MOSELEY AT WAR
WORLD WAR I

THE MOSELEY SOCIETY

Formed to protect a unique area of Birmingham Charity No. 512211

heritage lottery fund

MOSELEY
PARK
Tennis
Ground
Moseley Station
Grass Yard
St. Mary's
Church
Highfield
House
Al Dadore
Sorrento
Baptist
Chapel
Bowling
Green

WAR IS DECLARED!

Germany's invasion of Belgium in 1914 compromised British guarantees to respect and preserve Belgian independence and left her no choice but to declare war on Germany on 4th August. For Britain this was to be a war which was to be fought not only on the front lines but also at home. The home-front was a new experience of war which affected every man, woman and child in the first 'total war'.

This booklet tells the story of Moseley, a suburb of Birmingham, during World War I.

Information comes from 'The Collection', (a historical archive held by the Moseley Society Local History Group), from the experiences of local people and from associated Moseley sites, including war memorials.

WAR HORSES

The impact of the war on Moseley was felt quickly in different and often unexpected ways:

"When the War first broke out, they commandeered all horses and carts. They took the horses away and brought them into this park here, locked the gates because it had big railings round in those days. We had a sentry on duty guarding these horses, and the man next door took cups of tea to the soldiers. I can remember that I was 14. That was the outbreak of the 1914 war. They commandeered all the horses, any-body's they took, anybody's horses to take them to France I suppose to carry the gun carriages you see. That was dreadful."

During the first fortnight of the war, buyers went across the country to find and obtain draught animals for war work. Some 165,000 animals were collected, most of which were shipped to theatres of war, where they were needed to pull wagons, ambulances and light artillery.

Alongside the soldiers, they starved, froze, worked to exhaustion or death, suffered enemy fire, wounding, disease and infection. On the Western Front alone, over 256,000 animals died. Of those that survived the war, the fittest were kept by the army, while the rest were auctioned off, most likely to local butchers - an ignominious end for such service.

Losing their animals in this way could be catastrophic for those people whose businesses relied on them.

(Copy photograph from 'The Collection')

ZEPPELINS

From the beginning of the war there was the threat at home of being bombed by Zeppelins. Even Moseley wasn't safe from attack. Zeppelins dropped bombs on the east and south coasts for the first year of the war, but by 1916 they were bombing the Midlands. According to one Moseley resident they had already been over, possibly on reconnaissance before then.

"*I can remember the Zeppelins coming over at the beginning of the First World War. They came right over Moseley, the lower end of Moseley. They went towards Birchwood Road and I'm sure I could hear the men receiving orders on the platform underneath the Zeppelin. People won't believe me but I'm sure I could hear it.*"

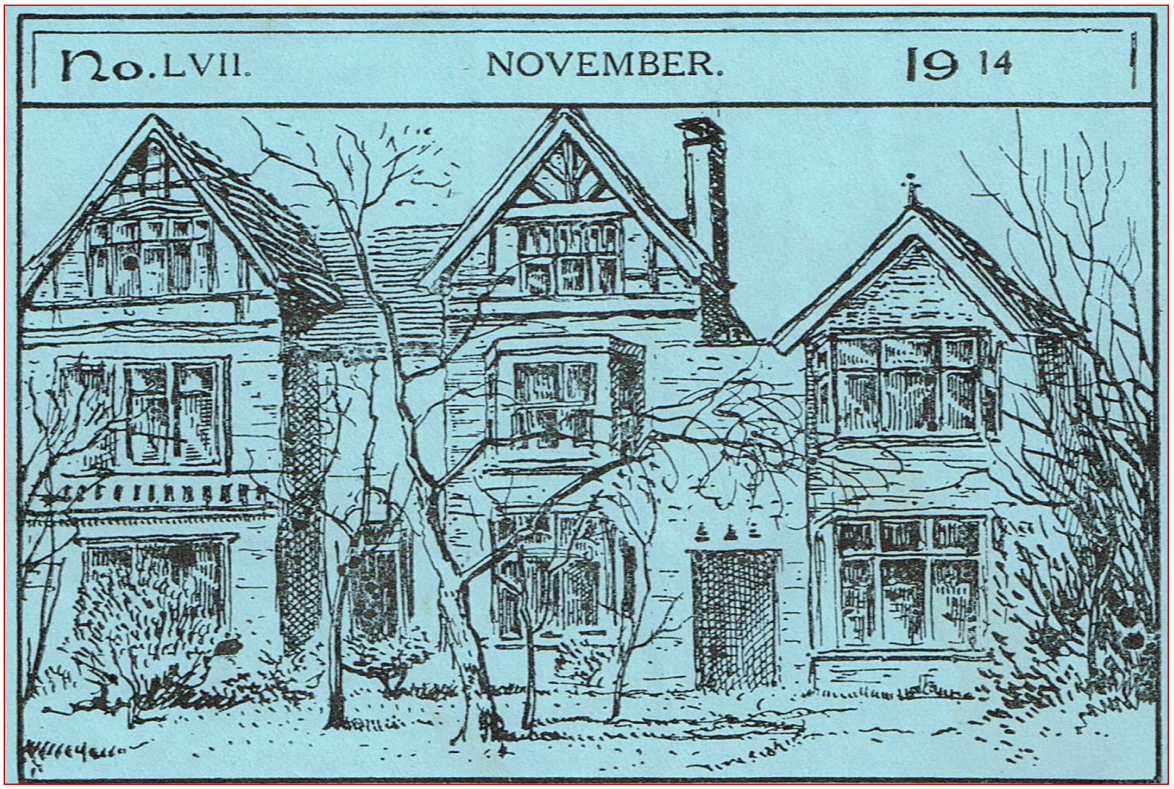
By the time the Zeppelins arrived in the Midlands, blackout conditions were already in place. Air raid drills and the use of public shelters had been rehearsed, albeit half-heartedly by a population who found it hard to accept the danger without evidence to back it up.

When the Zeppelins were finally seen they often provoked curiosity from people who were not used to seeing anything other than birds in the sky.

"One thing that sticks in my mind was the Zeppelin coming over and everybody was gawping up at this Zeppelin until someone suddenly saw the sign on it which told them it was German. .. My mother took one look and ushered us down the cellar! Pushed us all down the cellar."

German Zeppelin L-31 October 1916

A SCHOOL IN WARTIME



Wintersloe was a boys' school in Wake Green Road and The Wintersloe Magazines, Issues LVII - LXI, reveal much about the effects of the war on the school and its pupils.

The patriotic fervour that marked the early months of the war – when it was all expected to be over by Christmas - was noted thus:

"By the wish of the boys, a portion of the

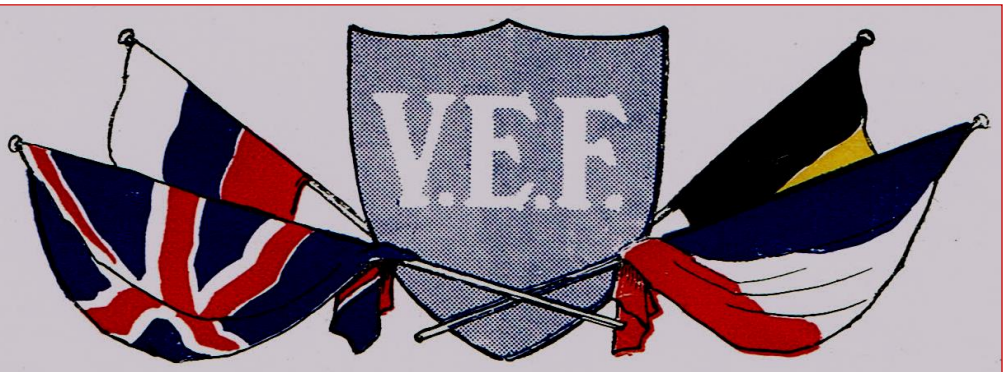
school funds raised by fines, sale of photos, etc., has been spent in the purchase of a Union Jack for the school flag-staff. We propose on some early and appropriate occasion to ceremoniously hoist our new tricolor, after which it will be flown, during the progress of the war, on the occasion of all successes attending British Arms."

('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LVII, November, 1914, p.3)

The old boys of the school were, of course, among those who enlisted to serve in the armed forces. In November 1914 'The Wintersloe Magazine' noted:

"…. that many of the Wintersloe Old Boys have responded to the Nation's Call, by joining the colours. They have indeed proved themselves true to the watchword of their old school, and we cordially offer them our heartiest congratulations, and wish them very fervently the best of good luck."

('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LVII, November, 1914, p.3)



L. W. Auster
W. Auster
C. Bach
C. Bagley
J. S. Baker
S. Ball
C. Beachcroft
O. T. Brewer
V. L. W. Brown
P. W. Brown
L. Bryan
S. Bryan
W. M. Chance
S. Chawner
D. Cheshire
A. T. Cond
E. Cook
R. Cronin
W. A. Cross
F. Cross
S. B. Edwards
G. Frazier
F. B. Goodison
G. Goodison
D. Grover
G. E. Gyde
H. Haddelsey
W. R. Hassall
W. Hedges
S. Hirst
V. Hookham
R. Holland
G. Holtom
D. Hurst
V. Hutton
L. K. V. Job
P. Joyce
C. Keeble
H. Keen
A. Lancaster
J. Lancaster
T. Lancaster
W. D. Lamble
G. Leigh
M. Lucking
R. Lucking
A. Macniven
D. Macniven
E. Mitton
G. Overton
S. Parker
B. Paterson
R. Perkins
R. Piercy
F. Richards
S. Robinson
E. Rouch
R. Rusby
G. Samworth
A. Sanby
H. Sanby
L. Sayer
D. Schwarck
S. Scott
S. Suckling
L. Tebbit
R. Thompson
F. Titterton
R. Tomkins
S. H. Toward
T. Turner
H. Verralls
F. Verrinder
W. Ward
C. Wareham
L. Wareham
A. White
E. White
H. Young

('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LX , July, 1917)

It is possible to trace some of the boys through the pages of the school magazine. One year they are performing in the school play, the next they are in the theatre of war.

In 1914, Wintersloe pupil, J.S. Baker, won the half mile, the mile, and then the Four Miles Cross Country for the third time. ('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LVII, November, 1914, p.8)

"The school is particularly proud of its present senior boy, J.S. Baker, who, having been enrolled as a member of the 3rd City Battalion, goes straight from our very midst to take his place in the ranks of his country's defenders." ('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LVII, November, 1914, p.3)

In April, 1916, Baker *"is doing four days in trench and four days' rest alternately* ..." ('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LIX, April, 1916, p.11)

Baker never came home – he was killed in action on 27th July 1916 at Thiepval.

Another ex-pupil is Thomas Ewert Mitton (misspelt ‘Milton’). Born on 26th April, 1897, he attended Wintersloe before moving on to King Edward's School. He enlisted on 10th February 1916 when he was 18 years old and spent a year training in England, before being sent to France, then Belgium, where he died, on 24th December, 1917, whilst erecting telegraph wires across a railway track. Mitton was just 20 years old. He left behind him a collection of poems, which his family published privately after the war. “Peace” was written optimistically in September 1914, barely a month after the outbreak of the war.

A trench on the Somme, 1916

'Peace' by T.E. Mitton

Far beyond the reeking battle,
Where all human factions cease,
Her bright eyes bedimmed with weeping
Stands the gentle form of Peace.

And she calls to toiling mortals
Children see ye grieve me sore,
Drive me from your happy homesteads
Stain your hands with lusts of War.

To the weeping maid they answer,
Lady, hear us when we plead,
For we turn from thee with sorrow
Turn to break a tyrant's greed.

And we vow that good shall follow
From our strife and warfare vile,
And thy reign shall be the fairer
Though we leave thee for a while.

Issue LIX of the magazine carried news of several 'old boys':

T. Lancaster *"went out in the early days of the war; was wounded but recovered; fought in the battle for Hill 60; was reported missing: no tidings of him have been received since May, 1915."*

Thomas Turner was killed at Basra while serving as 2nd Lieutenant with the 48th Indian Pioneers. The school reported that he *"enlisted in the Indian Army on the outbreak of war; went into training at Quetta; sent to Mesopotamia in December, 1915: killed in action March 20th 1916."*

William Hedges of 117 Anderton Park Road, was *"badly wounded at Ypres; returned to England; recovered; was promoted to Captain; went back to France; thence to Egypt. Is now back in France."*

('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LIX, April, 1916, p.12)

William Hedges was a Captain in the Royal Engineers and was awarded the Military Cross for bravery. He died of wounds on 22nd August 1916 at Calais, aged 23. He is commemorated on a family stone in St Mary's churchyard.

All these names appear on the Roll of Honour printed on p.16 of Issue LXI of 'The Wintersloe Magazine', which lists 18 old boys out of the 70 known to have enlisted. This amounts to 26% killed in action from just one Moseley school.

Roll of Honour.—

C. S. Beachcroft	...	1895—1898
H. Sanby	...	1896—1898
A. T. Cond	...	1896—1900
A. Macniven	...	1899—1905
T. Lancaster	...	1904—1906
W. Hedges	...	1905—1907
T. Turner	...	1902—1908
L. Sayer	...	1904—1908
R. Burt	...	1906—1908
F. Cross	...	1905—1909
J. Lancaster	...	1907—1909
F. B. Goodison	...	1903—1910
S. Hirst	...	1906—1910
E. Milton	...	1905—1911
P. Joyce	...	1909—1911
M. Lucking	...	1906—1913
G. Goodison	...	1908—1913
J. S. Baker	...	1908—1914

"Nulla dies unquam memori vos eximet aevo."

And what of those who survived? Many ex-servicemen found jobs as teachers in post-war Britain and this appears to have been what Herwald Verralls did. In 1919, 'The Wintersloe Magazine' reported that:

"... at the beginning of the present term the teaching staff was increased by the appointment of Mr. H. Verralls, a former pupil of the School who joined the colours in 1914, was drafted to India and Burmah (sic) *and returned to England a few months ago. He is at present, unfortunately, away from school through ill health, ..."*
('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LXI, June, 1919, p.7)

H. Verralls
(from a school photograph in 'The Collection')

IT'S A LONG WAY TO TIPPERARY!

Local men who enlisted often gathered at Moseley Station or Brighton Road in Balsall Heath waiting for the train to take them on the first leg of the journey to the Front.

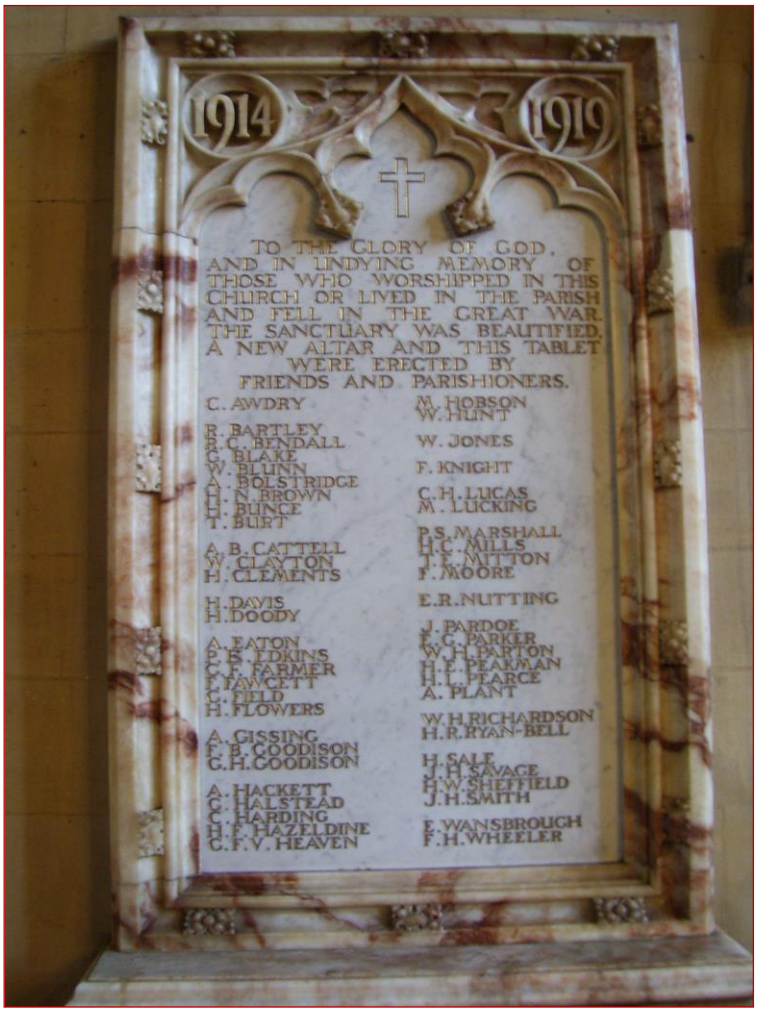
First World War Troops depart from New Street Station in 1914

The same stations would often bring them home on leave. A local resident remembers:
"Soldiers coming home from the trenches from New Street station, just as they were from the trenches covered with mud, absolutely one mass of mud. Kit bags hanging on their backs absolutely worn out, I can remember that now. Just occasionally we would see one stray one coming home at first, that was terrible wasn't it? The soldiers used to go through to France from Brighton Road to Moseley. You could hear them all singing 'Tipperary' all the way. We used to see another troop train going through. It was every two or three hours sometimes, … I can hear them now shouting and singing, we could hear them you see. Brighton Road, Moseley and Kings Heath went straight through to France I suppose, terrible. But it didn't strike me at the time, isn't it funny? Perhaps it did."

Many Moseley sons enlisted and died in the First World War. You can find their names on memorials in local churches.

Cambridge Road Methodist Church

Cappell Memorial, St. Mary's Church



St. Agnes' Church Memorial

PACIFIST IDEALS

Not everyone was keen to enlist for the armed forces. Harry Payne was a conscientious objector and went to prison for his beliefs. Payne was widely known in Birmingham for his shoe repair business, started in Longmore Street, Balsall Heath.

By 1914 the business was well established and Payne had three shops and several full time employees. The whole family attended Moseley Methodist Church. When he was called up in 1916, he went before a tribunal and declared that on Christian grounds he would not assist the war effort. He was freed from prison in January 1919 and went back to head the business which became a household name among Birmingham's shops.

Site of Payne's shoe shop in Moseley village.

BELGIAN REFUGEES

Britain became a sanctuary to thousands of Belgians fleeing from the German occupation. Moseley residents rose to the occasion, with refugees housed at Uffculme and Sorrento.

"I first remember Sorrento (hospital) in 1914 when the Germans had overrun Belgium and Belgian refugees came over to this country and we had flag days for Belgian refugees - that was the thing for money to keep these Belgian refugees and you took your collecting boxes to Sorrento which was empty at that time and it was used as a depot for things like that."

Before too long the Belgians were moved out and Sorrento later became a home for wounded officers.

THE WOUNDED

Many buildings in Moseley were converted to hospitals to cope with the increasing numbers of wounded men. By Spring, 1919, some 130,000 military casualties had been treated in the Birmingham hospitals.

Auxiliary hospitals were set up in Moor Green Hall, Moor Green House, Uffculme and Highbury.

In November 1916, 'Uffculme' was taken over by the Friends Ambulance Unit, and developed into a 200 bed hospital. In 1918 it became the regional limb fitting centre.

"..and I remember in the War, the '14 War, they had the wounded soldiers there [Uffculme], they were in the blue uniform and they were in part of the park [Highbury]."

'Moor Green House' was established as an annexe to Highbury, and became designated the 4th Auxiliary Hospital, Moseley. In

‘Moor Green Hall Hospital’ was established in November 1914, with 63 beds. It treated 1500 casualties during the war.

‘Highbury Hospital’ was established by the Voluntary Aid Detachment, in the former home of the Chamberlain family, in May 1915, with 140 beds, later rising to 274 beds. It specialised in neurological cases and was staffed by a commandant, a matron, eight sisters and voluntary workers, mostly women. It had 274 beds, an open air ward, and the conservatories and greenhouses were used in emergencies. Women in the neighbourhood volunteered on a part-time basis.
(www.connectinghistories.org.uk)

Some funds to support these hospitals were raised by local people:

“At our Gymnastic Display last June we succeeded in raising eleven pounds for the wounded soldiers, a sum which was very gratefully accepted by Miss Cooper on behalf of the wounded men at Moor Green Hospital”
(‘The Wintersloe Magazine’, Issue No. LIX, April, 1916, p.2)

FOOD SHORTAGES

Those who returned home to Moseley found their families coping with food shortages.

"Food was limited, but not rationed. I remember queuing for potatoes, margarine, etc. Any sweets or chocolate available were sent to my brother on active service abroad. He said he received the food parcels, but I have often wondered if he did. In any case, it satisfied my mother to continue doing so."

Increasingly,people turned to growing their own food as a solution to the shortages. *"In 1914 or 15, the corner of Queensbridge Road was all fields at that time, and on the corner there they made one big field and plotted it out into allotments for people to grow vegetables because food was so scarce."*

Wintersloe School also did its bit to alleviate the food shortages: "...*in view of the country's appeal for the cultivation of land it was decided to give up the Cricket and spend the time in digging."*
('The Wintersloe Magazine, Issue No. LX July, 1917, p.2)

Mr Heath of the Leasowes provided 1,000 square yards of his land in the Wake Green Road, and this was supplemented by the Council with a further 1,000 square yards in Grove Avenue. The Magazine reports that "... *the boys are now engaged, in their out-of-school hours, in moulding-up, weeding, thinning out, and generally keeping their respective patches in order. They of course provided their own seed and will be entitled to their own crops; the total expenses, exclusive of seed, amounted to 2/- each for the senior boys and 1/- for the juniors. A prize will be given to the boy who produces the best 10 lb. sample of potatoes grown by himself on his school allotment."*
('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LX, July, 1917, p.2)

In 1919 the school magazine was able to report that almost three tons of potatoes had been grown in the first year, prompting the cultivation of a further 1,000 square yards and an impressive potato harvest of over 4 tons in 1918, alongside the successful cultivation of various other crops.
('The Wintersloe Magazine', Issue No. LXI, June, 1919, p.5)

Boy Scouts cultivate vegetable allotments in the UK during the First World War
© IWM (Q30597)
http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections

THE END AT LAST!

The end of the War was a cause for great celebration:

"The day Armistice was declared, we were upstairs ……. And after we'd had our morning prayers Miss Johnson said: 'Now girls, I've got something to tell you. The war is going to end today and armistice is going to be declared and we shall know when the armistice has been declared because we shall hear the boys downstairs cheer.' And during the morning that cheer came. Miss Johnson got us all together again and she said: "Well, the war's over and the rest of the day's a holiday. You can go home." Although it was November it was a lovely bright day. I can remember skipping down the road. "Oh, we've got a holiday today because the war's over." It didn't really mean very much. And I can vaguely remember being taken by my mother and father and aunt down to the green where they lit a bonfire and all the young teenagers were dancing round the bonfire."

PEACE MEDALS

Peace medals were issued to Birmingham school children and parades were held for the returning troops.

NEW DANGERS

At the end of the War a new danger reached Moseley. From early 1918 to late 1920, The 'Spanish flu' killed somewhere between 50 and 150 million people worldwide.

A Moseley resident remembers:

"It was the time of influenza when young people were going down like flies after the end of the First War. People weren't nourished. There weren't ration books like there were in the Second War and you had a job to get food. So young people got this pneumonia, and it mainly was young people, they died in their teens. I had it three times that winter as I went from school to school."
(Oral History Interview, 'The Collection')

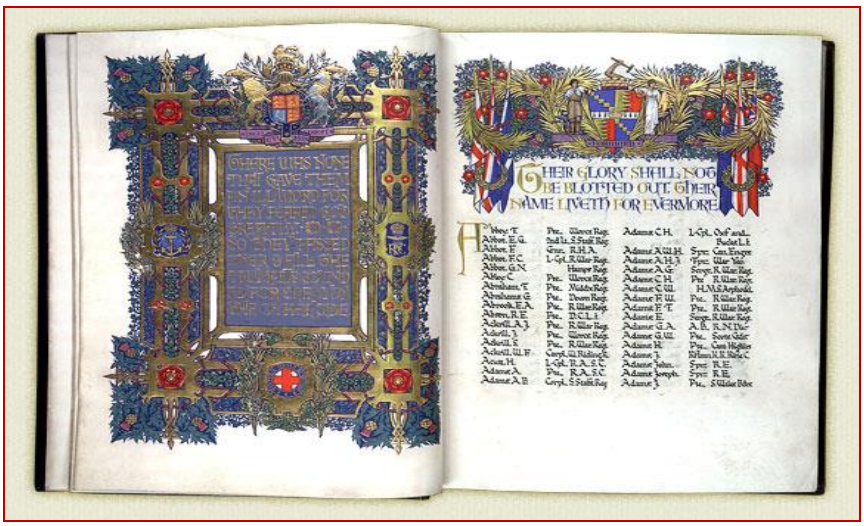
Another reports *"…a terrible 'flu that year. It killed a lot of people … everybody was going down like flies. As soon as we got this 'flu, we had two maids always, and they disappeared like that. They went. Frightened. It was so dangerous this 'flu and so bad, that they would not stay in a house with 'flu."*
(Oral History Interview, 'The Collection')

Those who had died in the war were commemorated by memorials in schools, churches, workplaces and on streets.

Birmingham Tramways Memorial, Wheelers Lane

Birmingham's Hall of Memory was built to commemorate the 12,320 Birmingham citizens who died and the 35,000 who were wounded in the First World War.

The first Roll of Honour lists the 12,320 Birmingham citizens who died in the First World War. The book was designed by Moseley resident, Sidney Meteyard, and penned by his wife, Kate M. Eadie.



The first page bears the inscription, 'Their glory shall not be blotted out. Their name liveth for evermore'

(www.hallofmemory.co.uk)

For those who survived the war there would often be difficult years ahead, especially for the many who had been seriously wounded. The Royal British Legion was consequently set up in 1921 to assist ex-servicemen in need. It is still doing the same today, with the annual sale of poppies a familiar event.

The oldest memorial poppy known to have survived has a Moseley connection. In May, 1916, 17 year-old Private Cecil Roughton picked a poppy from a front-line trench near Arras in France as a memento, later posting it to his family in Moseley, who kept it long after his return from war. In 2011, they donated it to the Royal British Legion, who restored it, hailing it as probably the oldest Remembrance Poppy in Britain.
www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2055743/Remembrance-Day-2011-UKs-oldest-Poppy-95-yrs-picked.html 1 November 2011

Sadly the peace was not to last and twenty years later we were preparing for a Second World War.

This project was made possible by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and by the efforts of many volunteers, past and present.

The Moseley Society Local History Group:

collects and manages archival materials,
designs displays for local events,
researches and produces local history booklets,
holds monthly meetings with varied speakers.

If you would like to participate in any of these or to volunteer, please contact us on moseleyhistory@moseleyexchange.com

You can find us on
Facebook:www.facebook.com/MoseleySocietyLocalHistoryGroup
Twitter: www.twitter.com/moseleyhistory
Our website: www.moseleyhistory.co.uk

'The Collection' is available for consultation by appointment.

Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are taken from the Local History Group oral history project.
Photographs of St. Agnes' Church courtesy of Mr J Andrew.

.

THE MOSELEY SOCIETY
Formed to protect a unique area of Birmingham Charity No. 512211

heritage lottery fund

Printed by Jericho Print & Promotion, B12 9LX. July, 2013

Memorial in St. Agnes' Church