

# **Life in the Sibfords during the First World War 1914 -1918**



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## Background and reasons for the First World War

In the early 1900's Britain's influence in the world was strong and at least one fifth of the world's land surface came under the control of the British Empire. Many of the European countries, outside of British influence, were building their military forces and alliances were being formed in an attempt to create a balance of power which it was believed would maintain peace between these two strong, separate blocks.

Historians give four main reasons leading to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914:

- Militarism
- Alliances
- Nationalism
- Imperialism

### Militarism

All European countries were militaristic but the governments of Germany and Austria-Hungary were particularly so. The build up of military numbers and arms gave power to the heads of the army and navy to influence their governments and to implement their foreign policies. In 1914 Germany, under Kaiser Wilhelm, had the largest and best army in Europe but they feared that Russia was increasing the size of its army rapidly and would soon be a formidable adversary.

The naval forces of Britain and Germany were in direct conflict for mastery of the seas.

### Alliances

As well as seeking protection due to the size of their armed forces, European leaders formed alliances to keep other countries friendly. Bismarck had kept Russia friendly with an alliance but this was overturned by Kaiser Wilhelm in 1879 in favour of a dual alliance with Austria-Hungary which became a triple alliance in 1882, when Italy joined.

France had had an alliance with Russia since 1894. France and Russia formed a Triple Entente-Cordiale with Britain in 1907 and Britain had formed a naval alliance with Japan in 1902.

### Nationalism

In the early 1900's everyone was nationalistic – patriotic songs were written and sung enthusiastically throughout the European nations. People became enraged when others insulted their country and hatred between nations started to develop. The most nationalistic of all were the Serbs, who in 1900 were still ruled by Turkey and Austria-Hungary. They were

determined, not only to rule themselves but all of the Balkan countries and this destabilised the region and led to rebellion and the formation of terrorist groups.

### Imperialism

By 1900 the British Empire extended over 5 continents and France had control over large areas of Africa. With the increase in industrialisation countries were in need of new markets and Germany was angered by the strength of Britain and France brought by their colonies. Germany only had a very small area of Africa under their control so they entered the scramble for colonies of their own. In order to drive a wedge between France and Britain, Germany attacked French territory in Morocco. They were defeated and it only resulted in strengthening the alliance between France and Britain inviting criticism of German 'Gunboat Diplomacy'.

One final influence and possible reason for the outbreak of hostilities was that of the individual strength and autocracy of those ruling the non democratic countries in Europe at that time. Government Ministers often struggled to exert any political influence over their countries rulers. One powerful individual could over-rule the government and commit their country to war. This was particularly true in Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph sent his heir apparent, Archduke Franz Ferdinand to the Balkans to review their armed forces there. On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie were visiting Sarajevo in Bosnia. They were driving in an open-topped car when they were both shot at point blank range by a Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo Princip. Fatally wounded, they both died within the hour and the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and Sophie set off a rapid chain of events.

Austria-Hungary, along with many other countries, blamed the Serbian government for the attack. Serbia, however, was supported by Russia so war was not declared on Serbia until Germany agreed to support Austria-Hungary. Once German support was gained, Austria Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914. Within a week this chain of events shattered the delicate balance of power in Europe. Alongside France and Russia, Britain was plunged into war with the empires of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey.

The First World War had begun.



## Life in Britain in 1914

In 2014, much was written about the First World War as the nation focused on the commemorations for the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War. I thought about my own grandfather, who I had never known and who had signed up to fight in August 1914 with the King's Royal Rifle Corps in Winchester. He died from wounds received while fighting on the Western Front in 1917. I started to wonder what it would have been like to have lived here in the Sibfords at that time.

But before I started to take a look at life in Sibford during the four years of the Great War I decided that first of all I should try to understand what life was like in Edwardian Britain during the years following the death of Queen Victoria and just prior to the outbreak of War in August 1914.

In the early 1900's most Edwardians worked. There was just a small percentage of professional classes – the clergy, lawyers, doctors and teachers - but the greater majority formed the working class. Many of these worked in dark,



smokey, noisy factories, many toiled down dangerous mines and in



cotton mills. Many had bones bent by rickets and lungs that were racked by tuberculosis.

Those in the rural areas predominantly worked long hours on the land delivering the vital agricultural economy. Others were employed 'in service' for the local gentry. The average weekly wage in 1914 was £1. 40p and a pint of beer cost 2 old pence.



Life expectancy was just 49 years for a man or 53 years



The Sibfords from the west

for a woman. Families were often large with married women producing a child annually during their childbearing years. Deaths resulting from childbirth were common and childhood ailments and many diseases including polio and rickets were serious and sometimes fatal. The majority of the working classes in towns and cities



lived in poor housing stock in crowded conditions. They wore cloth caps or bonnets and if you were fit enough, you continued to work in order to have enough money to live on. Just 1% of the total population owned any land, and they collected the rents. The landowners,



unlike the working classes, were able to take an annual holiday, probably in somewhere exotic like Biarritz or one of the fashionable spa towns on the continent.

The early months in 1914 were dominated by the fear of strikes leading to a possible 'labour war'. Strikes and disputes were



rife from teachers to shopkeepers, to bus drivers and cotton mill workers. The most militant were the coal miners who were in dispute with the pit owners around the country. During a strike of coal porters,



compressed wooden blocks were distributed instead of coal. The Liberal government grasped the need to reform but failed to deliver

measures quickly and civil unrest and disruption

followed. Only the outbreak of War put an end to the militancy and the unions called a halt to all strikes in a spirit of national solidarity. Sadly, many of the workers who had been involved in strike action soon died on the battlefields of the Great War. Some seven million men joined up and marched to war in August 1914 and many were dead or wounded by the end of the same year!



There was also a looming crisis over the demand for Home Rule for Ireland. In 1914 Parliament passed the Home Rule Act in the face of Tory opposition.



Ulster Unionists organised armed revolt and civil war threatened. The Unionists found many supporters in the UK and many meetings and rallies were held.



When war was declared a Suspensory Act was passed freezing Irish Home Rule until hostilities were over and partition did not finally happen until 1922.



In 1914 women were supposed 'to know their place'; they got married, stayed at home and had children, but a group of middle-class gentlewomen embarked on a series of militant acts and marches to draw attention to their suffrage and requested that women should have a right to vote.



They used explosives, damaged artworks and chained themselves to the railings of prominent buildings. The leader of the Suffragette Movement – Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst, was arrested while trying to deliver a petition to the King at Buckingham Palace. But their voice was heard and all the political parties agreed to put suffrage in their election manifestos.



In 1914 suffragette prison detainees were released and they put their energies into the war effort many doing men's jobs. By the end of the war in 1918 a new Act gave the vote to all men over 21 and to all women over 30 who met the minimum property qualifications. This led to an increase in the total voting population from 7.7 million men to 21.5 million men and women and was one of the few good things to come out of the carnage of the four war-torn years.

As the international storm clouds gathered early in 1914 the money markets were reduced to panic. The Stock Exchange was closed in July and remained closed for several months. The Bank rate was increased from the existing 3% to 8% and



then again to 10%. Due to the run on money the Banks were closed for several days successively indicating the severity of the impending crisis.



The roads in England were not yet asphalted so they kicked up a fine dust in dry weather and turned to thin mud in the wet. This led to skidding conditions for the early

type of motor vehicles with their narrow wheels and poor brakes.



developed flying machines. This provided good experience for the years that were to follow.



In London there was a mix of motor and horse drawn vehicles. Three hundred thousand horses were involved in transport in London in 1914 while there were only 3000 motor buses. This combination of horse and motor transport led to a high number of deaths on Britain's roads. In 1913, 717 fatalities on the roads were due to accidents with horse drawn vehicles and a total of 2099 people died on the roads in Britain. By



comparison, in 2012, despite the huge increase in traffic, this number of deaths from road accidents had fallen to 1754



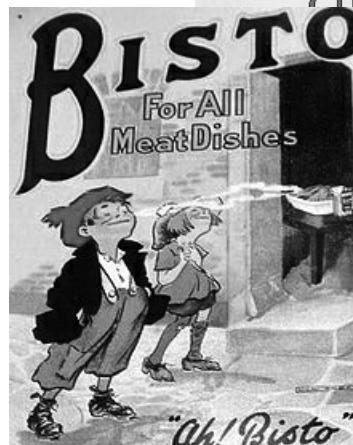
Young men enjoyed the excitement and danger of driving cars and learning to fly the newly



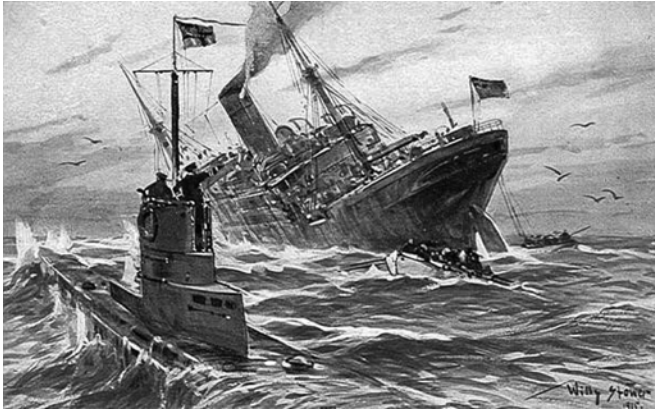
Some food could now be shipped from distant corners of the world and chains of high street grocery stores began to replace the small specialist tradesmen.



New commodities arrived in the early 1900's and included tinned food, Heinz baked beans,



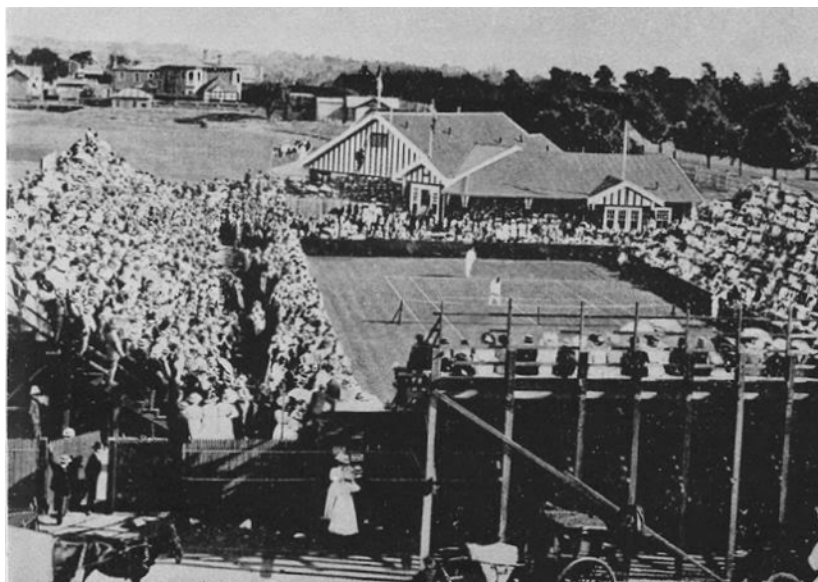
Bird's custard and Bisto gravy and the first type of fast food take-a-way – the Fish and Chip shop. Women were encouraged to improve their dreary cuisine but few could afford the Jersey potatoes offered at tuppence halfpenny a pound.



However, the war started to have a profound effect on food supplies and by 1916 all food imports had virtually ceased due to the U-Boat blockade in the North Atlantic and the nation had to try to produce enough food to feed its population – one that had doubled since the mid 1800's. Figures show that for every 9 men of conscription age in 1916, 2 were unhealthy, 3 were physical wrecks and 1 was a chronic invalid – a direct result of poor living conditions and nutrition.



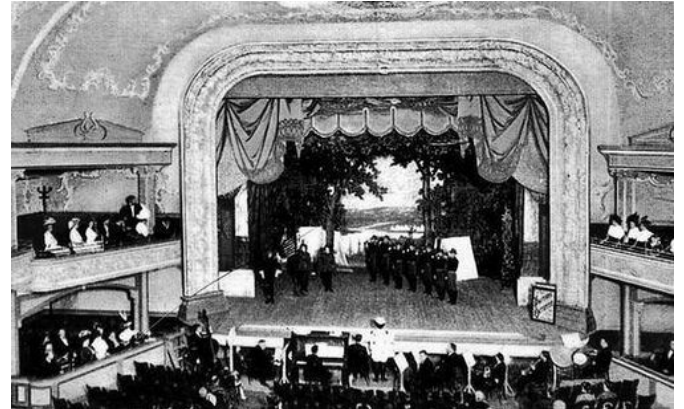
Fashion for the upper classes was heavily influenced by London and Paris houses of couture – fashionable outfits were worn by the upper classes for Ascot, Wimbledon and Henley regatta. In 1914 the first paper pattern was launched including one for a bathing



**So this was the national picture in Britain in 1914.**

All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, Wimbledon, c1914. The Championships were suspended for four years after 1914

costume for mixed bathing in Weymouth! West-end shops began to introduce the first 'ready-made' outfits at good prices and stripped fabrics were popular.

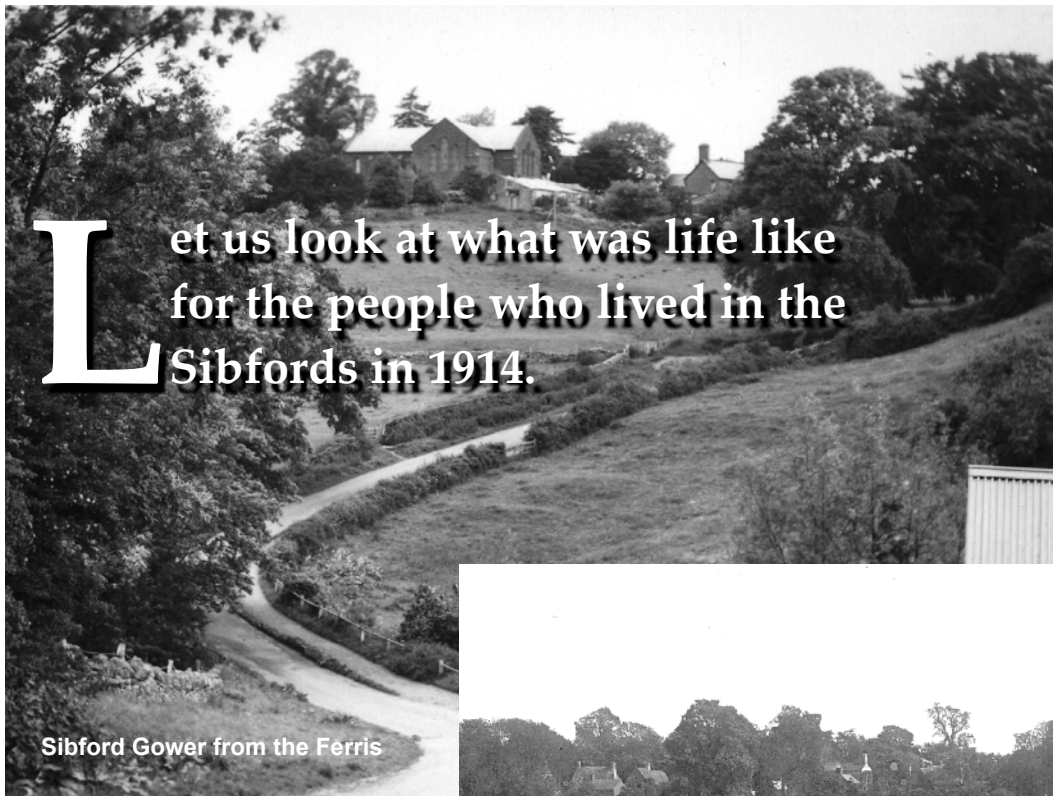


Popular forms of entertainment were music halls,



pleasure gardens, theatres and movie houses showing silent films. During 1914 Charlie Chaplin made his debut in the silent film, 'Making a Living', and George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion opened to rave reviews. Gin palaces and public houses became socially popular – men went to the pubs while ladies stayed home and did their sewing and embroidery!





Let us look at what was life like for the people who lived in the Sibfords in 1914.

Sibford Gower from the Ferris

The population of Sibford Ferris, Burdrop and Sibford Gower was around 650 at this time and they were almost certainly largely unaware and unaffected by national events that we have already looked at. The adult population was almost entirely bound up with agriculture and all the allied trades.



Sibford Ferris from the Gower



The community was self-sufficient – there were two butchers, a baker, a plumber and builder, a sweet shop and post office. This picture below shows Fred Inns' Great Grandfather outside the Old Post Office in the Gower.







Rev. Leonard Moxon, his mother and sister in the garden of the Old Rectory

There was a doctor, a vicar - the Rev Leonard Moxon and two headmasters – the headteacher of the village school in Sibford Gower and the headteacher and his assistants at the Quaker school in Sibford Ferris.

work and were often harnessed to pull different types of machinery up and down the village fields. At harvest time they hauled the trailers bringing the stooks back to the threshing barns. In 1914 there were still a few plush weavers in Sibford, mainly in Bonds End Lane – who were outworkers for the local Shutford Plush company.



The remainder of the villagers were farmers, farm labourers, thatchers, shepherds, cowmen, blacksmiths and others connected with farm work. Horses had an important role to play in many different aspects of farm

The horse-drawn carrier's cart was the principal transport to Banbury. Carriers had been transporting goods to and from the Sibfords since 1811. It was a 3 hour journey each way and took place 2 or 3 days every week. The carrier would stop at his chosen inn, collect dairy and horticultural produce to deliver to the village shopkeepers, do some shopping errands for the villagers and catch up on the local gossip at their regular inn. At the end of the day he would start the return journey – perhaps carrying a passenger or two on a roughly constructed bench seat.



Carriers Carts in Market Place Banbury



Sibford School had its own a horse and trailer to bring scholars to school from Banbury when they arrived at the station at the beginning of the school year. Most of the boarding pupils did not return home again until the end of the whole school year. In the summer months the same trailer would be packed with picnic food and the pupils taken to Temple Mill, Compton Wyngates, Whichford Woods and Traitors Ford for happy outings.



Life at Sibford School continued much as normal during the Great War. There is little recorded in the school archive for that period apart from a piece written by a female student – Theodora Sheppard who wrote about her life at school from 1914 – 1917.



Dining Room at Friends School

Some of the male staff were conscientious objectors and she mentions James Thorpe, who was away for some of the time working with the Friends Ambulance



Unit. Many Quakers were involved with peace work associated with the war. She records her sadness of seeing groups of young conscripts at the railway station in Banbury who were departing perhaps never to return.

At mealtimes butter gave way to margarine and bread and potatoes were rationed at supper time. Supplies of fish failed after only one fish dinner! They were never short of milk but tea was rationed to 3 days a week. On Tuesdays they had 'Slosh' for tea. It was a great favourite made from minced apple and any other garden fruit that was available. Windows had to be darkened and one evening an excited teacher ran into the dormitory at the top of the Manor saying that their light could be seen all the way to the Gate Hangs High.

Mr Harrod read the wartime news to the students at dinner and in her final year in 1917 Theodora records doing 'work' for war victims. Eggs were only

provided twice a year – once on Easter Sunday and the other on the last morning of the half year.

Clearly, there were national daily newspapers but these did not generally reach the villages and most homes would have had very few



books - a bible and possibly a few other religious books.

Society in the Sibfords and the male members met for their annual meeting at the Primary School on the first Monday of June each year.



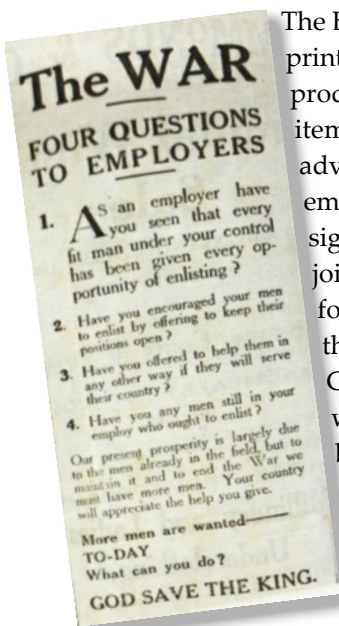
Once the business had been completed and the



members had eaten a large meal there followed a day of celebration for everyone. It was known as Club Day.

The Sibford Brass Band led a procession from the pond to the church for a service.

The Banbury Guardian – first printed under that title in 1853, produced weekly news and carried items of local interest including advertisements encouraging local employers to allow their staff to sign up and join the allied forces. But the Banbury Guardian was seen by few villagers during the war



The British Broadcasting Company was not formed until 1922, well after the end of the First World War, so village households would not have had any news of external affairs even if they were fortunate enough to have an early crystal radio set.

Apart from letters written by loved-ones who were living, working or serving their country away from the village the dreaded telegram was the only means of knowing that a family member was dead or missing in action.



The working day was a long one leaving little or no time for relaxation and retirement was unheard of and holidays a rarity. However, there was a Friendly



In the afternoon there was a grand fete attracting fairground rides and many other attractions. Everyone dressed in their Sunday best and it was the highlight of the year for many village families.



The village supported two bands in the early 1900's – a Brass Band and a flourishing Band of Hope or Temperance Band. Some of

the band members played in both bands! The brass band practised at the Old Post office in the Gower while the Temperance



Band rehearsed in the Mission Room. Sibford did not have a Village Hall during the years of the war.



the village Primary School was used for dances, concerts, country dancing, Morris dancing

classes and Parish teas. But villagers could meet socially at the Reading Rooms in Burdrop or Sibford Ferris.

Many villagers cultivated and grew fruit and vegetables in their gardens and many kept a pig which was fed on boiled scraps and peelings. Once mature it was killed and the meat and salted bacon kept the family through the winter months. Milk was produced on farms locally and delivered daily around the villages in churns on a small cart. Measures were dipped into the churn (as seen below in Woodway Road) and sold according to capacity. There was no refrigeration at home – just a cool larder and a marble slab where the milk was stored in a jug.



By 1917 hardship and hunger throughout the country produced calls for peace but this was rejected so as not to undervalue the loss of so many lives already given in the fight for freedom. Food prices were fixed to prevent profiteering on diminishing supplies. Farmers were subject to inspection to see what foodstuffs were being fed to their livestock. Heavy fines and even prison was threatened to those who flouted the rules for animal feeding. Rationing was introduced in 1917 - it even reached the Co-op in Sibford Gower – each week one person was allowed:

- Bread, 4lbs or the equivalent in flour (3lb)
- Half a pound of sugar
- Two and a half pounds of meat



The Co-op Store, Sibford Gower

## Life at Sibford Gower Endowed Primary School 1914-1918

So how do we know what was actually going on in the Sibfords during the Great War. I looked at various village records and documents and they made for fascinating reading.



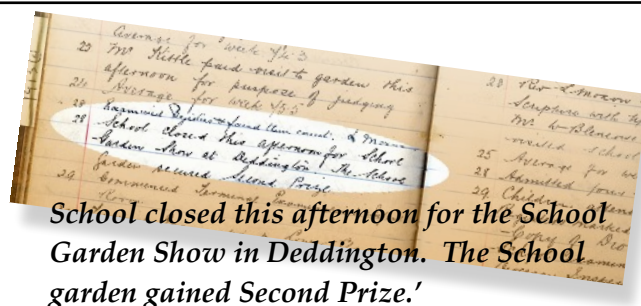
Starting with the Log Book for Sibford Gower Endowed Primary School we find that Mr Hooper was Headmaster in 1914. All the entries in the Log Book were recorded in the fair hand of Joseph Pettifer who was clerk to the Trustees

at that time and the Registers of attendance were regularly examined by the Rev Leonard Moxon who was vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Sibford from 1900-1922.



There were one or two 'dame' schools, attended by the slightly better off but the village school provided an education for most of the village children in the early 1900's. About one hundred schoolchildren walked to the village school from both villages and numerous outlying farms although attendance was affected by weather, sickness and absence was often due to farming related tasks – potato picking, haymaking, reaping and dandelion picking - presumably for wine making. The official school leaving age was fourteen years of age although some children, mostly boys, left to work on local farms long before reaching their fourteenth birthday.

The number of pupils varied between 80-90 but attendance varied dramatically depending on weather, sickness and the time of year. Sibford's rural economy depended heavily on agriculture which meant that children were often needed to help with work on the land. At the outbreak of World War I there was no mention in the School Log Book of the international events which meant that Britain, as an ally of Russia and France was at war with Germany! Instead, on the day war was declared on 28th July 1914 the entry reads:



School closed in early August following the completion of the terminal examinations and did not reopen until the harvest was completed.

During the remainder of the year the school was inspected by the Diocesan Inspector for schools and was found to have made good progress in 1914. He reported that:



*'The children answered well throughout, those in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Standards were particularly ready and quick. The Catechism was accurately written out by all the children and many of the papers on the New and Old Testaments were carefully and well done ...'*

The school garden was diligently cultivated by the boys and two of the girl pupils were awarded cash



prizes of ten shillings each (the equivalent of £30 today) and one received five shillings, due to their success in the National Dolls Outfit Competition in Needlework. The District Nurse visited to 'examine heads' and two children were sent home 'with dirty heads'. The pupils made regular visits to the Church and Attendance Registers were regularly and duly marked, closed and inspected.

These were the highlights recorded in the Log Book for 1914 – no mention of the 3R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) or that Britain was at war!

The first reference to the war can be found on 11th January 1915.



*'two new scholars were admitted – they were Belgian Refugees.'*

The entry then continues:

*'a parcel of seeds were received from Suttons, Reading and three loads of manure were delivered for the school garden.'*

There was still no actual mention of the war and its impact on the families in the villages or why Belgian refugees were living in the village and attending the village school. That will become clear later but from a different source.

School was closed for a couple of months from March to May due to an outbreak of measles. The school leaving age was officially 14 but many of the boys found agricultural employment before they were 14. Certificates of Exemption were granted to those over 13 but some left before then and were kept on the school register although they did not attend. If the employer was known a note was made and kept by the correspondent. School life continued as normal and children under five years of age were admitted for the first time.

Another Belgian refugee was admitted in July. The weather deteriorated rapidly during the winter months of 1915 and bad colds, sore throats, diphtheria and whooping cough were rife and attendance was very low with school being closed again in December.

Empire Day was observed on May 24th and lessons on the Empire were given and Empire songs were sung. There was no mention of the tragic losses being sustained in France or whether any local Sibford families were affected. However agricultural workers were exempt from service until national conscription started during 1916 so only



those villagers who chose to join the armed forces would have been away on the Western Front at this time.

The annual inspection noted that:



*'the school continues to do very good work' but the District nurse again excluded several children due to: 'verminous heads.'*

Children started the academic year after the Harvest holiday on 26 September 1916 and the first entry in the Log Book noted the arrival of:



*'two spades, two forks, two rakes, two draw hoes and two push hoes'*

so the cultivation of the school garden would benefit from these new tools.

An entry on 20 November 1916 reads:



*'Poor attendance this afternoon in consequence of the Choir boys going to Banbury Cinema to see the Battle of the Somme.'*

There is no record of who took the choir boys to the Banbury cinema but it is strange to think it might have been the vicar, Rev Leonard Moxon, who regularly checked and signed the School Registers as being *'correct'*.

The winter months of 1916/17 brought outbreaks of chickenpox and the extreme weather reduced the nation's coal stock dramatically. By April the headteacher records:



*'Owing to the shortage of the coal supply the school has been heated with wood fires.'*

During May 1917 twenty of the girl pupils were awarded prizes in the Oxford Prize Scheme for Needlework. On Empire Day the children paraded around the village with the May Garland and they are pictured here on Mannings Hill.



School did not reopen until 2nd October and in the afternoon the children were given a half day holiday -



*'to pick blackberries to make jam for the Army and Navy.'*

The same happened the following day and on 4th October 1917 -



*'272 pounds of blackberries were sent to Bloxham for jam making'.*

Picking continued throughout the month and by 29th October.



*'four hundred weights and five pounds (453lbs) have been sent to Bloxham Station.'*

So in the autumn of 1917 the children made a positive contribution to the efforts on the Home Front to support the troops.

The winter of 1917/18 was again very severe with up to one foot of snowfall in January. The Old Elm tree in Sibford Ferris is pictured under a heavy blanket of



snow. Illness and bad weather adversely affected attendance and on 12th February there was very poor attendance in the afternoon.



*'Several children during the dinner time went to see two aeroplanes that had landed in the District and did not return for afternoon school.'*

Nothing further was recorded about the aeroplanes but they must have afforded a very rare sighting in 1918.



The annual report noted: *'This is an admirable school, full of life and work. The teaching throughout is on*

*good lines and is being given in a way that makes it at once interesting, and likely to be of real use to the children when they go out to face the difficulties and experiences of their lives.'*

Children suffered from influenza and measles and one child was absent for 13 weeks with tuberculosis.



*'A Tuberculosis Dispensary Certificate was received from Doctor Pearce in Banbury'*

On 12th June



*'The County Dentist came into school and examined the teeth of children from six to nine years.'*

He revisited on 21<sup>st</sup> June



*'to attend to the teeth of eight children.'*

More than a ton and a quarter blackberries were picked in the autumn and delivered to Bloxham station.

On 11th November 1918 the first real reference to the Great War can be found on Page 227 of the School Log Book covering the period 1902 – 1934. The correspondent records:-



*'News was received this afternoon of the signing of the Armistice by the German Delegation thus bringing to an end the Great European War that had lasted from August 1914 to the present time. As the day was miserably wet, after an address by the Master the children sang in the schoolroom patriotic songs'.*

*'12 November – The children gathered in the playground at 2.30pm with flags, sang several patriotic songs, then marched to Burdrop and back with flags flying and singing to celebrate the signing of the Armistice'.*

*'By the end of the week several children have been absent with influenza so prevalent for some months in the country'.*

This virulent strain of Spanish Flu resulted in many deaths and must have affected local families. But, school life had continued throughout the four difficult years of World War I. It seems surprising that so little reference was made to the impact it had on the family life of the school children.

Soldiers, sailors and airmen gradually returned home to their families – many in poor health, injured and damaged both physically and mentally. After the end of the Great War and on 26 November 1920, the School Log Book shows that school closed early -



*'to allow school to be used for a dinner for the men who had served in His Majesty's Army, Navy and Air Forces during the Great War.'*

School continued to the end of the Christmas term although the severe weather meant that on 13th December 1920 -



*'the thermometer stood at 32 degrees Fahrenheit when school was opened'*

These were still tough conditions in difficult times for all those who had been affected in so many different ways by the Great War.

## School Children and Boy Scouts collected conkers during the War

At the beginning of the First World War, cordite - the smokeless powder used as a propellant in small arms ammunition and artillery - was imported mainly from North America, but when blockades made shipping difficult Britain needed to produce its own cordite. One of the ingredients required for making cordite is acetone, a volatile liquid compound used as a solvent. Acetone is made from starch and Britain needed to look for sources of starch. At the beginning of the war we relied on imported maize and even potatoes for starch. But when supply routes were cut, Lloyd George, as Minister of Munitions, required that starch should come from closer to home. He asked Professor Weizman of Manchester University to come up with an alternative way of making acetone. He devised a process to extract the solvent not only from maize but also from horse chestnuts or conkers.

School children and Boy Scouts throughout the country were organised to collect conkers. Once they

had removed the outer green husks 7/6d (37.5p) per cwt (50 kg) was paid for the immediate delivery of conkers to the various collection centres.



Willingdon Scouts - 1917

An entry in the Willingdon School Log Book for 30 January 1917:



*'Sent off today 3 bushels of horse chestnuts gathered by children for the Minister of Munitions.'*

Over the previous weeks there were notes in the Log that the children had been out in the parish during the school day collecting conkers as part of the war effort. Many of the schoolboys also belonged to the 1st Ratton Scout Troop founded by Lord Willingdon and the scouts were also seen around the parish busily searching in the grass under the horse chestnut trees and filling boxes and baskets with conkers. Once collected they brought them back to the schoolroom to remove the green shells, leaving just the nuts. These were bagged up in sacks, put on a hand cart and wheeled off to Hampden Park Station ready for collection and transportation by train to London and from there to secret locations

Factories at Poole in Dorset and by the dockside at King's Lynn in Norfolk, produced as much as 90,000 gallons of acetone a year. When supplies of maize ran short, it was supplemented with the horse chestnuts collected by schoolchildren. The factory locations were top secret and schools that collected conkers sent them to London to be passed on to the factories. The horse chestnuts were fermented by bacteria and enzyme action resulted in the production of acetone. The brew was filtered, distilled and further ingredients added to produce cordite. However the process did not scale up well and production from conkers was abandoned.



## Belgian Refugees in the Sibfords during the First World War

Following the invasion of Belgium by German troops on their way to occupy France the people of Antwerp suffered very heavy bombardment during the days and nights of 7th, 8th and 9th October 1914. The centre of the town was devastated along with many homes and businesses leaving 600 people homeless.

News of the damage that was being imposed on the people of Belgium must have reached the people of Sibford because on 28 October 1914 a Public Meeting was held in the Village School Room. At that meeting it was *'unanimously agreed to take a cottage and send capacities to Mrs Braithwaite with a view to entertaining a Belgian Family of Refugees for as long as seems necessary.'*

The Meeting appointed the following committee, to be known as the Sibford Belgian Refugee Committee (SBRC) to act for them:

Chairman	Reverend L Moxon
Secretary	Eva M Lamb
Committee	Miss Cook, Miss Thame, Mr Prowse, Mr Stevens, Mr Alcock

The committee resolved *'that each member be responsible for a part of the village to ascertain how far we shall be able to get guaranteed subscriptions for a period of not less than a year.'* It was proposed that *'each contributor be provided with envelopes for his contribution and that he hands the same into the Post Office or Co-op each week, to be collected later by one of the committee.'*

Sibford Villagers responded positively and regular weekly contributions of between one and three pence were collected. Some work was undertaken to prepare the cottage for a Belgian family and £2 was spent on furniture. Miss Thame visited the Aldwych Buildings in London in November 1914 to ascertain whether there was a suitable refugee family to come to Sibford. On 18 November she reported that *'there are no Belgian refugees at present requiring homes but that there may be some more come into England any day from Holland.'* It was decided to continue with the weekly contributions and to offer 'our' cottage to a family of refugees in Hook Norton who needed to be re-housed. However, they were not prepared to move to Sibford. Following another visit to London, Miss Thame was



The cottage used by the Belgian families

advised that we were to receive a group of eight Belgian refugees on Wednesday 16 December 1914.

The names of the refugees who resided at Burdrop in the cottage by the Bishop Blaze (now demolished) were Monsieur and Madame de Vries and their two sons, Pierre (9 years) and Gustaf (3 years) and Monsieur and Madame Poppe and their two sons Max (4 years) and Pierre (2 years). The three oldest boys are the ones referred to in the Primary School Log Book. M. Henri De Vries and M. Poppe were cousins and both were diamond cutters and polishers and M. de Vries also had a large cafe in Antwerp.



Bombardement van Antwerpen, 7, 8 en 9 October 1914  
Te midden der puinen op het achterplein verheft zich statig de toren der Kathedraal

### The De Vries family

Antwerp came under German bombardment on 7th October 1914. Madame de Vries rapidly left Antwerp that day with her two young children and walked six miles out of the city. She spent the night in a field hoping to return to the city the following day. After another day of bombardment the Germans moved into the city so she did not return but fled northwards.

M. de Vries, not knowing which way his wife had gone, left Antwerp on the 8th October and went westwards towards Ghent, Bruges and Ostend where he booked a passage to Calais. Hearing no news of his

wife he decided to come to London in the hopes of hearing news of her from friends who had arrived in London and might have seen her. He arrived in London on 2nd November.

Meanwhile his wife and sons, after two days of walking and nights spent in the open, arrived in Rozendaal in Holland. M. De Vries was rewarded with news that his family were safe in Rozendaal and they eventually joined him in London on 28th November where they stayed until they came to Sibford on 16th December.

### The Poppe family

Madame Poppe's parents left Antwerp with their grandson, Max, as soon as the bombardment commenced, and they walked for a day and a half until they reached Rozendaal – Max walked all the way! Monsieur Poppe, his wife, his parents, his two sisters and baby Pierre left Antwerp the following day after enduring a second day and night of terror during the bombardment of their home city.

With hundreds of others they walked, sleeping in fields until after two days they reached Rozendaal. It was extremely crowded, and not knowing that Max and his grandparents were still there, they decided to go to Flushing in



the hope of returning to Belgium. After days of trying to find somewhere suitable to stay, sleeping with chickens in a barn they stopped in Middleburgh where they had news of Max. He joined them from Rozendaal after eight days of separation. Encouraged by the Dutch government, M. Poppe took Max back to Antwerp to see if there was any chance of returning home but it was under German occupation and with no chance of work they returned to Middleburgh where they remained, paying for board and lodging until their money ran out. They were then

put into a school house with only straw to lie on. They decided things must be better in England and used their last money to buy ferry tickets from Flushing to Folkestone - eighteen shillings for each adult and nine shillings for each of their children. They arrived in London on 14th December and arrived in Sibford on 16th December 1914.



### 1914-1916

The two related families settled into the small cottage and the SBRC considered trying to acquire a second cottage but the two families wanted to remain together. Sibford families responded very generously and often at personal cost, offering the families surplus furniture, clothing, milk and vegetables. The first six months of rent for the cottage was also given free. Supporting two families placed a higher demand on the Relief Fund and it was hoped that, once the weather improved in the spring of 1915, some light work might be found for the two men, who were very willing to work. The two oldest boys were admitted to the Primary school once school reopened in January after the Christmas holiday.

Several members of the families became ill during their time in the village and medical attendance was also given free. An allowance of thirteen shillings a week was given to the families and it was hoped that they might be able to earn a little to bring this up to fifteen shillings a week. The committee decided to ask for an increased commitment to donations but this proved to be impossible as the village population – mainly farm labourers were already experiencing personal hardship given their existing donations of one to two pence per week.

By June 1915 the De Vries family expressed a wish to return to Holland where Henri De Vries hoped to be able to find work. The estimated cost for the family to travel was £7. The committee decided to ask the London Refuge Fund for financial help. This was refused so Sibfordians rose to the occasion, organised a Belgian Day and with the help of the Sibfords' Brass Band £8 3s 9d was raised. This money was spent on the fares and general incidental expenses and the De Fries family left Sibford for Holland on 5 July 1915.

This reduced the pressure on the Relief Fund but the cottage rent was now costing 1s 3d per week.



Meanwhile, M Poppe had been trained in driving a motor brake and was employed as a chauffeur.

The SBRC met in October 1915 and Miss Thame informed them that M Poppe wished to leave his work as a chauffeur and seek work related to his former occupation as a diamond cutter and polisher in Birmingham. This did not prove successful but by December 1915 he had gained employment in Coventry at a munitions factory. M Poppe started work in Coventry and the family, now self sufficient, remained in Sibford until rooms for them in Coventry were secured. They finally left Sibford on 23 March 1916 to move to three partly furnished rooms. From the sale of effects from the cottage and further generous donations a sum of 30 shillings was sent to them *'to buy any little necessities that they might need to furnish their new abode.'*

The total receipts from village contributions and donations had amounted to £71.1s. 4 pence halfpenny. This would represent a sum of £26,000 one hundred years later. Total expenditure was £71.4s. 5 pence halfpenny with a few donations still to collect so the accounts would balance. The Sibford villagers had had the pleasure of assisting two grateful, self helpful and courageous families who bore their alienation bravely.'

The Relief Fund was closed at the committee meeting on December 1915 and a full report and accounts were sent to the War Refugees Committee in London and posted in the village as practically all the villagers had contributed either in money or in kind.

What a lovely story of the community spirit engendered in the Sibfords during the first two years of the Great War.

Both families sent letters of thanks to the villagers of Sibford and these are transcribed on the next page.

M Henri De Vries wrote from Bergen op Zoom in Southern Holland where the family settled and he had found work back as a diamond cutter and polisher.

**148 Antwerpsche Steenweg,  
Bergen op Zoom,  
Holland  
17 July 1915**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We am glad to let you know that we arrived in good conditions in Holland. We cannot tell you how happy we were, when we saw our old mother, she is sick yet, when we saw our brothers and sisters it was nine months since we saw one another.

We cannot thank you enough for all the kindness which we have had from the good people of Sibford. Therefore ladies and gentlemen we write here these few words, but as soon as the war is over, we are sparing any money again – you may rely on upon us, but we will cross over the sea to thank you personally, and you will say Mr and Mrs De Vries do not forget us. But ideas will be long in Sibford, then we cannot forget so quick such good people as the people of Sibford.

Ladies and Gentleman once more we thank you a thousand times for all the well done we received from you during nine months, and hope to see you again in a few time.

Many kisses to all the children from Pierre and Gustaf. I shake hands for the friends from Mr and Mrs De Vries. Rule Britannia

Hoorah for Belgium, Goodbye  
*Henri De Vries*



And a personal letter to Miss Eva Lamb:-

Dear Miss,

We enclose herewith a few words especially for your honourable family. Please will be so kind to present our kind regards and many thanks to your father, mother, brothers and sisters. Tell them we will never forget such a good people as they are. The family De Vries wish the family Lambs the best health and prosperity. By writing these lines as we feel our eyes come wet, then we think we never cannot give back what you and your family have done for us.

Now Miss Lambs, give many thousands of kisses from us on your family and specially from Pierre and Gustav – we do not say farewell but goodbye, then when the war is over, there will come a time after sparing any money, I will come over in order to present my thanks personally in happier times. Goodbye,

Yours truly, Family De Vries

PS Miss Lamb

The children are very sorry that they cannot go out no more with you, for a walk, and cannot eat no cake no more.

And from M. Poppe

**Coventry**  
**18 December 1915**

Dear Sibford Friends,

I am so glad that I can write a little English but you must excuse me for every mistake that I shall make.

Dear Sibford Friends I send you my best thanks for all that you have done for me and my wife and my children. I am been very happy at Sibford, I shall never forget the people from Sibford, because you have all done for us your best that you could do. It has now been one year since we came to Sibford. I remember the first day that I meet Miss Thame to London and she aside us to come to Sibford. We have been very comfortable there and you have all been very kind to us. Dear Sibford Friends I have left Sibford but I shall come many times to see you when it is possible for me to come.

Again my best thanks to you all.

I remain with kindest regards from

Your friends

Family Poppe

A further child – Rosalie, was born to M and Mme Poppe in Coventry on 6th April 1917



Poppe family seated

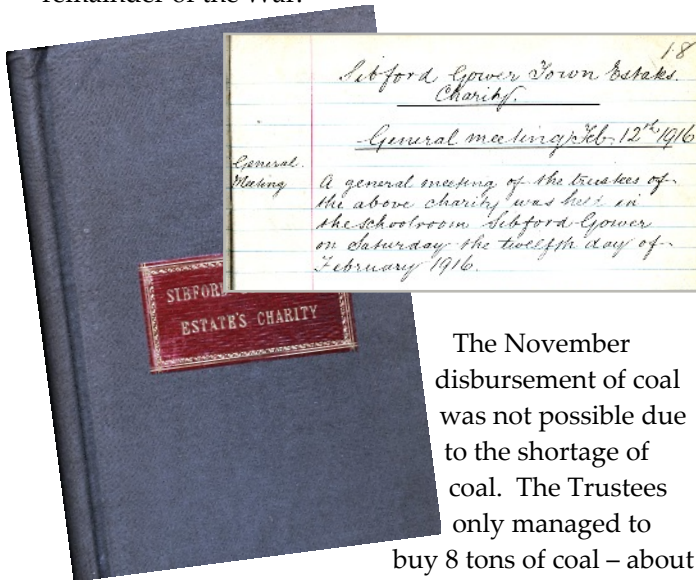
## Sibford's Organisations

**T**he Trustees for the Town Estate Charity met without interruption during the period of the Great War and their meetings were recorded in a fair hand by the Clerk. They met in the Schoolroom Sibford Gower twice a year in February and October.

The meetings of the Trustees discussed the maintenance and repairs required for their assets – Heath Farm, the Schoolroom and the School Master's house. The government had imposed a Land Tax and this was duly paid along with insurances, rates and management fees for the Trust's assets. They also provided prizes to the School for Scripture, Horticulture, and Sewing and supported the Sibford Clothing Fund set up by the Rev Moxon. They considered applications from residents of Sibford Gower and Burdrop for free allocations of coal and they

paid the Co-op store for supplies of Bovril and Soups for those in need.

In 1916 the limit on the value of the coal distribution (7 shillings per application) was rescinded for the remainder of the War.



The November disbursement of coal was not possible due to the shortage of coal. The Trustees only managed to buy 8 tons of coal – about

half the usual amount, and this was allocated in January 1917. During the four years of the war the price of coal varied from 22shillings and 11pence per ton to 27shillings and 11pence per ton – a cost price rise of just over 22%. The Trustees accounts show entries for the purchase of wood. The shortage and cost increase in coal during the war prevented the full disbursement of coal to needy villagers but the accounts show entries for the purchase of wood which may have replaced the temporary shortage of coal.

Between 1914 and 1918 business was conducted very much as usual ensuring the Trust's assets were well managed to allow the disbursements allowed under the terms of the Charity.

**A**nother of the Sibfords oldest organisations, **Sibford Cricket Club**, continued to meet and to play cricket during the early war years.

Sibford Cricket Club started in 1876 and games were played in a large field opposite Holy Trinity Church in the heart of Sibford Gower – where the village hall is now. Games were played against local teams from nearby villages and on 25 July 1914 the Sibford team were playing an away match against Adderbury.

The Cricket Club's score book shows that Adderbury scored 52 runs and Sibford posted a total of 51. Honours almost even but the game was lost.

Match played at Adderbury on July 25<sup>th</sup> 1914

Adderbury vs Sibford 1st Innings

NO.	PLAYER'S NAME	RUNS AS SCORED	HOW OUT	WICKETS	TOTAL
1	J. J. Walker	1	Bowled	Woolgrove	1
2	A. Hasset	11	Bowled	Poulton	1
3	P. H. Woodfield	11	Bowled	Woolgrove	2
4	A. Bryant	1	Run out		2.3
5	A. H. Webb	1	Bowled	Woolgrove	1
6	P. H. Webb	21	Bowled	Poulton	3
7	A. G. Webb	10	Run out		2
8	A. P. Webb	1	Bowled	Poulton	2
9	A. H. Woodfield	1	Run out		2
10	A. H. Woodfield	1	Bowled	Poulton	2
11	P. H. Webb	1	Bowled	Poulton	2
12	P. H. Webb	1	Bowled	Poulton	2
BYES					0
WIDE BALLS					0
NO BALLS					0
TOTAL					52

Sibford players included many familiar family names.

**Inns , Woolgrove , Lamb ,**

**Haynes, Poulton, Webb, Canning**

There are further records of cricket games through the summer of 1915 when Sibford played teams from Hook Norton, Whichford, Swerford, Wroxton and Sibford School.

Some of the players joined the armed forces once the government introduced conscription in 1916 for single men between 18 - 45 years of age. Widowers with children and ministers of religion were still exempt. However, due to heavy casualties in the Battle of the Somme, and by August 1916 conscription was extended to all men up to the age of 51. So the introduction of conscription saw changes for the men of Sibford. They left their families and loved ones and joined the men already serving on the Western Front and further afield. By the end of the war in 1918 two and a half million men had been conscripted into military service. Conscription in the UK continued until 1919.

So cricket games lapsed and did not recommence until 1919 when the Married versus Singles Match was introduced. This is a picture of the teams playing in this match in 1920's,





So let's have a look at the Sibford villagers who served their country during the Great War. In Holy Trinity Church there is a wooden memorial plaque which bears the names of the 91 villagers who left the village to serve in the armed services. Eva Herbert kept notes as news filtered back to the village and although some of the actual dates of those who gave their lives vary slightly from those in the War Office records we owe her a great debt of gratitude for the information we have today.

Three woman's names are recorded: **Gulieleia M Thame** who served on HMS Osea. **Helen M Thame** who was a Red Cross Nurse and **Evelyn M Everett** who served in the Woman's Land Army Service. These ladies served in the navy, Red Cross and the Woman's Land Services Army but may not have seen service overseas.

81 villagers returned safely to their homes and families in the Sibfords and I doubt we would have such a comprehensive record of all who served had it not been for Eva's careful record keeping. This is why I personally feel it is so important for us to keep records of what is happening in the village now so that future Sibfordians will have the chance to understand what life was like in our time here in the village.

The names on the memorial plaque with a red cross painted by their name are those who did not return and gave their lives for our freedom.



No look at the Sibfords between 1914 and 1918 would be complete without remembering those who did not return to the villages after the Great War:



### George Bodfish

George Bodfish was one of eight children of George and Mary Bodfish of Sibford Ferris. He married Sarah Dumbleton on October 30th 1917. They had a week's honeymoon, he returned to the war in France and never returned home.

In the 1901 census he is listed as a shepherd in Sibford Gower, and in

1911 as a farm labourer.

He enlisted in Banbury into the Territorial Army, and served on the Western Front with the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry from May 1916. He was serving as a lance corporal when he was injured and taken prisoner during the German Spring offensive in 1918, when the British lines were overrun. He died of wounds as a prisoner of war in a Bavarian Field Hospital on 12 April 1918. He was 36 years old.

It took several months for the news to reach home.



### Thomas Dyer

Thomas Dyer was born in Sibford Ferris to Annie and John Dyer. His father had died before he enlisted. The family were now living at 6 The Colony in the Gower. It is not known whether there were any other children. In the 1911 census he was listed as a farm labourer.

He landed in France on 25th July 1915 crossing from Southampton to

Le Havre. During August they dug in and fought during the next 4 months.

On 29th December, a party of Germans raided the British trenches. During the raid, four were killed and 17 wounded. Thomas was killed in this action on 29th December 1915. He was aged 21



### Horace Hawtin

Horace Hawtin was born in Sibford Ferris in 1898, the son of Caroline and William Hawtin, and one of 6 children children. His father worked as a groom and gardener: Horace's own employment is unknown. He enlisted in Banbury and joined the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry

On 1st October 1918, his battalion was in action

trying the seize a railway line near Menin. After advancing about 1500 yards the battalion came under very heavy machine gun fire and took heavy casualties. Horace was injured and evacuated to the clearing station. He died of his wounds 9 days later. He was 21 and buried in France near to 8 of his comrades.



### William Webb

William was the son of John and Mary Webb of Sibford Ferris and was born in 1897.

A recent letter received from William's niece confirmed that William was born in Sibford Ferris in 1897, the fourth of five children born to John and Mary Webb who lived in Rufus Cottage near to the shop in Main Street. John (father) was a farm

labourer and Mary (mother) worked at a school run by the Quakers. (Sibford School) Annie Webb was William's youngest sister. She died in 1975 but told her daughter all about her life



John, and Mary Webb with their daughter Annie



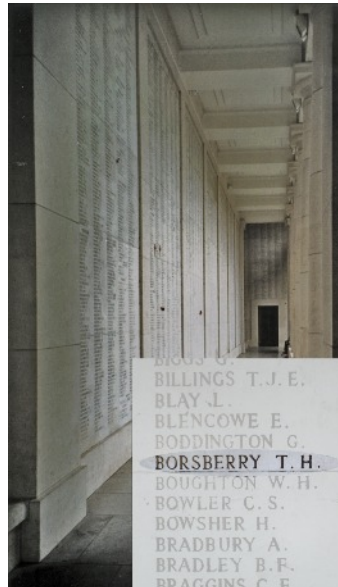
in Sibford until her marriage in Sibford Church in 1926 to a man from Evesham where they eventually went to live. She wrote, "My mother was born on 25 March 1904, Lady Day. Jack and Mary were very pleased that Annie was born on that day as it was a pay day in those days. My mother always had very happy memories of

living in Sibford. The school she attended was a good walk across fields and she took a tin mug with her in the hopes of seeing the milkmaid with yoke and buckets, as she was allowed to dip her mug into the milk. She said it was delicious, warm from the cow, and very welcome on a cold winter's day."

In 1911, aged 14, William was working as a farm labourer. He enlisted in Oxford, in the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry. In the summer of 1917, his battalion fought in Ypres on the Pilkem Ridge. Fierce fighting continued for several months and on the 4th December 1917; his company sustained 10 casualties – 5 killed and 5 wounded. William was injured and he died of his wounds at a casualty clearing station on 5th December 1917, seemingly being wounded the previous day. He was 20 years old and is buried in the Bailleul cemetery extension in Outtersteen.



William Webb, back row, first left



## Thomas Henry Borsberry

Thomas Borsberry was born in Hook Norton into a family of farm workers, a trade he followed himself, in adult life. Their Sibford connection is not clear.

Soon after the start of the war, Thomas joined up in Oxford. He served in France and Flanders from 20 May 1915 and served in the 14<sup>th</sup> division of the

Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry. On September 24th 1915, at 03:50am Thomas' battalion went over the top. The initial assault was successful but at 8am a very strong German counter attack developed, and the Battalion suffered heavy losses. Thomas was amongst those killed. He was 29. His body was not found after the war and today he is remembered on a panel of the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres.



## Harry Lines

He was born in Sibford Ferris, the son of Mary and Joshua Lines. According to the 1901 census he was already working as a stockman on a farm at the age of 13. He married Elsie Green in 1910, and they moved to Gallows Hill Farm, where he worked as a farm labourer.

He was killed in action on the Somme on 30th September 1918, aged 31 when his battalion lost 31 men that day. He is buried at Orival Wood Cemetery.



### Charles David Wade



Charles was born in London on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1895, but living in New York when he enlisted. The son of Charles and Emma Wade of Battersea, London, he worked as a messenger until he came to Sibford Gower to work as an assistant secretary to Frank Lascelles, Queen Victoria’s Pageant Master. In October 1915, David, as he was known,

accompanied Lascelles to New York and worked as a motion picture operator. In August 1917 he crossed the border into Canada via Niagra Falls and enlisted into the Canadian Infantry in Toronto. He joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Central Ontario Regiment and was posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division in France. He was wounded during the Battle of Amiens and died in No. 5 Casualty Clearing Station on 10 August 1918. He is buried in the British Cemetery in Crouy in the Somme region. Frank Lascelles had a engraved memorial window made and put into his home – the Manor, Sibford Gower to remember him and ensured he was commemorated on the village War Memorial where his name appears as Charles David Wade.



### William Barton

We know more about William Barton than we do about most of the others, because his nephew, Bruce Horne is still in the area and has been able to pass on what he knows.

William was the second child of John and Julia Barton. There were 4 children. They lived in a cottage on the land adjoining the Bishop

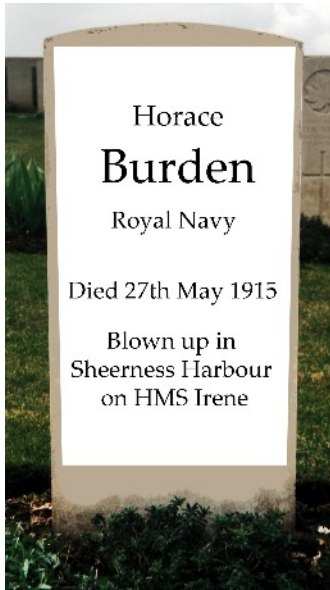
Blaize. William grew up there and became an errand boy on leaving school. Although the cottage was later demolished, the piece of land still belongs to the Barton family.

William enlisted, in the RFC in February 1917, which became the RAF in April 1918, serving as a driver with the rank of Air Mechanic 2nd class. He was wounded in Italy on 11th April 1918. Aged only 21, he was evacuated home and died in the Third Western General Hospital, Cardiff. His body was returned to Sibford where he is buried in the churchyard – where his headstone is the only white military one and is maintained by the War Graves Commission.

### Arthur Charles Haynes



Arthur Charles Haynes was born in Sibford Ferris to Jane and Arthur Haynes. He enlisted in Banbury, and was a driver with the Royal Field Artillery. He served in the Persian Gulf, and was in Alexandria when he died of pneumonia in hospital. He is buried in Basra War Cemetery, South Iraq. He was 27 when he died.



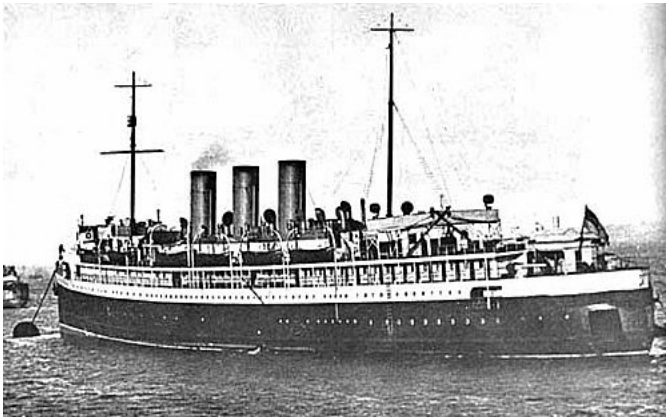
## Horace Burden

There is just one more name that does not appear on the War Memorial and who does not have a gravestone in the War Cemeteries on the Western Front. It is that of Horace Burden, who although born in Brailes in 1886 to parents George and Emma Burden, moved to Sibford Gower at a young age.

immediately requisitioned by the Royal Navy and converted to an auxiliary minelayer. At 11.15am on 27 May 1915, as she was being loaded with mines she exploded, disintegrated and sank off Sheerness, Kent with the loss of 352 lives. A column of flame 300 feet high was followed a few seconds later by another of similar height and A pall of smoke hung over the spot where Princess Irene had been, reaching to 1,200 feet.

273 officers and men, and 76 dockyard workers who were on board Princess Irene were killed. On the Isle of Grain a girl of nine was killed by flying debris, and a farmhand died of shock. Wreckage was flung up to 20 miles away, with people near Sittingbourne being injured by flying debris. A case of butter landed at Rainham 6 miles away, while a 10 ton section of the ship landed on the Isle of Grain, damaging naval oil storage tanks there. The sole survivor from Princess Irene was a stoker, who suffered severe burns but was thrown clear. Three of her crew had a lucky escape as they were ashore at the time.

Henry Burden died on his ship and is remembered on a memorial plaque at Chatham Dockyard.



He was a regular in the Royal Navy and served on HMS Princess Irene which was an ocean liner built in 1914 for the Canadian Pacific Railway. She was





**Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU)**

In September 1914, writing in the Quaker publication 'The Friend', Philip Baker appealed for volunteers to attend a training camp at a Quaker Meeting House in Buckinghamshire. Sixty volunteers attended at 'Jordans' and formed the base of



the Friends Ambulance Unit. Although initially, neither the Red Cross nor the Army wanted to involve a group of pacifist volunteers, this all changed when the Belgian Army was overrun late in October 1914.

The FAU developed on the Home and Overseas Fronts providing support to civilian and military



hospitals. By 1915 they were running ambulance trains from the Front and by 1916 they had two hospital ships returning wounded and injured soldiers back to Britain. Eight hospitals in France and Belgium were staffed by the FAU

The Lamb family from Sibford Ferris were among Quaker supporters of the FAU. Jessie Lamb – sister to Frederick, Joseph, Henry and Bernard Lamb from Grounds Farm worked at the training centre at Jordans in Buckinghamshire.

Her brother Joseph served in the Friends Ambulance Unit while the three remaining brothers all served in the military forces during the War.



Joseph Lamb

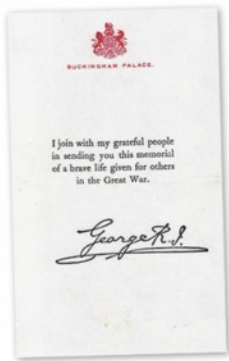
The Home Service set up four hospitals – two on Quaker premises in York and Birmingham while there were two in London.



21 members of the FAU died in action while a total of 1882 men and women had served with the Friends Ambulance Unit. They had driven over 2 million miles transporting 277,000 sick and wounded back to Britain.

## First World War Memorial Plaques

The British Government decided to produce a commemorative memorial plaque that could be given to the relatives of men and women whose deaths were attributable to the Great War including those who died of wounds, accidents or suicide. After a national competition a design was chosen for a plaque to be cast in bronze. Each memorial plaque was accompanied by a scroll signed by King George V. It is also known as the Soldier's Penny, Dead man's Penny or Death Penny.



The production of the plaques and scrolls did not start until late in the autumn of 1918 because the supply of the metal and the paper were difficult to obtain in wartime. From 1919 and for several years after the end of the Great War there were over one million plaques and scrolls sent to next of kin in commemoration of the men and few hundred women who died as a direct consequence attributable to service in the Great War including those who died of wounds, accidents or suicide. Each plaque carried the inscribed name of the deceased below the outstretched arm of Britannia. Around the edge of the plaque were the words:

*"He/She died for Freedom and Honour"*

This plaque was awarded to the family of Thomas Gray Hopkyns – Ivor Hopkyns Great Uncle. He studied at

Oxford and was an ordained minister, who, while vicar of a parish in South Africa volunteered to serve in the South African medical corps. He was killed on the Front Line in Western France whilst acting as a stretcher bearer carrying wounded

soldiers away from the battlefield.



*We have very few pictures of our serving soldiers but of those who returned, we have one of Ernest Woolgrove and one of Wilfred Ewart Inns.*

There is a story associated with Ewart which Bob Lamb and Fred Inns have shared with me.

The Lamb family farmed at Grounds Farm where Bob's father, Frederick Joshua Lamb, grew up and helped on the farm with the sheep that were reared and the arable crops that were grown there.

Frederick had three brothers. They all left their family home in Sibford and served their country during the First World War.



Bernard, the youngest son, was called up as soon as he was eighteen years of age in 1917. He joined the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry and served in the trenches in France. Bob remembered him particularly well, especially some of his colourful language which was learned while he was in the army and not on the farm in Sibford! Whilst serving on the Western Front and after a long day on the battlefield he was sent to a village house where soldiers were being billeted. As the most recent man in the house he was sent to the top floor. It was raining hard and the roof was leaking. He was not happy and voiced his discomfort in no uncertain terms. Imagine his surprise when someone called up the stairs in reply saying: "Now, now young Bernard – your father back in Sibford would have none of that language!" Ewart Inns, also from Sibford, was a

senior serviceman billeted in the same house and was fighting on the same battlefield as young Bernard Lamb!

Ewart Inns was badly injured and left for dead on the battlefield one night. It was only in the morning when the dead were being collected for mass burial that Ewart murmured and the officer realised that he was still alive. He was patched up at the medical station and sent to Malta to recover from a serious shrapnel injury to his thigh. He returned to the Western Front to see more service. The good news was that all four Lamb brothers and Ewart Inns returned from their service overseas alive and well although, no doubt, deeply affected by their wartime experiences. Bernard continued to work on the farm where his language never gave any cause for concern! Ewart returned to his family plumbing business and, with Ernie Woolgrove, brought the first piped water supply to Sibford School.



Pupils and staff celebrating the end of hostilities on the roof of Sibford School. In 1918. The roof line no longer exists as the roof was subsequently lowered

**A**rmistice was declared on November 11th 1918 and the country celebrated the end of four war torn years.

Britain's Prime Minister, Lloyd George, on Armistice Day, the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 said: "At 11 o'clock this morning came to an end the cruellest and most terrible war that has ever scourged mankind. I hope we may say that thus, this fateful morning, came to an end to all wars." Sadly his hopes were not fulfilled.

Conscripted men gradually returned home to their families although conscription continued until 1919. Sibford had lost ten of its own; 81 returned. The total number of military and civilian casualties on both sides in the Great War was 37 million.

- 16 million deaths – two thirds in battle and one third due to disease including Spanish Flu
- 20 million wounded
- British Armed Forces deaths were almost 1 million
- total UK population at that time was 45.5 million.

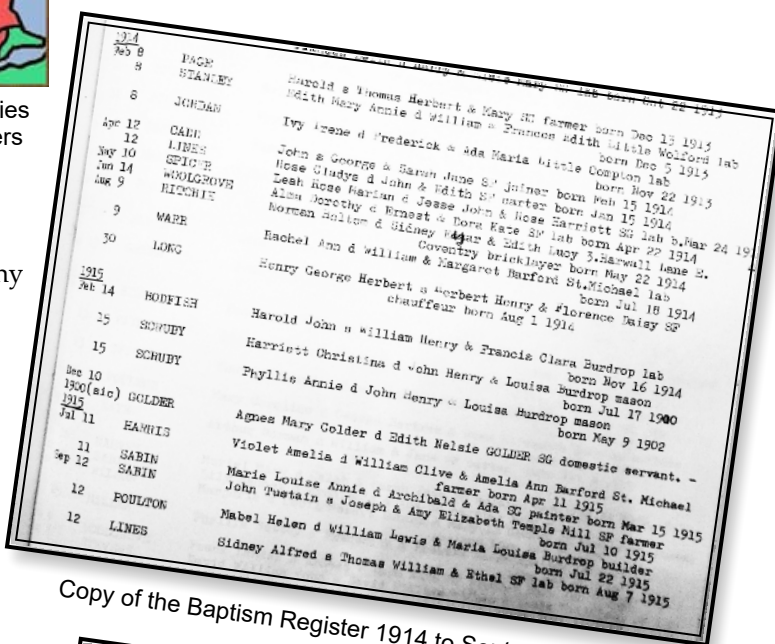


In Europe, after the Great War ended, some new countries were created and others had their former existing borders redrawn

In 1915 two families chose to have their teenagers baptised. All three had been born earlier in 1900 and 1902 – a decision which might have been influenced by the uncertainties and concerns around the War.

It would seem that once conscription for all men (married or single) was introduced during 1916 the birth figures in 1917 and 1918 were lower than in the preceding six years.

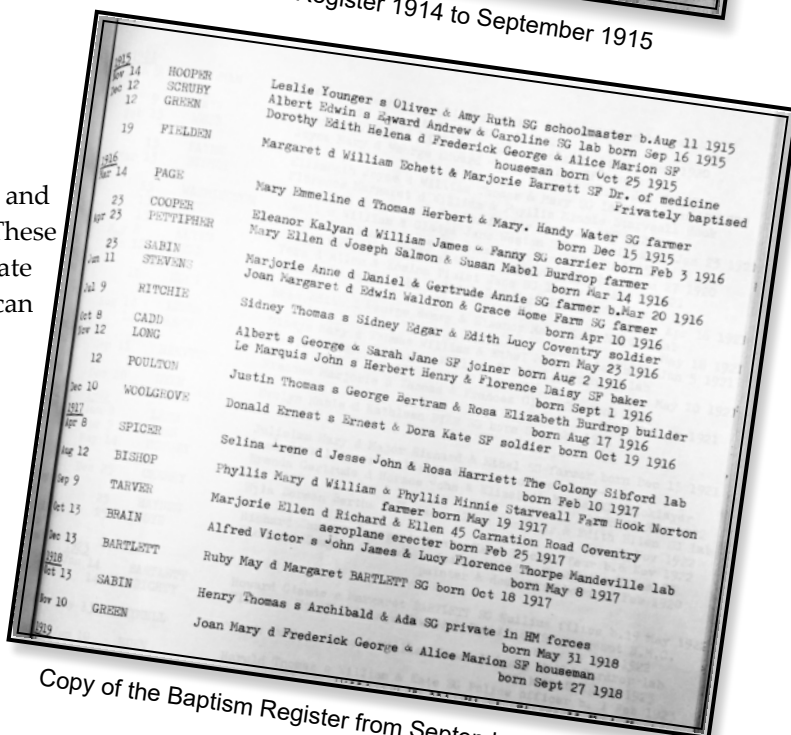
Life in Britain gradually returned to normal, but many servicemen were unemployed due to the many changes that the war years had brought about. Physical and mental injuries meant that some men were unable to work and many jobs, previously carried out by men, were now being done by women. High levels of unemployment and hardship led the Government to introduce a new unemployment benefit scheme to help the families of the 2 million jobless by 1922 – a quarter of who were ex-servicemen.



Copy of the Baptism Register 1914 to September 1915

### Baptisms, Banns and Burials 1914 – 1918

The parish Registers for Holy Trinity Church, Sibford (held in Oxfordshire Records Office) were examined to extract details of baptisms, marriages and burials in the village during the period of study. These records only show those who chose to commemorate family baptisms, weddings or burials at the Anglican parish church in Sibford Gower but they do show some interesting details and trends.



Copy of the Baptism Register from September 1915 to 1918

#### Baptisms:

To provide some background information the baptism records from 1910 onwards were also examined:

- 1910 13
- 1911 5
- 1912 13
- 1913 8
- 1914 10
- 1915 13 (Three were born earlier but baptised in 1915)
- 1916 10 (Conscription introduced in 1916)
- 1917 5
- 1918 2

The register also recorded the father's occupation which showed the range of work being carried out in the villages at that time. The predominance of farmers and labourers reflects the agricultural community here at that time. One unusual occupation stands out above the others. In 1917 Sibford had an 'aeroplane erector' only fourteen years after the first ever successful air flight was recorded by the Wright brothers in America in 1903. By 1916 'soldier' appears in the list of occupations.

George had to return to France. Sadly, he never returned home and died on 12 April 1918 from wounds received during the Lys Offensive in the Fourth Battle of Ypres in Belgium.

The average age of those getting married between 1914 and 1918 was 31 years of age – a higher figure than I had expected to find.

**Holy Trinity Church Sibford Baptisms, 1914-1918**

Father's Occupation	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Farmer	1	4	4	1	0
Labourer	5	2	0	2	0
Joiner	1	0	1	0	0
Carter/Carrier	1	0	1	0	0
Bricklayer	1	0	0	0	0
Chauffeur	1	0	0	0	0
Mason	0	2*	0	0	0
Domestic Servant	0	1*	0	0	0
Painter	0	1	0	0	0
Builder	0	1	1	0	0
Schoolmaster	0	1	0	0	0
Houseman	0	1	0	0	1
Doctor	0	1	0	0	0
Soldier	0	0	2	0	1
Baker	0	0	1	0	0
Areoplane Erector	0	0	0	1	0
Unknown	0	0	0	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

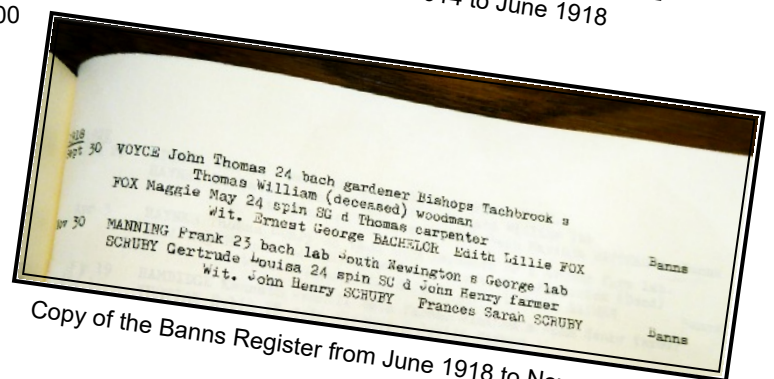
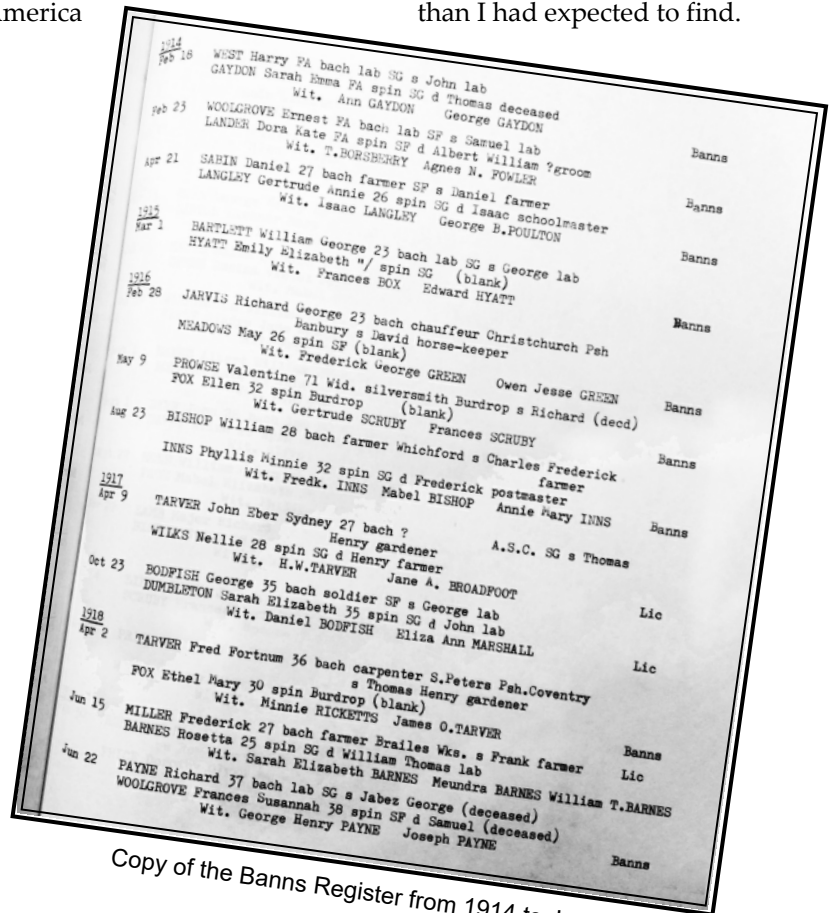
\* Three young people, Baptised in 1915, were born in 1900 and 1902 respectively.

**Banns:**

The Banns of Marriage were read for 14 couples whose weddings subsequently took place at Holy Trinity Church.

The marriage, in February 1914 of Ernest Woolgrove – a labourer in Sibford Ferris, to Dora Lander, spinster, also from Sibford Ferris was witnessed by a friend from Hook Norton, Thomas Borseberry. Thomas was killed on the Western Front in September 1915. His body was never found so he is remembered on the panels of the Mennin Gate in Ypres and on the War Memorial in the burial ground at Sibford Church. Happily Ernest returned home to Sibford at the end of the war.

The marriage of George Bodfish – soldier, to Sarah Dumbleton took place, by Special Licence, in October 1917. They had a week's honeymoon together before



**Burials:**

21 burials were recorded between 1914 and January 1918. Any further records for 1918 were unavailable as one register ended in January 1918 and the next volume is not currently to hand.

Two further deaths recorded in 1915 were in the Fox family. Martha Fox, aged 77, died in the Infirmary of Banbury Workhouse in February 1915. Eliza Fox, aged 81 from Burdrop also died in December 1915 but it is not clear if they were related.

The total number of deaths would have been increased by ten when those servicemen whose bodies are not buried in Sibford are included in the list.

1914			Burdrop	70
Feb 11	SABIN	Harriet	SF	62
Mar 15	RYMELL	Thomas	SF	23
Apr 17	HONE	Edith Harriett	SG	73
Nov 4	MOORE	John	SG	80
Dec 27	PADBURY	Hannah	SG	
1915			Workhouse Inf.	77
Feb 25	FOX	Martha	Banbury	
Mar 2	HOPKINS	William Baldwin	Fudge Farm	52
24	HOPKINS	Sidney	Hook Norton	84
Sept 30	LAMB	Eliza	SG	75
Oct 14	PROWSE	Annie	Brailes	55
16	BODFISH	Harold John	Burdrop	11 mts.
21	ARIS	Benjamin	"	77
Nov 23	BODFISH	William Henry	SG	29
Dec 4	MARSHALL	Ellen Ann	Burdrop	69
22	FIELDEN	Margaret	SC	3 days
24	FOX	Eliza	SF	81
1916			Burdrop	2 mts.
Apr 8	COOPER	Eleanor Kalzan	SG	70
Dec 20	ROUTH	Richard Laycock	SF	
1917			SG	55
May 28	GAYDON	William	SG	63
Dec 21	WESTBURY	Mary Ann	SG	80
1918			SF	
Jan 28	WOOLGROVE	Samuel		
				*****

Copy of the Burials Register from 1914 to January 1918

There are many familiar village names among those on the list. Most had achieved their normal life expectancy although three had died in infancy. This was not uncommon at that time due to the severity of children's ailments and the Primary School Log Book for 1915 records the severity of the winter in 1915. School had to be closed at times due to outbreaks of diphtheria and whooping cough among the children. Eleanor Kalzan Cooper from the Gower died in October aged only 2 weeks and Margaret Fielden from Sibford Ferris died in December only 3 days old.

Another early death recorded was a William Hopkins – from Fudge Farm on the outskirts of Hook Norton, who died aged 32.

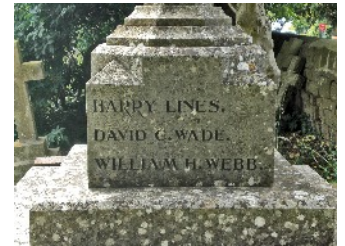
The Bodfish family were also experiencing sad times. There were Bodfish families living in Burdrop and Sibford Ferris so William Henry, who died aged 29 in November 1915, may not have been the father of the baby Harold John, who died in October 1915 aged 11 months, although they are both listed as living in Burdrop. George Bodfish originally from Sibford Ferris, died as a result of wounds in 1918 but he was 36 and married. He is buried in a cemetery on the Somme in France. His widow, Sarah, lived in Albert Cottage in Hook Norton.





The nation decided to honour its war dead, memorial books were made and many monuments and memorials were built. Here in Sibford a War Memorial Fund was set up and the memorial we can see in the churchyard today was built by local men

working for Poulton Builders whose yard was just behind Holy Trinity Church.



memorable and fitting tribute to each and every man or woman who had died.

Some 90 thousand of those poppies were made locally at Whichford pottery. In total there were 888,246 poppies forming a sea of red around the moat of the Tower of London – each one marking a life given in the service of our country during the First World War.

It was officially unveiled on Sunday 1 May 1921 by Sir Rhys Williams, MP for Banbury at that time. Over 400 people were present and many wreaths were laid to remember the men of the parish who had died and also to give thanks for those who had returned safely.

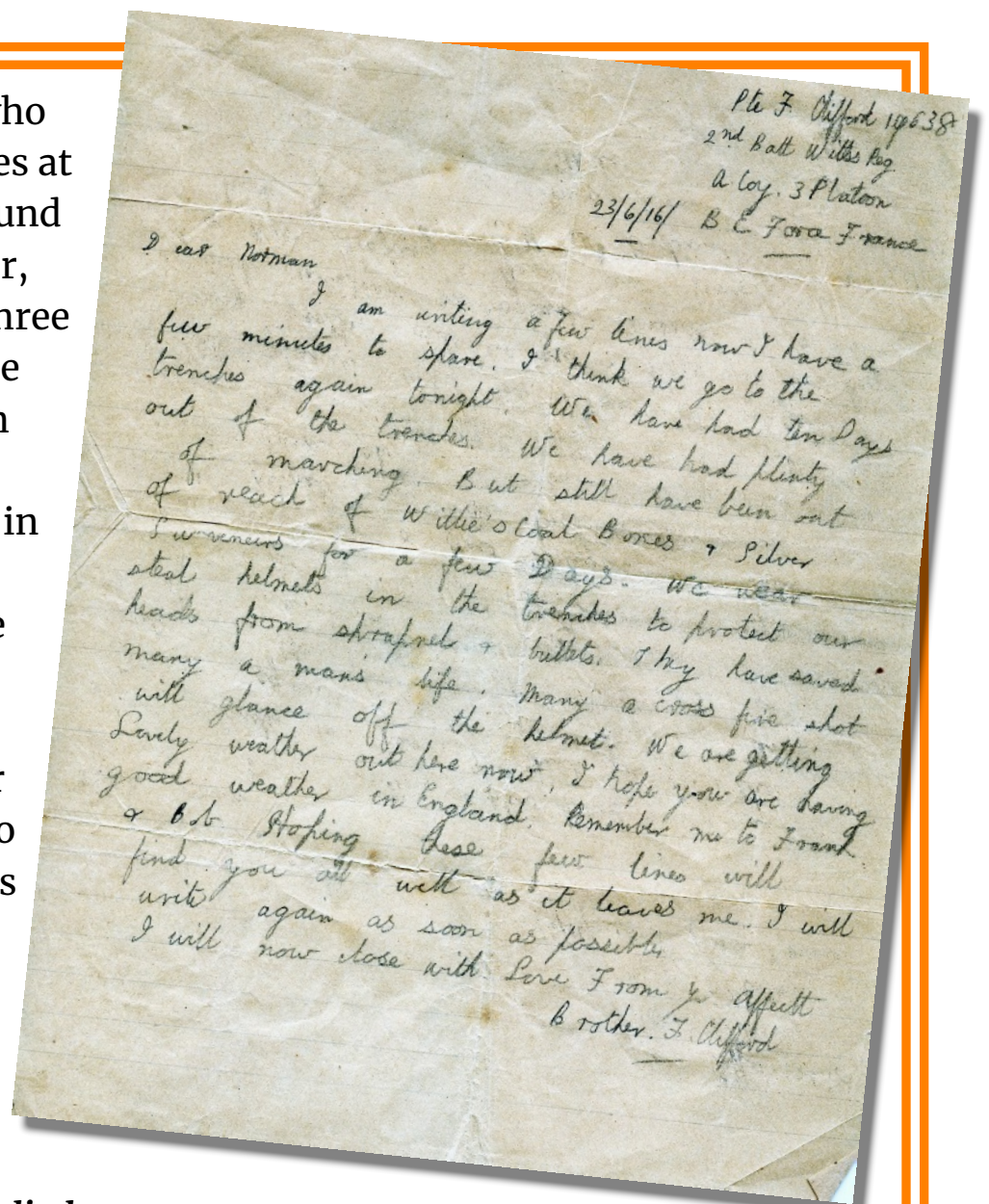
The Poppy Appeal was started in 1921 and the wonderful artistic display of ceramic poppies at the Tower of London in 2014 was a



**B**eryl Sabin, who currently lives at Far View, Pound Lane, Sibford Gower, has kindly lent us three letters sent from the Western Front from her Uncle, Frank Clifford. He served in the in the 2nd Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment, A Company, 3rd Platoon. This letter was written just two weeks before he was killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1st July 1916.

***On that first day  
19,240 Allied troops died.***

Frank's remains were never found, and he is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. There are no graves for 72,962 men who fought in the Battle of the Somme.



Thiepval Memorial.

18/6/16

Dear Bert

I am now making time to write a few lines in answer to yours received on Wednesday. We have been very busy lately. We come out of the trenches a week today for rest but have not seen much yet. I am glad to see the Navy has been able to have a smack at them. They will not want to meet them many more times. I also see the Russians are advancing every Day & many prisoners. I think he will be glad to give in very soon or he may lose all his men. I had a letter from everyone by same mail as yours. All are well

I expect mother is anxiously looking for a letter from me. I had not wrote for nearly three weeks. I like to write every week if possible. Ted has shifted again. I am sorry I have been unable to find him as I am sure he was near here. I hope you will keep in Good Health now. I hope Leonard will get the job on the G. C. Railway, or he may have to get into Khaki. Hoping these few lines will find you quite well as it leaves me. I will write again soon. I am writing a few lines to Norman so it will now close with Love from your Affectionate Brother, F. Clifford

**Frank Clifford wrote to his brother, Bert Clifford, in his letter of 18th June 1916 of the hardships in the trenches and his anxiety that his younger brother, Leonard, should not join the Army.**

**Frank Clifford was just 21 years old**

18/6/16

Dear Norman

I am writing a few lines in answer to yours received a few Days ago. I am sorry to keep you waiting so long for a letter. We have been busy this last few weeks & like everywhere else our work is never finished & will not be until Willie is fed up. I had a letter from home & Ted Harrit & Bert by same post as yours. All are well. Harrit is quite happy at his new quarters. Bert is out of Hospital again now. He tried for a leave again but could not get one. He tells me Leonard's boss is selling up. He is trying for the job on the G. C. Railway I hope

he will get it or I expect he will have to join the colours. I like is quite enough of us in Khaki now. I am doing more than I volunteered for and many more too. We march the roads & sleep at the same time. We are doing more than any person would do if he was in prison. We shall get through with good Luck & will be a long time before they get volunteers as they have in this Campaign. Hoping these few lines will find you well as it leaves me. I will now close with Love from your Affectionate Brother, F. Clifford

# Time Line for the First World War

## 1914

**28 June:** Archduke Ferdinand is assassinated while visiting Bosnia. Austria is very annoyed as he was going to succeed as the next Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

**23 June:** Austria blamed Serbia for the death of Ferdinand but Serbia's apology is not accepted and Austria declared war on Serbia.

**4 August:** As allies of Austria the German Army marches through Belgium in order to attack their principal enemy, France. Britain joins the war to support Belgium.

**23 August:** Russia – an ally of France, engages German troops in the east and is defeated.

**9 September:** Battle of the Marne when the French army stop the German army advance in France.

**October:** Millions sign up to join the allied armies as the war is expected to be over by Christmas.

**22 November:** The opposing armies have come to a standstill in northern France. They dig trenches opposite each other and remain fighting in this area – known as the Western Front for a further four years. The battle line of trenches dug in the ground between the two armies eventually reached in a line from Belgium to Switzerland.

**25 December:** The enemies stop fighting for Christmas and even play friendly football matches in 'no man's land' between the two armies. This Christmas truce was not repeated in subsequent years.

## 1915

Battles continue to be fought from the trenches on the Western Front but fighting starts to spread around the world. British people in Germany are rounded up and imprisoned as spies while in London the government are forced to imprison enemy aliens for their own protection.

**19 January:** First Zeppelin Airship raids on Britain affecting ordinary people in their daily lives.

**2 February:** Germany says it will surround Britain with submarines to sink food supply ships and to starve Britain to defeat.

**18 March:** British Government asks women to sign up for war work.

**22 April:** Poisoned gas is first used against soldiers in the trenches.

**May:** Allied troops try to sneak behind the German front by landing in Gallipoli in Turkey, expecting to defeat Turkish troops easily.

**7 May:** As part of the naval blockade of the UK, German submarines in Irish waters, sink a passenger ship – the Lusitania en route from New York to Liverpool with the loss of 1198 lives. The whole ship sank in just 18 minutes.

**7 June:** A German Zeppelin airship is shot down over Flanders – the large, slow moving Zeppelins make easy targets.

**July:** The Turkish state uses war as an excuse to wipe out an entire race of people – the Armenians.

**August:** Food is getting short especially in Germany. Prices go up and taxes go up to pay for the war. £1 million (£9,200 million in today's money) a day is needed in Britain to pay for the fighting.

**September:** Battle of Loos in Flanders. This was the biggest battle of 1915 and the first time British troops used poison gas as a weapon against the German troops.

**12 October:** Nurse Edith Cavell is shot caught helping British prisoners to escape in Belgium.

**11 November:** Winston Churchill is sacked as a British Government Minister because his idea to attack Gallipoli is a disaster.

**20 December:** Allies give up on the Gallipoli attack and retreat. Over half of the 73,485 casualties were British or Irish troops although 250,000 Turkish and Arabic soldiers were killed defending Gallipoli. Due to the number of unburied bodies fly-borne diseases were the cause of some of the deaths.

## 1916 - The Year of the Somme

**25 January:** Conscription comes to Britain. Single, fit men have to join the army. Some of Sibford's agricultural workers are called up and trained to join the troops on the Western Front.

**February:** the French and Germans begin the longest battle of the war, at the fortress of Verdun in north-eastern France.

**March:** German soldiers are told to have one day a week without food to save on supplies.

**24 April:** The Irish rebel against British rule and try to seize Dublin Post Office.

**May:** The only great sea battle of the war takes place at Jutland off the coast of Denmark. Involving 250 ships and 100,000 men the outcome of the naval gun battle remains unclear. However, the German Navy retreated and the British Navy remained in control of the North Sea.

**5 June:** Millions of posters are produced with Lord Kitchener's face saying "Your Country Needs You!"

**1 July:** The Battle of the Somme begins. British soldiers outnumber German soldiers by seven to one ... but lose seven men to every one German.

**10 August:** A news film called The Battle of the Somme is shown in British cinemas. It is seen by 20 million shocked Britons who are suddenly made aware of the brutality of the conditions for all soldiers fighting in the mud on the plains of the River Somme. Holy Trinity Choir Boys are taken to see the film.

**15 September:** The new British super weapon enters the war – The Tank.

**14 November:** End of the Battle of the Somme. Allied and German losses total over 1.3 million men. The Allies gained six miles – that's 120 men for every yard of ground gained – such is the price of this terrible war.

## 1917 - The Year of the Mud

Everyone is desperate for peace. In Germany coal is short. Lights have to be out by 9pm in Berlin. Elephants from the circus are used to pull coal carts from the railway stations to save wasting coal on steam trains or using horses that could be used in the army. Houses in Paris are allowed only one electric light in each room. The winter of 1916/17 is bitterly cold and everyone is suffering but the war goes on ... and on.

**January:** A munitions factory blows up in East London killing 69 factory workers.

**February:** The Russian people rebel against their leaders and the Russian soldiers lend their rifles to help the revolution.

**March:** The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps is founded (WAAC).

**April:** American soldiers join the Allied war effort but the French troops rebel against their conditions.

**May:** Horse racing is stopped in the UK. County Cricket and League Football also stopped.

**June:** Britain ban rice being thrown at weddings and feeding birds – food is too precious.

**July:** The war is now costing Britain £6 million a day.

**1 August:** Terrific rain storms as the British mount another attack in Flanders. The mud becomes as deadly an enemy as the Germans.

**October:** Bakers are allowed to add potato flour to bread while French bread becomes grey and soggy.

**November:** War between Russia and Germany coming to an end as

the Russian Bolsheviks start to take over their country.

**December:** German bomber aircraft reach London.

## 1918 - The Year of Exhaustion

The Germans decide to have one huge attack on the Allies before their rations run out. The Allies give way and pull back but the German troops rush forward too quickly and their supplies cannot keep up with them. When the Allies stop and turn the Germans have nothing left to give. The feeble and starved Germans are pushed back into Germany.

**January:** Britain is forced to have two meatless day a week and no meat for breakfast.

**25 February:** Meat, butter and margarine are rationed in the south of England.

**21 March:** Called 'The last day of Trench Warfare' - The day when the Germans break through the trenches. British casualties numbered 38,500,

**1 April:** The formation of the Royal Air Force.

**May:** The German government encourages young people to marry before they are 20 to produce more children for the country – they are running short of people.

**June:** 30 people die in Lancashire from Spanish Flu. No one has any idea how many will eventually die from this disease – far more than in the whole War!

**18 July:** The Allies stop retreating at the Marne River. The Russians massacre their royal family.

**8 August:** German General Ludendorff calls this 'the black day for the German army' as they are driven back by the Allies.

**29 September:** Bulgaria asks the Central Powers for peace.

**October:** the German navy are asked to make one last voyage to destroy the British fleet but the sailors refuse and pour water on their ship's boilers.

**November:** Kaiser Wilhelm is thrown out of Germany.

**11 November 1918:** Armistice Day – Peace is agreed at last and the Armistice is signed at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour on the 11<sup>th</sup> day in the 11<sup>th</sup> month.

This marked the end of the First World War.

Eight and a half million people had died as a direct result of the conflict with many more wounded and suffering from the effects of gas and shell shock. Four war-torn terrible years had taken their toll and it was hoped that this would be the War to end all Wars – only time would tell.