



**CIRENCESTER
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AND HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

NEWSLETTER

Number 65: 2019

Commemorating the end of the Great War:
War Memorial and Peace Celebrations in Cirencester Market Place
(1918-19)



The community gathers in Cirencester Market Place for the service of dedication of the war memorial cross on 31 October 1918.

Remembrance 2014-2019

This issue has a retrospective air, noting commemorations and anniversaries of a century ago within the context of the ending of the First World War and the memorials created in the town. It also serves as a record of the Society's main contribution to that remembrance, a detailed project of research on and access to the listing of names of those recorded on the town's two main war memorials. References below, mostly now available on the Society's website, will it is hoped encourage further research on individuals, creating from the anonymity of a memorial name a fuller picture of a Cirencester-connected individual.

The Society's War Memorial project is introduced in "First World War Memorials in Cirencester"; see <http://www.cirenhistory.org.uk/projectww1intro.htm>

A time line – 'A century ago' - of individual's stories has been running in diary form on the website, and makes fascinating reading; see <http://www.cirenhistory.org.uk/index.htm>

Previous issues of the *Newsletter* record the project's origins and outcomes. No 57 (Spring 2013) and No 59 (Spring 2014) appealed for information on named individuals, and No 60 (Autumn 2014) told the story of local boy Frank Webb; see <http://www.cirenhistory.org.uk/nl60frankwebb.htm>

Newsletter No 61 (2015) is devoted to the 'Cirencester Commemorates 1914-18' project, with various individual stories and a schedule of names (alphabetically listed) on the town's two main Great War memorials: see http://www.cirenhistory.org.uk/index.htm_files/Newsletter%20No%2061%20Spring%202015.pdf

These lists are also available on:

http://www.cirenhistory.org.uk/index.htm_files/WW1%20List%20of%20the%20Fallen.pdf
& http://www.cirenhistory.org.uk/ww1_agg-barrett.htm

The project team of Dale Hjort, Linda Viner and Florence Beetlestone are to be thanked again for bringing all this detailed information together, remembering too the early initiative of Deirdre and Jim Waddell in making an initial record of the names on the Town Hall memorial in the Market Place. Many others contributed their own knowledge and research.

A Great War timeline has been maintained in the Parish Church, allowing relevant dates to be highlighted throughout the period of the War from 1914-18 and beyond. Ailsa O'Connor oversaw this task and is to be thanked for her commitment. An exhibition, sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund at the Corinium Museum in Aug-Sept 2014, gave the whole local initiative an excellent launching pad.

The town also came together in 'We Remember 1918' to commemorate the ending of the Great War in a variety of events, co-ordinated by Cirencester Community Development Trust. A spectacular gathering was The Human Poppy project in the Market Place on Sunday 11 November 2018, when a record-breaking attempt (apparently the previous record was 3,000 – the Guinness World Records decision is awaited) attracted some 3,300 people dressed in red, green and black ponchos, coming together to form a human poppy. A

memorable event for those who participated and a credit to Cirencester, well covered in the local and regional press. See, for example:

<https://www.wiltsglosstandard.co.uk/news/17216384.thousands-take-part-in-worlds-largest-human-poppy-in-cirencester/>

Nor do the stories cease once November 1918 is reached, and in this issue we add two further chapters to this fascinating period of our local as well as national history: the story of creating the town's central (and first) Great War memorial, and – almost exactly a century ago – the weather-affected main peace celebrations also in the Market Place, held on 19 July 1919. Both stories were well recorded in the local press, from which much of what follows is derived.

Cirencester War Memorial



The main focus for commemoration was naturally the creation of a suitable war memorial and its appropriate siting in the centre of Cirencester. A succession of reports in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* [WGS] reveals the good intentions, desires and inevitable tensions which arose when the community came together to mark the end of the Great War.

As early as June 1917 a vestry meeting was held at the Town Hall, to consider and if approved to sanction an application for a faculty for the erection of a Calvary in the Little

Churchyard adjoining the Market Place, “as a memorial to those of Cirencester and district who have fallen or shall hereafter fall in the present war”.

“The proposed memorial is very kindly offered to the town by Mr Thomas Kingscote, M.V.O., of Watermoor House, Cirencester, for whom Mr J.N. Comper, of 228 Knight’s Hill, West Norwood, London, S.E., has prepared a chaste and stately design, which was circulated amongst those present at the meeting, and evoked general admiration” [WGS 30 June 1917]. The donor requested anonymity.

Work underway revealed earlier structures. “It may be added that the excavations for the foundations of the cross have exposed walls of cellars of some of the houses which formerly stood in Butter Row and which were removed about 1830” [WGS 28 Sept 1917].

The Service of Dedication was fully reported. “The erection of the beautiful Crucifix in the Little Churchyard of Cirencester Parish Church given in memory of those from Cirencester who have laid down their lives in the Great War having been completed on Thursday afternoon 31 October 1918, it was solemnly dedicated by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese. The service was attended by, perhaps, one of the largest congregations that ever assembled in the town, and was marked by a simplicity, reverence, and subdued but intense feeling that seemed to give fervent expression to the thoughts and sentiments of the vast concourse gathered together.

“It is not permitted to mention the source, although it is well known, of the gift of the Cross to the church and town, as it is desired that no personal public expression of gratitude may be made.

“It has been designed by Mr J.N. Comper and has been carved with rare skill by Mr W.D. Gough, of Kennington, who has had the assistance of Messrs. Saunders and Sons, Limited, of Cirencester, in building it. It proved necessary to go down 12 feet for its concrete foundations. The whole is of Clipsham stone. The steps and base are 13 feet in diameter and stand 7 feet from the ground. The plan of the pillar and its capital is reminiscent of the old Market Cross, as seen from a passing glance outside its railing. The whole height of the Cross is just upon 30 feet, and it is 23 feet from the ground to the figure of Our Lord which is 3 feet 6 inches high.

“On the base on the eastern side are the incised words: “To the men of Cirencester who have given their lives for their King and Country in the Great War, 1914 – [blank]. And this faces the west wall of the south porch, or Town Hall, in the stone panels of which their names will be inscribed when the date now left blank can be filled in.”

The address from the Bishop was based on the text from Lamentations 1:12: “Is it nothing unto you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.”

“The ringers gave a half-muffled peal after the service. Through the kindness of the Commanding Officer, Rendcomb, there was no traffic of motor lorries through the town and no aeroplanes flying in the neighbourhood during the service” [WGS 09 Nov 1918].

So, Cirencester had its memorial *before* the war came to an end. Less than a fortnight later, on 11 November 1918, hostilities ceased and the inscription could be completed.



Floral tributes on the war memorial cross at the time of its dedication, October 1918

In December 1918 a committee comprising representatives of the Urban District Council, Churchwardens, C.E.M.S., Y.M.C.A., Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, District Visitors and the Press, with Rev. A.J. Kitson as chairman, met to compile a list of the names of all who fell in the war who were known to have been natives of Cirencester or whose home was in Cirencester at the time that they joined up, *with the addition of the names of a few relatives or close personal friends of the donors [editor's italics]*. The work of inscribing the Roll of Honour on the west face of the Town Hall was completed in February 1920.

It became common knowledge that the 'anonymous' donors were Mr and the Hon. Mrs Thomas Kingscote of Watermoor House, and this explains why the list of names on the side of the Town Hall includes family members and friends – the Trotters, for example, were nephews of Mrs Kingscote – with minimal association with the town.

Some sense of the unease felt about this in certain quarters can be seen in the Minutes of the Parish Church Vestry meeting of 13 January 1919 when "in response to a remark by Mr W S Harmer regarding the inclusion of certain names in the List of Fallen to be inscribed on the West Wall of the Town Hall, and which did not appear to him to belong to Ciceter men, Mr Kitson explained the course adopted by the Committee chosen to go through such names, and that in the circumstances the insertion in such [a] list of one or two of the donor's friends was unavoidable" [Glos Archives, PCC Records P86/1 VE 2/2].

And onwards to today

There was a further twist to the story of the War Memorial. Exactly two years later, on 13 January 1921, the town was battered by a gale “which did little serious damage in the district with one grievous exception, the beautiful War Memorial Calvary”. The cross shaft snapped and the carved capital was irretrievably broken. The *Wilts & Glos Standard* gave full details. “The hurricane from the north-west exerted its full strength, its force probably being increased by the fact that the wind swept through the sort of passage-way formed by the south-west angle of the tower and the houses opposite. The Calvary stands almost exactly in front of this passage-way, and about 10 o’clock on Tuesday night, when the gale was at its height, the shaft snapped in two at a joint seven feet from the base, and the upper part of the column, with the exquisitely carved capital, was hurled against the iron railings of the churchyard, which were crushed to the ground, and the stone work of the shaft and capital were smashed by contact with the railings and street pavement.

“It is hardly necessary to add that this sad disaster to the beautiful memorial, which has become an object of reverent admiration not only to residents but also to visitors to the town, is sincerely mourned by the parishioners, who feel the greatest sympathy with the donors in seeing their gift thus ruined. Mr Comper, the architect who designed the Calvary, is visiting Cirencester today (Friday), for the purpose of examination and advice” [WGS 22 Jan 1921].

Writing to the Kingscotes on 24 January, the architect assessed the cause of the structure’s collapse. “All that is possible to say on a first examination of the collected stones is that, while the workmanship was quite perfect in every particular, the joint at which the shaft gave way was faulty, as the event proves. Had the spread and weight of the head of the cross been less, so as to offer less resistance to the wind, or had it stood in the open where it could not have encountered such a gust, it is conceivable that the joint might have held. It is known in Cirencester what the force of the wind must have been in that particular gully (in a line with which the cross fell), but a cross not capable of withstanding it should obviously not have been put there...”. Comper duly instigated replacement works and the restoration of the Calvary was completed in February 1923, once again paid for by the Kingscote family.

Meanwhile the issue of drawing up a ‘true’ Roll of Honour was entrusted at the end of January 1921 to another Sub-Committee, aiming to achieve a complete list of the names of all Cirencester men and women who fell in the War or died from the effects of wounds received or illness contracted on Active Service. The qualifications for inclusion were birth in the parish of Cirencester and/or enrolment whilst resident in the town.

This Roll of Honour was to be affixed to the outer wall of the Apsley Hall extension of Cirencester Hospital in Sheep Street, which ever since has formed the town’s second War Memorial and Peace Thanksgiving. Many names appear on both, but as with so many examples elsewhere the possibility remains that there may be individuals who would qualify to be included but who still have no memorial.



Apsley Hall, in Sheep Street, seen here around 1925. Its war memorial hospital façade is clearly seen, part of the conversion of the building overseen by local architect V.A. Lawson (photo W. Dennis Moss)

Cirencester has other more specific war memorials too of course, preserved (if not always accessible) around the town. A plaque commemorating Cirencester Old Grammarians who died in the Great War was removed from the former Grammar School in Victoria Road and is now displayed in the Bingham Hall; another plaque to former members of the Church Lads' Brigade hangs in the Parish Church. Former pupils of Oakley Hall School were commemorated in the school chapel, now a private house off Somerford Road; and a memorial to former church bell ringers hangs in Holy Trinity Church, Watermoor.

An unusual form of memorial was the gift of an oak staircase contributed towards the refurbishment of the Memorial Hospital in Sheep Street from the family of Major Edgar Bannatyne, in gratitude for the care he received in the hospital following a flying accident at RFC Rendcomb. He died of wounds in September 1917. In recent years and prior to the building's demolition, it is understood that the staircase, in use of course for many years until the closure of the hospital some years ago, has been rehabilitated to a new location elsewhere with the agreement of his family's descendants.

Meanwhile in the centre of the town, the War Memorial Calvary continues to this day to be the focus for services of dedication and commemoration on Armistice Day, annually marking the eleventh hour of the eleventh month; and to catch the eye of so many local people and visitors passing by in their busy lives every other day of the year.

By the early 21st century both the inscriptions on the war memorial base and the lists of names on the adjoining wall of the Town Hall were in need of conservation. A restoration campaign was launched and using the skills of local stone craftsman and artist Rory Young in 2003-4 both the memorial names and the inscriptions were recut and highlighted, to give these memorials once again the presence they deserve.

Peace Celebrations, 19 July 1919

Now partially opened up once again as a central open space, Cirencester Market Place has a distinguished history as a venue for public festivities, including national events, from the Coronation of Queen Victoria onwards, through the 19th and for much of the 20th century. Some of these developed from local celebrations, often involving charitable dinners and teas, the town's Mop, or milestone events linked to the succession of royalty; plus of course some more sombre gatherings marking key dates and events in both the First and Second World Wars.



Peace celebrations in Cirencester Market Place on a very wet day, 19 July 1919
(photo W Dennis Moss)

The weather, alas, was not always conducive to large open-air gatherings, and one of the best examples of that were the peace celebrations held in the Market Place on 19 July 1919.

The *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* reported on the preparations for this event. "It is intended that the PEACE CELEBRATION shall include a united "Treat" for the Children of the Town on July 19th, and also the Entertainment of returned Soldiers and Sailors to a Dinner" [WGS 12 July 1919].

"It appears to be the unanimous feeling of the Inhabitants that the Fitting up of the Apsley Hall Premises as an X-Ray and Electrical Department and altering the Building to provide

Bedroom and Sitting-room accommodation for the Hospital Nursing Staff would be the most suitable form of War Memorial, and also that a 'Roll of Honour' for Cirencester shall be inscribed on a Block of Stone or some other suitable Monument to be placed either outside the Apsley Hall premises or in some more conspicuous position such as the Market Place."

All this was expressed in the paper in the following way, subscribers being invited to allocate the whole or a portion of their subscriptions to the General Fund or to the Hospital Fund. A house-to-house collection was also to be made, using volunteers.

Cirencester: War Memorial and Peace Celebration.

As a War Memorial and Peace thank-offering at the close of the most terrible war of all time, the proposition to alleviate suffering in the future by the addition of Apsley Hall to our Hospital, and fitting it up with the most scientific appliance at a cost of £2,500, has met with general approval.

We also wish to show our extreme gratitude to our returned fellow townsmen by entertaining them on Peace Day, and also cause our children to remember the great event of the signing of peace by giving them a tea. This will necessarily cost between £200 and £300.

In connection with the Hospital Scheme, Earl Bathurst has most generously given the Building, and has joined with Countess Bathurst in providing £500 for an Endowment Fund, and it is hoped Ciceter people will acknowledge their thankfulness to God by Subscribing generously.

*E.J. Burge, Chairman of the Committee
R.W. Ellett, Hon. Secretary.*

Two days after the event, the *Gloucestershire Echo* edition for 21 July 1919 tells the whole story: "For the peace celebrations at Cirencester a capital programme had been arranged, but owing to the very wet weather, especially after 3 o'clock, the majority of the sports, the entertainments by schoolchildren, country dancing, gymnastic displays by the Church Lads' Brigade Gymnastic Troupe, as well as the out-door dancing by the general public and the letting off of fireworks had to be abandoned.

"The town was gaily decorated for the event, nothing to equal it has been carried out in the capital of the Cotswolds for a quarter of a century. The day's proceedings began with selections by the M&SWJR Works Band in the Market Place, and shortly afterwards three of the principal events in the programme of sports were started in the presence of an enormous crowd. The first was a road cycle handicap, for which there were seven entries. The distance to be covered was 19½ miles, the course being through Poulton, Fairford, Quenington, Barnsley, and returning to the Market Place. Result: F.W. Ruddle 1, E.H. Winstone 2, E. Maslia 3.

"The next one was a cross-country handicap of about four miles. The three competitors had to run through Castle Street, Sheep Street, Somerford Road, Siddington, Watermoor Road, Cricklade Street and Market Place. The first home was W.A. Sollis, age 52 years, who had a

most popular ovation, as he was an easy winner and ran the whole course in 29½ minutes. F. Peachey was second and W. Kent third. In a 7-mile junior cycle handicap (the course being Tetbury Road, Stroud Road, Cotes, Trewsbury, Tetbury Road and Market Place) H.N. Gough easily won first prize. J. Gill being second and Percy Lock third.

“At one o’clock there was a dinner in the Corn Hall for demobilised sailors, soldiers and seamen, and service men on leave. About 430 men accepted the invitation and all were loud in their praises of the feast provided for them. Mr Thomas Davies, M.P., presided, and was supported by Mr E.J. Burge, J.P., chairman of the Peace Celebrations Committee. Following the repast, Mr Davies proposed the loyal toast (which was accorded musical honours) and said that during the past week he attended the garden party at Buckingham Palace to meet the King and was introduced to the Queen, with whom he had some conversation relating to Gloucestershire. Her Majesty mentioned with special interest her visit to Badminton some years ago, but when asked if it would be possible for her to visit Gloucestershire again soon the Queen said she was sorry that she could not do so at the present time as she had so many appointments to fill. Mr E.J. Burge, in proposing “Our Guests”, thanked the men on behalf of the town for the part they had taken in the war, and said they regarded it as a great honour to entertain so many gallant fellows.

“At 2.30 there was a great crowd in the Market Place when the hymn “All people that on earth do dwell” was sung, followed by a verse of the National Anthem. A procession was then formed in the following order: M&SWJR Works Band, members of Cirencester Urban Council, demobilised sailors, soldiers and airmen, and Service men on leave, Cirencester Detachment of the British Red Cross Society (Mr E. Connel, commandant), fancy dress parade, Church Lads’ Brigade, boys of town schools, local company of the Girls’ Life Brigade, girls of town schools, and infants in conveyances.

“The procession, which was nearly half-a-mile in length, passed through Dyer Street, Lewis Lane, Cricklade Street, Gosditch Street and thence to the Abbey Grounds kindly lent by Major Dugdale. The judging of the competitors in the fancy-dress parade was at once proceeded with, the awards being as follows: 1 W. Mills and Miss M. Mills, “Old soldier and his mother”; 2 Ernest Pike, “Red Indian”; 3 A. Tenty and H.B. Lawn, “John Bull and Uncle Sam”.

“While the heats in the boys’ races were being run, rain fell so heavily and it was deemed advisable to postpone the remainder of the programme of sports and the entertainments etc. Thanks to the wise fore-thought in providing marquees the 1,400 school children belonging to Cirencester were able to have tea in the Abbey Grounds, as well as the general public on payment of a small sum. Shortly afterwards everybody made tracks for home or to some other place of shelter from the incessant heavy rains.

“In the evening the Comrades of the Great War held a successful smoking concert at the Crown Hotel.

“The inmates of the Cirencester Poor Law Institution had a splendid time on Peace day and were provided with extra fare for dinner and tea. Miss Hadow, Messrs. A.J. Matthews, T. Mann, and A. Long (Guardians), and the Rev. W.A. Robins (Chaplain) assisted the officials in

serving the dinner. Some of the Guardians also visited the Institution at tea time and helped in attending to the wants of the very happy inmates.”

Anniversaries quickly rolled round, and the *Cheltenham Chronicle* reported on the 1919 Armistice church parade. “To mark the first anniversary of the signing of the Armistice, the Cirencester Comrades of the Great War held a church parade on Sunday morning. They assembled at the Barracks and headed by their newly-formed band, which made its first public appearance, marched to the Cirencester Parish Church for divine service. The members mustered in strong force, and were under the command of Lord Bathurst, and their progress through the streets was witnessed with considerable interest by a large concourse of people. The preacher was the honorary chaplain (Rev. W A. Robins). After the service the three sections passed in single file by the local war memorial and gave the salute” [CC&GG 15 Nov 1919].

The fund-raising scheme to equip Apsley Hall as an addition to the town’s hospital in Sheep Street also bore fruit: “The Cirencester Hospital war memorial building is almost completed and will be ready for re-opening in the course of a few weeks. Countess Bathurst has been appealed to to perform the opening ceremony. The X-ray apparatus and plant which was used at the Bingham Hall when it was occupied by wounded soldiers, and which has been presented by the Red Cross Society to the Cirencester Hospital, has already been installed in the new building, and will prove a big boon to the inhabitants. It has been decided to erect a tablet on the front of the memorial hall bearing the names of all the men belonging to Cirencester who lost their lives in the Great War.” [CC&GG 01 Jan 1921].

.....

NEWSLETTER No 65 for 2019

The *Newsletter* serves as an update and archive of various research and local activities and submissions are always welcome. Contact the editor: dviner@waitrose.com. The views expressed in the Newsletters are those of the contributors and/or the editor in each case and are not necessarily those of the Society.

The *Newsletter* (and Annual Report) first appeared for the year 1958/59. An archive set of all these publications, plus the four editions of *Cirencester Miscellany* containing longer articles on local history, is held in Gloucestershire Archives under the reference number D10989, where members and other enquirers are welcome to consult them @ www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives

Cirencester Archaeological & Historical Society [CAHS] is a registered charity (No. 287289). An increasing amount of material published over the years in its publications is now being made available on the Society’s website, which should be the first point of contact for enquiries @ www.cirenhistory.org.uk

August 2019

.....

What might have been



The Cirencester Church Lads' Brigade [CLB] took part in the procession around the town as part of the Peace Celebrations on 19 July 1919. However, with the heavy rain causing postponement of much of the sports and entertainments programme to follow in the Abbey Grounds, one of the victims would have been the demonstration from its Gymnastics Group. This image shows the Group demonstrating on another (unknown and undated) occasion and in better weather. Their distinctive *Ciceter CLB* banner is prominently displayed, this use of the old town name still being commonplace at the time. A century on, Ciceter has disappeared from use (and even recognition) almost completely.

Photo courtesy Philip Griffiths collection.

.....