female labour; control of vermin; representation on behalf of farmers at local tribunals; and, later in the war, the introduction of tractors to assist in ploughing.

The introduction of tractors was probably one of the most useful initiatives. By 1917 the Cheshire Committee had 25 tractors in use - 12 Moguls, 12 Titans and one Overtime - as well as a further number of the new lightweight Fordsons, 10,000 of which were imported from America during the last two years of the war. In March 1917 the editor of the 'Whitchurch Herald' declared "there will be no such music in England during the coming weeks as the hum of the tractors". Elsewhere in the same paper appeared an advert for "Volunteer Motor Drivers and Ploughmen for Day and Night Tractor Ploughing". With the creation of the Food Production Department in January of that year, one of the first acts following the resignation of Herbert Asquith's government and the installation of the legendary David Lloyd-George as Prime Minister in December 1916, the great drive really got under way to grow more crops and to make the country as self-sufficient as possible. In April 1917 it was reported that Mr Hugh McCaffrey of Hollowood was using a four-furrow Mogul plough, the first seen in the district, to plough the field around the Liverpool Waterworks reservoir.

STRANGE LIGHTS IN THE SKY

A Distant View of the War

Being on the west side of Britain, Malpas did not experience any immediate effects of battle action, in contrast to communities in East Anglia and the Home Counties, where not only did the inhabitants hear the distant rumble of gunfire from the Western Front but also suffered direct attack through air raids. Some twenty five years later the town was to feel and see action much closer to home, when local people would stand on the bank above Overton Common to observe the bombing of Liverpool. Nevertheless, even in the first World War, there were occasions when the town must have felt some sort of involvement with the action of the war. Perhaps the first occasion was a false alarm when, in October 1914, a strange light appeared in the sky one evening. A lone cyclist rushed four miles into Malpas to report it to the police, fearing it was a German airship, although later it was decided that it had probably been a meteor. A similar scare occurred in January 1916 when a number of observers "saw an aerial vehicle with a huge light suspended, which seemed to be surveying the valley of the Dee". The following August, Malpas Parish Church held a rummage sale to raise funds "including the cost of insuring the church against air raids"! No doubt this was prompted by increasing reports of Zeppelin attacks on the other side of the country during 1915. A Mrs Huntley, daughter of Mr and Mrs Hinton of Higher Wych, had gone to live in the south-east and had a narrow escape. She wrote back to her parents, in June 1915: "Thank God I am safe. I am writing hurriedly to you in case any details of the Zeppelin raid last night reach you through the newspapers ... Four or five bombs were exploded round the house. We escaped into the cellar." During the war over 1,400 civilians were killed in air attacks on this country, by airship or aeroplane.

Other events of the war also touched upon Malpas. In January 1915 local residents were quick to send a telegram to Rear Admiral Sir David Beatty, to congratulate him on his victory at the Battle of Dogger Bank. The Admiral was born in Nantwich but had spent some of his childhood at Cherry Hill,

Chorlton by Malpas, where his private tutor was Matthew Henry Danily. Similar congratulations were in order in May 1916, after Beatty's further victory at the Battle of Jutland, an action in which Malpas born Arthur Boughey also served. It was also the battle which earned a posthumous Victoria Cross for young Jack Cornwell. His bravery in action on board HMS Chester is recorded by the memorial in Chester Cathedral.

An event which caused tremendous national outrage was the sinking in April 1915, by a German torpedo, of the Cunard liner 'Lusitania', off the west coast of Ireland. Around two thousand passengers were drowned, many of them children, and it was with great relief that Joseph Bussey of Malpas learned of the survival of his sister, who had been aboard the ill-fated liner. The introduction of the convoy system later in the war did much to reduce casualties to merchant shipping.

Towards the end of the war Malpas became increasingly aware of the growth of aerial warfare, as aircraft became a frequent sight above the town, which is on a direct line between the airfields at Tern Hill, south of Whitchurch, and Sealand near Chester. Les Boughey remembers them well and, since Charles Wolley-Dod was in the Royal Flying Corps, for every aircraft that passed over the boys would exclaim, "There goes Mr Wolley-Dod!" A number of aircraft made forced landings in the Goodmoors/Well Meadow area, each occurrence providing a signal for the boys to rush from the school playground, across the 'Hobbyhorse Field' (immediately opposite the school), to examine these exciting objects. There was particular consternation in March 1918 when an aircraft in difficulties flew underneath the telegraph wires at Bradley, followed by another aircraft of the Canadian Flying Corps, which landed at the Old Hall Farm. It is claimed that this was the first aircraft ever to land at Malpas.

For general news of the war, Malpas had to rely on the newspapers. Although wireless was used for military purposes during the war, there was no public radio broadcasting until the advent of station '2LO' in 1922. The 'Whitchurch Herald'

every Saturday carried war news, suitably vetted by the official censor, and better off members of the town would no doubt have received national newspapers. Information from the papers was supplemented by the occasional talk, such as the Rector's lantern slide lecture on 'How Germany Makes War', in January 1915. This was followed in June by the introduction of cinema to the town. The Jubilee Hall was transformed into the venue for "Remarkable Animated Pictures. Subjects: Dramatic, Comic, Travel and the War". The two hour show played for three nights. It must have been a landmark in the social life of Malpas!

Meanwhile news still filtered back from the front, both through Malpas men coming home on leave and through official despatches. A number of men from the parish were decorated for bravery in the field, including Corporal Groome of Wigland, who received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry during an attack on the enemy trenches at Hooge in August 1915. His letter home to his father the next month simply said: "Sorry I have been so long without writing, but we have been having a rough time of it lately." Military Medals were given to Sapper Edward Tomlinson, son of the Malpas registrar, and to Driver Albert Meredith, son of the town's police sergeant. When any of the men enlisted, or maybe when they returned home on leave, they were possibly sent off to Kathleen Weaver, George's wife, in Old Hall Street. She ran a photography studio and advertised "Your Warrior Boy! You will want an enlargement or miniature of his Portrait". What painful memories those photographs must have evoked later for the families of those 'warrior boys' who never returned.

Perhaps the most exciting night of the war, apart from Armistice night, was when the Royal Train arrived at Malpas in May 1917. King George and Queen Mary were due to visit a factory at Chester, to be followed by a tour of other factories in Flintshire and Cheshire. Their early morning schedule meant that they needed to be close to Chester the night before, so it was arranged that they should sleep in the Royal Train at Malpas Station. No doubt security around the station was very tight but, even so, there must have been many local people who made their way to Hampton that

evening, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the royal entourage. When George Weaver reported the event in the local paper he was quick to point out that Malpas was quite used to royal visitors, referring to the (legendary) visit of James I to the Lion Inn during the 17th century, and that of Empress Elisabeth of Austria for a hunting expedition in 1881.

'YOUTHS ASSEMBLING BY THE JUBILEE HALL'

Social Life during the War

As the men went away, so the social life of Malpas began to diminish. Very soon there were few dances, unless they were to raise funds for some aspect or other of the war effort; likewise not so many concerts, except for 'patriotic entertainments'; the Malpas Brotherhood seems to have gone into a decline after the death of Mr Danily early in 1915; cricket, football and bowling all disappeared from the local sporting scene; hunting was much reduced, partly because so many horses had been requisitioned for the army; and by 1916 even Chester Races had been cancelled, wiping out one of the major seasonal events, which drew supporters from a very wide area.

So while the remaining men worked long hours on the farms and at their trades, or commuted daily to the munitions factory at Queensferry, and while the women were either trying to hold their households together, in the absence of their menfolk, or were involved in such war work as VAD nursing at The Bolling or on the farms with the Women's Land Army, it was left to the young people to entertain themselves as best they could. Any social activities for them tended to centre on church or chapel. Ben White was a member of the all male church choir, visiting Saint Oswald's three times each Sunday, involving about eight miles walking, and joining the older boys after evensong for their card school on the Oxheyes! Girls were provided for at 'Top Chapel' (the Congregational Church, now High Street Church), where the Girls Life Brigade kept going throughout the war years. Every Summer both boys and girls could look forward to the Sunday School outings, or 'treats', to local farms or beauty spots, from



Members of the congregation and Sunday School at 'Top Chapel' (Malpas Congregational Church), thought to be around 1914
(Mr. L. Boughey)



Alport School girls dressed up to celebrate Empire Day in 1920

(Mr. L. Boughey)

either church or chapel, or both for those who were not too strict about their denominational allegiances! These treats were highspots of the year, when the children would be dressed in their best and loaded onto the low farm carts known as 'lurries', suitably decorated for the occasion. When they arrived at their destination, there would be organised games and sports, finishing up with a grand bunfight designed to delight the stomach of any healthy girl or boy. But for many of the older ones who wished to 'put away childish things', there was little to do. There is a familiar ring about a matter raised at a Parish Council meeting in July 1918, when the Chairman said that "complaints had been made about youths assembling by the Jubilee Hall and other places and often annoying people that were passing".

Church and chapel also provided comfort for many during those difficult years, particularly those families who had menfolk away at the war. Some demonstrated their feelings outwardly, such as the lady who paid for a double peal to be rung on the church bells in April 1915, in thanksgiving for the preservation of her four sons who were all serving at sea. Following a national trend, there seems to have been in Malpas an increase in church attendance by those left at home, perhaps demonstrated by the confirmation service at Saint Oswald's in 1917 when 142 candidates were confirmed, including 52 from Malpas parish itself. The 'Top Chapel' had a rather unsettled time during the war years, with a succession of ministers, one of whom left to serve with the YMCA in France. Stability was achieved by 1922, when Reverend Eaton Thomas came to serve the church for the next eleven years. Of the Methodists, both the Wesleyans in Old Hall Street (their building stood where 'Chapel Rise' now stands, the garages being the former chapel stables) and the Primitives in Wrexham Road, there is little news reported throughout the war, after a patriotic concert by the Wesleyans in early 1915 to raise money for the Prince of Wales' Relief Fund.

At the Alport Boys' and Girls' Schools, and the Infant School, life continued as close to normal as possible. Former pupils remember regular visits by school managers such as the Rector, Mrs Rasbotham from Ebnal and Mrs Wolley-Dod, to check

the registers or to test them on their progress in religious knowledge. At the beginning of the war, Mrs Rasbotham came in to the boys' school to read them "Lord Roberts' Message to the Empire"; Mr Freeman, the assistant master, left to join the Royal Army Medical Corps; and on Empire Day, May 24th 1916, pupils of all three schools marched to the Cross, waving flags and singing patriotic songs.

But the greatest effect of all on the town's life must have come simply from the absence of so many menfolk, whether husbands, fathers, sons or brothers. The hardships of wartime restrictions did exact their toll and no doubt the introduction of fuel and food rationing in early 1918 must have helped to sap the general health of the community. It was against this background that disaster struck Malpas, and many other communities, in the very closing weeks of the war.

'MANY FAMILIES ARE UNDER ITS GRIP'

The Spanish Influenza Epidemic

On October 16th 1918 the 'Whitchurch Herald' reported "an epidemic of influenza is prevalent in Malpas and district, and many families are under its grip. Unfortunately the death toll is rather high ...".

This was the great Spanish influenza epidemic which, it is estimated, killed over 70 million worldwide and around 150,000 in England and Wales. The virus had reached the British Isles via British troops in France and the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow. Its first outbreak in this country came in June and July 1918 but the epidemic did not affect the Malpas area until the second main outbreak, at the end of October. The Alport Schools were closed for days at a time, to try to stop the infection spreading, but this was too late to prevent the deaths of many young people in the area. Les Boughey recalls the emotional impact on his sister when her eighteen year old best friend, who lived on a nearby farm, became an early victim. The very first cases reported in the district, typical of many tragedies to follow, were the death of a two year old on a farm at

Willington, followed four days later by the death of her father. By the following March the childless widow had put the farm on the market, unable to carry on alone.

The local paper praised the dedication of the Malpas doctors: "Dr Paulin and Dr Buxton, who until a week ago constituted the only medical aid over a wide area, have had to work day and night, stopping their cars betimes on the roadside to enjoy 'forty winks', which their exhausted nature demanded ...". On December 14th it was reported that the district was clear of the first outbreak of the epidemic but there were further deaths when the final wave hit Malpas in February 1919.

Of the thirty five people buried in Malpas Cemetery between October 1918 and February 1919, twenty one (60%) of them were in the age range from infancy to forty five years. This shows very clearly that the influenza was striking hardest at the young and middle-aged, rather than the elderly, when the figures are compared with similar periods before and after. From October 1917 to March 1918 only 5 (24%) out of a total of 21 burials, and from October 1919 to March 1920 only 3 (23%) out of a total of 13 burials, were of persons aged forty five or under.

Meanwhile the war had finished, with the signing of the Armistice "at the eleventh hour, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month". Did anyone in Malpas have the will, or the energy, to celebrate, with so many killed in the war or carried off by the influenza?

FEW HOMES FOR HEROES

Unrest follows Victory

Throughout the war the buzzer at Logan's artificial manure factory off Greenway Lane, used to summon its workers, had been silent. At the news of the Armistice it sounded over the town once more. The more mobile of the recuperating soldiers from the Red Cross Hospital, when they heard the good news, made their way to the Alport School and grabbed every available boy from the playground. Somehow they had managed to get hold

of drums, trumpets and other instruments, and with these as accompaniment they marched the pupils up and down Malpas High Street, laughing, singing and shouting in excitement at the news.

However, despite the initial euphoria, normality was slow to return. A society which had been battered by war for over four years needed time to take stock, to attempt to repair what damage it could, and to plan its future.

Slowly the men who had survived began to return from the battlefield, although it was well into 1919 when many of them finally made it back to Malpas. The local branch of the National Farmers Union, only formed in March 1918, complained that the army was slow to demobilise key farm workers. However, many of those who came back decided that they did not want to return to farm work, which was poorly paid in comparison with other occupations. Likewise many of the munitions workers, who had been well paid, were reluctant to take up their former occupations after the closure of the Queensferry factory at the end of 1918. Even the roadmen, as the Surveyor complained to the Rural District Council, were seeking new jobs through the recently established Malpas Labour Exchange, tempted by "the higher wages in other employments". The Council quickly took note and raised the roadmen's wages to thirty shillings (£1.50) a week, with a further rise to thirty six shillings (£1.80) four months later.

Some of the Malpas men who returned had been held as prisoners of war, and claimed that they had been treated badly by their captors. Experiences of prison camp, following upon the trauma of trench warfare, must have made it very difficult for them to re-adjust to civilian life. In fact, some of them found it so difficult that they considered re-enlisting in the army, leading George Weaver to report to the local paper "that the discharged soldier is halting between settling down to his old life or joining up again under the new and attractive conditions".

Once the dust of victory had settled, there was a slow spread of disillusionment and frustration at the lack of progress in fulfilling many of the promises made during the war, by politicians and

others, about what they would do to rebuild society once hostilities had ceased. Since mid-August, when it was becoming apparent that the outcome of the war could well be in favour of Britain and her allies, there had been widespread discussion about 'reconstruction'. At a Rural District Council meeting "the provision of cottages after the war formed the subject for discussion, and it is understood that about 20 cottages are to be asked for in the Malpas district". This discussion took place in the light of the Government's promises of financial assistance for local authority house building, and the promise of 'Homes for Heroes' as families were re-united with their returning menfolk. However, in December it was reported from Malpas that: "The provision of houses for workers on the land, which is part of the scheme of reconstruction and to come within the purview of the local authorities, has not so far advanced very encouragingly, and it is more than likely that the enormous demand for building materials elsewhere will give an enormous setback if more life blood is not given to it".

Discussions dragged on and during 1919 both the Rural District and Parish Councils were involved in schemes to increase the local housing stock. An offer, from the military authorities, of former army huts to provide temporary housing was turned down and, in September, a Mr Matthews was appointed architect by the RDC Housing Committee, with a view to thirty new houses being built in the area. No doubt Mr Matthews was well qualified for the purpose but the official reason given for his nomination, demonstrating the considerable public sympathy for those who had seen active service, was that he had "been to the war". Despite the Council's obvious good intentions the plan was slow to come to fruition. It was not until the end of the second World War, in 1945, that Malpas was to see the building of its major local authority housing development, the Springfield estate.

As one writer rather cynically remarked: "Providing homes fit for heroes had become too expensive - the heroes would have to go without."

'ALL THE NEW DANCES'

Social Life returns to Malpas

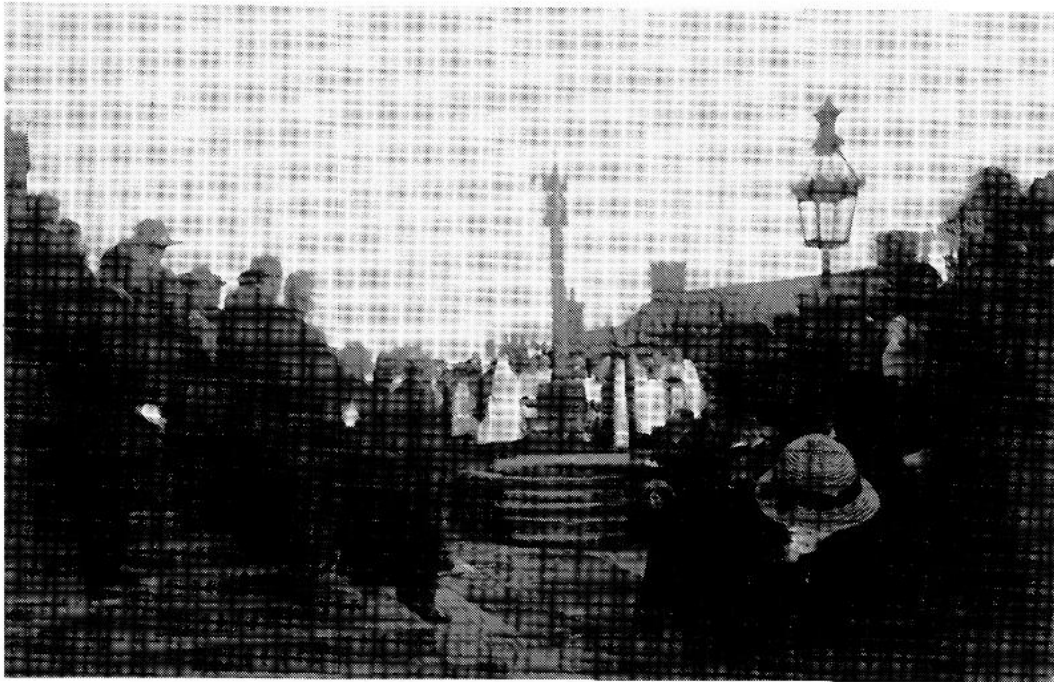
Despite all the setbacks and disillusionments, social life slowly started to return to Malpas. Following the entry of America into the war, in April 1917, transatlantic influences became stronger in Britain, to the extent that the sounds of jazz even started to assail the ears of Malpas townsfolk! Perhaps they were heard first by the two hundred or so dancers who attended the Victory Ball, "organised by a strong committee of local gentlemen in aid of St Dunstan's Blinded Soldiers Fund ... excellent music was supplied by the North Shropshire Orchestra". This was in January 1919. In February, George Weaver wrote from Malpas: "The determination to learn all the new dances has set up a demand for teachers and classes are now being formed." In May bowling was once again taking place on the Wyvern Hotel (now Wycherley's shop) bowling green on top of the Castle Mound, when Malpas beat a visiting team from Saint Martin's (Oswestry). Over August Bank Holiday the Malpas Wakes were revived, with parades, sports and feasting in the town, and the 'Old Romantic Castle Mound' illuminated for the occasion.

Finally, to add some spice to the local entertainment scene, a touring theatre company visited the Jubilee Hall in October, to present "Monty's Flapper"! What sort of a play was that, one wonders? And how did it go down in Malpas?

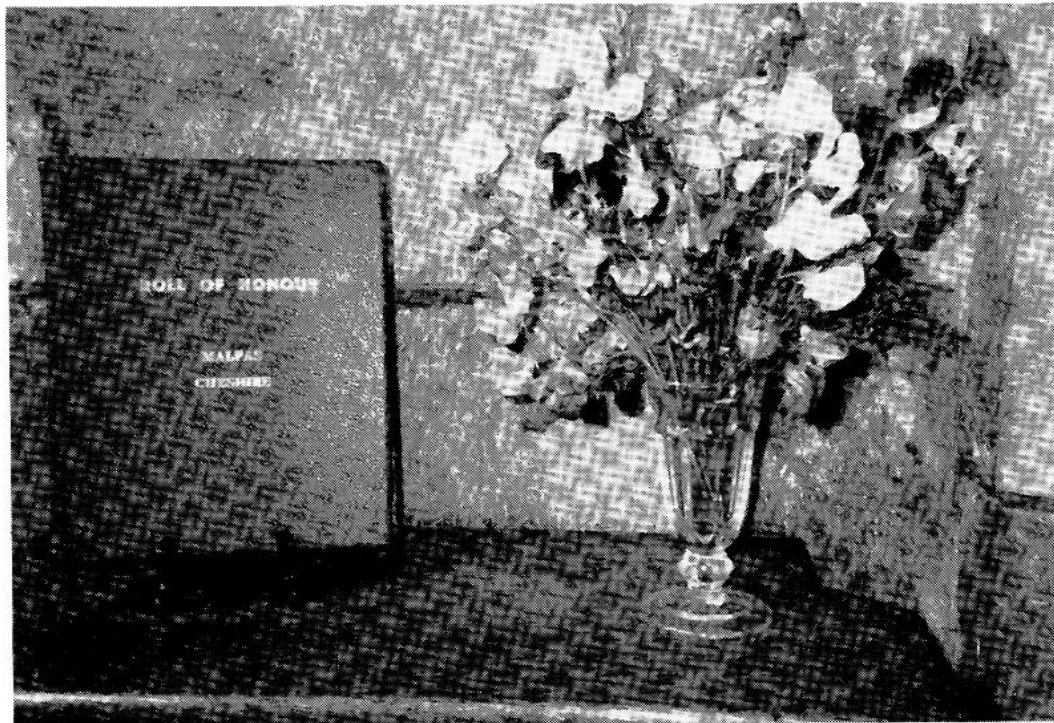
'SOMETHING TO LOOK UPON WITH REVERENCE'

Remembrance and Reconstruction

Alongside the efforts to bring life back to as near normal as possible, there was a growing awareness in Malpas, as everywhere else in the country, that those whose lives had been taken should not be forgotten, and that their sacrifice should be used as a spur to a positive reconstruction of society. The dark days of recession in the 1920s and the further nightmare of the 1939-1945 war were to show what a difficult task lay ahead. Perhaps there is an uncomfortable



'Something to look upon with reverence'
The dedication of Malpas War Memorial in February 1920
(Miss J. Moulton)



The Malpas Roll of Honour in the parish church of Saint Oswald. This book commemorates those killed in both World Wars.

truth in the assertion of the historian Arthur Marwick, when he wrote in 'The Deluge': "... the war is a historical fact, whose consequence, in the end, can only be presented, not argued over. Its greatest significance is as a revelation, not so much of the folly of statesmen, but of the irrationality and love of violence bedded in human society."

Right across Europe, as communities mourned their lost ones they also sought to remember them in tangible ways. In May 1919 the Rector of Malpas called a public meeting in the Jubilee Hall to discuss what sort of war memorial would be erected in the town. As Mr Sandbach rose to speak, there must have been others present who shared his grief at the loss of a son, and echoed his feelings that a memorial to those who had fallen "should be something they could look upon with reverence, and there was no place more fitted for it to stand than in God's acre, which had been the burial place for all Malpas for generations". When, early in 1920, the Bishop of Chester unveiled the new memorial in Saint Oswald's churchyard, he said in his address that "he had dedicated such gifts in all sorts of places ... but perhaps he had never stood in a more lovely spot than this".

On November 11th 1919, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Logan's factory buzzer sounded over the streets of Malpas, as a sign for the townsfolk to bare their heads for their first observance of the 'Great Silence'. It was time to ponder upon the great changes that had taken place in Malpas, as in every other community, and time to look positively to the future.

Peace would do wrong to our undying dead -
The sons we offered might regret they died
If we got nothing lasting in their stead.

(Wilfred Owen: 'Smile, Smile, Smile')

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Photographs

Mr L Boughey, Mrs M Lockett, Malpas Bowling Club and Institute, Malpas Library, Miss J Moulton, Mrs O Williams, Mr F Wycherley, Mrs V Marsh

Additional thanks and acknowledgements:

To Jill, my wife, for checking the manuscript and for her patience; the staff at Whitchurch, Malpas and Chester Libraries; and the staff of Chester City and Cheshire Record Offices; Mr E Hinton, Mrs S James Mrs M Lockett, Dr P Morgan, Mr J Bownes, Mrs S Platt