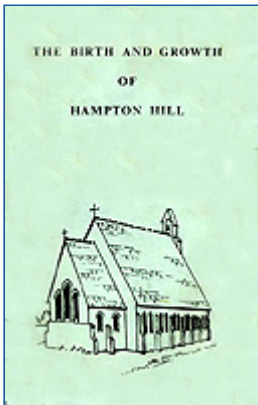


## Chapter 6 - The War Years

### *The Boer War:*



In June, 1899, Queen Victoria celebrated the sixty-second anniversary of her accession to the throne, and the Rev. C. R. Job wrote in his Parish Magazine, "No reign was ever so blessed as this has been to England's prosperity and England's peace." Within five months, however, that peace had been shattered and England was at war with the Boers of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, the first of three bitter wars she was to fight within the next forty-five years.

Local recruiting meetings were organised and when the war was six months old the SURREY COMET reported that Hampton Hill was well represented in South Africa, as no fewer than fifteen of the men of the village were serving under Lord Roberts. Fifteen out of a population of two and a half thousand seems remarkably few and it is little wonder that village life seems to have been barely affected by this distant war.

Funds were opened to collect money and gifts for the volunteers. General Sir George White had occupied "Willowbrook" in St. James's Road, a few years earlier, so special interest was taken locally in Lady White's national appeal for Christmas presents and comforts to be sent to the Ladysmith Garrison. And how odd some of the presents were! The first local list included four shawls, eight tam o'shanters and pipes - both old and new. By December, 1899, money had been raised for the benefit of wives and families of soldiers and sailors on active service; the Hampton Hill Football Club had sent their first contribution of £31 1s. 7d. to the Mansion House Fund for sufferers of the war, a smoking concert had been held at Victoria Hall on behalf of soldiers, sailors, widows and orphans, and our local fire brigade had been to Chiswick to take part in a parade organised on behalf of Lady Hamilton's Transvaal Fund.

The outward enthusiasm for the war seems to have been short lived and apart from those with husbands or sons in South Africa, life went on as before, with the usual round of variety entertainments, mothers' meetings, fruit and flower shows, carnivals and cricket matches to brighten up what was, for the majority at the turn of the century, an austere existence.

When peace came on June 7th, 1902, there was no organised demonstration, but "a plentiful array of flags." The High Street look particularly gay, while in other parts "there were not wanting outward and visible signs of heartfelt rejoicing." It was expected that there might be a repetition of Mafeking night when the Vicar had addressed his people from the roof of Mr. Roland Moores' shop (on the corner of High Street and Windmill Road); and on Monday evening crowds began to assemble there to "assist" in such a celebration. But this was not to be, so they contented themselves by demonstrating in their own fashion, parading the streets and shouting and singing patriotic airs for several hours. At about nine o'clock the local firemen turned out with their hose truck on which was a harmonium, and taking their stand in front of the Post Office, with Superintendent Bailey at the instrument and Fireman Shaw as soloist, the National Anthem and Rule Britannia were lustily sung.

### *The First World War:*

When war was declared in August, 1914, enlistment in His Majesty's Forces was again on a voluntary basis, but, nevertheless, by October 1st, a list hung in St. James's Church porch, showed the names of over a hundred local men who were already serving in some branch of the forces. It was decided that until the war ended the church bell would ring at noon each day to remind everyone to pray for "the King and all those in authority, our sailors, soldiers, the suffering, the anxious and the sorrowful." Like every town and village throughout the country,

Hampton Hill lost many of her young men during the ensuing four years, indeed the first casualty from the local volunteers was reported in October, 1914. By November 11th, 1918, the Roll of Honour which Mrs. Bligh had presented to St. James's Church contained the names of one hundred and seven parishioners who had been killed on active service.

It would be invidious to single out some for special mention and to refrain from mentioning others, but one particular death resulted in a touching local ceremony and so is recorded here. In 1916, Mr. Deacon Howe lent the Wellington Road Football Ground for the presentation of a flag by Miss A. C. Butler to the XV Deanery Battalion of the Church Lads' Brigade, in memory of her only nephew, Lieut. Edward H. S. Bligh, son of the second Vicar of St. James's, killed at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles. There were three hundred and twenty officers and lads drawn up on the field under the command of Major F. Cooke and Captain A. E. Basey, and many local personalities were present; the Hon. Mrs. Bligh, Captain and Mrs. Christie Crawford, from Beveree, Mr. and Mrs. G. F. Stutchbury, Mr. and Mrs. Downes Norton, Mr. and Mrs. Hetherington, the Misses Ovington Jones and the Rev. L. R. Coad-Pryor, amongst many others.

There are many instances amongst the village casualty lists of families with three or four sons all serving in various branches of the Forces and a Myrtle Road family had seven sons all serving - the youngest, a lad of fifteen.

In spite of the casualties and the newspapers' reports, the war front must still have seemed a long way from Hampton Hill's civilian population and there must have been great local alarm when, for the first time in the history of the village, in October, 1915, the villagers were threatened in their own homes by attack from the air. There were many not well prepared for such an attack, as we read that "during the Zeppelin raid it was surprising to see how very well illuminated were several of the houses in this vicinity."

On March 3rd, 1917, there was some small excitement when a naval balloon containing one officer "dropped gently to the ground" on Fulwell Golf Links, opposite the Isolation Hospital (now Longford Close). Several boys and other volunteers helped in packing it up and it was later removed in a cart. Another sign of war activity came a few months later when "during the great air raid on Saturday, the German raiders were seen from several places in the village, where the sounds of the firing and the falling bombs were clearly heard."

To take precautions against future raids the Urban District Council established the boys' school and drill hall as Hampton Hill's casualty clearing station but there is no record of it having been in actual use.

On the home front the villagers were not idle. Within a few weeks of the outbreak of war, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Mrs. Norton, of Laurel Dene, to help Belgian refugees. Lady White, of Willowbrook, was also on the committee, of which Mr. S. Cornish was the auditor.

The first party of Belgians arrived on October 31st, 1914, and the average number being cared for in the village at any time was forty. They lodged in hostelrys established in Velmead, Maybury and Belgian Cottage and six private apartments in the village, and by 1916, £1,181 had been subscribed by local people to help these unfortunates. All the men were found work, either in this country or in France, so they were able to contribute towards the maintenance of themselves and their families, and the children were given free tuition by the Education Authorities. According to the SURREY COMET "the hospitality and help extended to the refugees has been received with extreme gratitude and is amply expressed by the sincere and touching letters that have been received."

A Belgian officer on leave was reunited with his family for the first time since the commencement of hostilities and wrote expressing his relief and joy in finding his wife and son well cared for. He said he could "now return with renewed courage to face what comes." Six Weeks after his return to the front a telegram was received - "Adjutant D. . . . gloriously killed, September 10th."

From the early days of the war, local women were busy rolling bandages and knitting for service men and in 1916 Mrs. Norton appealed for volunteers to make large quantities of net

mosquito curtains (for Wear on the march) and "sunshades of khaki drill to protect the neck." On December 21st, 1917, we read that Princess Marie Louise bestowed the Order of Mercy on Mrs. Norton, at St. James's Palace.

Hampton and District V.A.D. enlisted volunteers, and detachments did day and night duty at the hospital. It is not surprising to learn that they practised physical and stretcher drill, or bandaging and first aid, but why they spent hours doing signalling drill is unexplained and must remain a mystery.

In January, 1917, the Hampton Court Military Hospital, with accomodation for a hundred and forty beds opened and was staffed by voluntary medical organisations from all the surrounding villages including Hampton Hill. This was the very first hospital to be jointly administered by V.A.D.s, the Order of St. John and the Red Cross.

Whist drives and entertainments by such groups as the Scarlet Minstrels, were constantly organised and supported to provide Christmas presents and comforts for the troops, as well as to raise money for such causes as the Star and Garter Fund for Disabled Soldiers and Sailors and the National Egg Collection Fund for wounded soldiers.

At a meeting held in December, 1916, it was unanimously decided that local residents would open and staff a canteen at the Fitz Wygram Coffee Tavern for the benefit of wounded Canadian soldiers from the hospital which had been set up in Upper Lodge, Bushy Park. St. James's was the scene of several impressive military funerals when Canadian soldiers were buried in its peaceful churchyard which rang momentarily to the firing of three volleys in salute and to the soundmg of the Last Post.

Members of the younger generation were not backward in giving assistance where they could, and many of the village children helped Mrs. Isobel Anthony, of Sussex Lodge, with the National Egg Collection. In January, 1916, Mrs. Anthony thanked the Hampton Grammar School boys and St. James's Church Lads' Brigade for their help in collecting four thousand nine hundred and seventy-four eggs and £26 in cash. The following year, in a letter to the SURREY COMET, she suggested that "if a few words of encouragement and cheer were sent on the eggs, written in pencil, it would encourage our men, and those who were down hearted would get a new interest in their lives on finding that there are people who think and care for them and are grateful for their protection."

Between March, 1915, and June, 1917, ten thousand, three hundred and forty eggs were collected in the district, plus over £66 in cash, but the Rev. R. Coad-Pryor said that more effort still was needed in this direction as a million eggs a day were being used.

Perhaps the most astonishing help in the local war effort came from the senior classes of the girls' and boys' school. The children, none of whom could be more than twelve or thirteen years of age, went for an hour each day to the Eastbank Mission Hall where they did work in connection with the production of hand grenades. The money they earned was put into school funds for the probable provision of a library at some future date.

As regards the "call up" when conscription became necessary, there was no schedule of reserved occupations as such, but a Hampton Tribunal met regularly to review "Conditional Exemption Certificates" and from details in the Press it would appear that the tribunal was very loth to grant exemption. In 1917 two Hampton Hill master grocers came up for consideration. One was classed at B.3. He was a man of forty with a wife and four children. The other, C.1, was aged thirty-six with a wife and three children. They were granted a mere two months' exemption and told to train someone to run their businesses, further exemption being improbable.

As the war dragged on, conditions at home became harder, particularly for the families of servicemen. In April, 1916, a protest meeting of married men who were liable to be called up under the Derby Scheme was held in the Fitz Wygram Hall. The Rev. R. Coad-Pryor said that "the wife and child of a man who had been earning £2 3s. 0d. a week would receive 17s. 6d. which was not enough. Men who left their homes to fight should have their responsibilities taken over by the Government. Assurances had been given that no married group would be

called up until all the single men had responded, which pledge had been endorsed by Lord Derby. The State must see that justice was done to those who risked all, and set their minds at rest." Somebody at the meeting added: "it would be a good example if Members of Parliament gave up a little of their £400 per annum. Let there be equality of service, of sacrifice and of security."

There is evidence that these grievances were felt generally as there are reports of similar meetings from the surrounding districts. A resolution embodying the feeling of the meeting was sent to the Prime Minister.

It is hard to imagine how a mother and child could have existed on 17s. 6d. a week, for by the beginning of 1917 some essential foods were in short supply and were very expensive. Potatoes were scarce, and much hard feeling was aroused in the village when some shopkeepers insisted that other goods should be purchased before they would supply potatoes. Beef, mutton, fish, sugar, cheese, bread and potatoes were one hundred per cent beyond their 1914 prices and the cost of some other goods had risen by as much as one hundred and seventy-four per cent.

A meeting of the Hampton Allotment Holders' Association was held at the Library, in Windmill Road, in October, 1918, and the SURREY COMET reported that, "The Chairman thought some action ought to be taken in regard to the price of milk. At a conference he had attended, a statement was made as to the huge profits that were being made by cowkeepers who were selling milk at sixpence a quart."

The following month the war came to an end and "at Hampton Hill there was much jubilation and general display of bunting on the signing of the Armistice, the roads in which the cottager class live showing most conspicuously in the blaze of colour. The places of worship were promptly thrown open for thanksgiving and prayer, the bells were rung and in many instances workpeople were granted a half-day off."

A few days later, the Rev. R. Coad-Pryor presided at a meeting at which it was agreed that a memorial to all those parishioners who had lost their lives during the war should be erected in St. James's Churchyard.

### *The Second World War:*

Most of the problems and incidents with which Hampton Hill was faced in the 1939-45 war were common to the entire country. Little is to be gleaned from the local press, as security precluded the reporting of bomb damage, casualties and the shortages, anxieties and alarms of wartime life.

Two days after the outbreak of war there was not a curtain rod, hook or ring left in the village as the blackout went up, and torch batteries vanished temporarily as well. The old pre-lighting days were relived as the twentieth century villagers felt their way round suddenly unfamiliar streets in the rigidly enforced gloom. Locality names were eradicated so as to give no aid to parachutists, but here and there some forgotten manhole cover modestly continued to proclaim its allegiance to the Borough of Twickenham or even to the Hampton Urban District Council.

Many small local industrial plants were geared to wartime production as the village entered the war effort. Six acres of land on Fulwell Golf Course were ploughed up for allotments, Twickenham Corporation paying an annual rent of £2 per acre. A large part of Bushy Park was under cultivation and the Allotment Holders' Association acquired a vast increase in membership, the Old Brew House becoming a centre of activity for those villagers "Digging for Victory" in back gardens all over the parish.

St. James's Parish Magazine brings back those distant days vividly. In December, 1941, the Rev. F. P. P. Harvey, in introducing the collections for the "Fund for Russia," says: "We must do all we can to help this brave and courageous people who for half a year have been resisting with no little success the mighty onslaught of a ferocious enemy." In March, 1942, he comments on the "critical time in the war which has become a world wide tragedy," and due to this crisis the railings in front of the church were sacrificed for munitions.

In July, 1942, it was impossible for St. James's to hold its fête due to wartime shortages but a gift day took its place and the Vicar sat in the church from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. on Saturday, July 25th, and received £50 in donations towards the upkeep of the church. In August of the same year great efforts were made to see that no name of those from the parish serving in H.M. Forces, of either sex, should be left off the Roll of Honour which was placed in the church.

In the same issue of the magazine we read, "at last we are assured of ever-increasing help from our great ally America from which we can take courage" and soon afterwards American forces were encamped in Upper Lodge and its surroundings and the villagers became accustomed to transatlantic tones in the village shops and transmitted from the camp's loudspeaker system - especially when the air raid siren sounded and the volume and urgency became intensified as the soldiers "jumped to it." Early in the war the park had been pitted over its entirety by deep holes so that these and their attendant piles of earth should act as a discouragement to airborne landings. To these disfigurements were added the temporary buildings and car park necessary to accommodate our allies.

The Vicar was asked to make known to his parishioners the Borough's instructions as to procedure in the event of invasion in order "to co-ordinate military and civil needs in such a way as to maintain services essential to life" and under the heading "If Invasion Comes" he performed this duty in the Parish Magazine.

The Town Clerk became the Invasion Defence Officer, relying on the Forces and the Government to guide him. The borough was divided into eleven areas each under a District Invasion Defence Warden. Hampton Hill with Fulwell became District No. 9 and was named "Fairlight" after its headquarters which became Wardens' Post E.G.

The Public Library had been closed at the outbreak of hostilities and was used as an auxiliary fire station. The books were transported to Fairlight, which thus did dual duty as library and Wardens' Post. The wardens' service and fireguards played a prominent part in local civil defence and the Women's Voluntary Service also had liaison officers at the local headquarters.

"In the face of invasion the duty of the whole civilian population is to stand firm and in any and every way possible, hinder and frustrate the enemy . . . all must anticipate and be ready to answer the call to attend instruction lectures and classes." Hampton Hill certainly answered the call. There were classes for lighting emergency field kitchens, working stirrup pumps, fire fighting, first aid drill, casualty clearing, gas mask drill and, in addition, St. James's Mothers' Union underwent courses on "the planning of palatable wartime meals" and "make and mend."

In spite of the outbreak of war Hampton Grammar School moved into its new £100,000 quarters in Hanworth Road in December, 1939, and set about the provision of air raid shelters. The Middlesex Education Committee asked the County Council for £666 towards the £1,000 needed to provide an air raid shelter for the Lady Eleanor Holles School, large enough to accommodate four hundred and sixty children.

In November, 1940, we read that Lady Eleanor Holles School was growing enough vegetables in its garden to supply the school during the winter and the girls had done a great deal of the work.

Windmill Road School was closed in September, 1939, until further notice but milk was distributed to the children. A study of what happened in this school gives a fair idea of what school life was like in the parish during the war. On October 16th the school opened again, but for tutorial classes only, not more than eighty children being allowed on the premises at any one time. Parents had to sign a form accepting full responsibility in the event of air raids.

In November, home groups for infants were started by Miss A. E. Lush at her own home, fifteen children attending from 10 a.m. to noon and a further fifteen from 1.30 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. However, the expected raids did not materialise at this time and the school was functioning normally again by December 18th, but its usual routine was interrupted by gas mask drills, air raid precautions drill, etc. - all checked by the local A.R.P. Wardens.

The first air raid whilst pupils were in school was on August 26th, 1940. Pupils and staff were in the shelters in two minutes so excellent had been the preparation and training. From then on the children were in the shelters day after day, for ever increasing periods of time, sometimes nearly all day. Nights were disturbed also and thus school opening hours had to be changed from time to time - sometimes starting as late as 10.30 a.m.

The raids went on almost daily until the Christmas holidays and on October 8th, Windmill Road School records state, "The Head Master desires to place on record his appreciation of the courage and devotion to duty of all members of the school staff during the continuous air raids. Mental arithmetic, spelling and word games, reading, story-telling and recitations have received attention in the shelters and the lessons have been thoughtfully prepared . . . the children have adapted themselves to these trying conditions remarkably well."

During the 1942 summer holidays the school was open for the service of meals and milk and also for the amusement and recreational occupation of children whose parents were on war work; the teachers being in charge.

The year 1944 saw the advent of the Pilotless Planes and schools' and villagers' lives were once more disorganised by constant journeys backwards and forwards to the shelters.

Some idea of conditions can be gained by reading that after all-night air raids on June 19th, 1944 - the raid still being in progress at 9.15 a.m. - one child only attended the Windmill Road School on time - some stragglers coming in later.

Although our local schools were not evacuated under the Government Scheme, local teachers volunteered for escort duty and nobly escorted little evacuees as far afield as South Wales and back - no light task over wartime railways with the attendant delays and anxieties.

So life went on, the children busying themselves with such things as salvage collections and collecting books for the Forces, helped and encouraged by their teachers. The Windmill Road School collected £35 7s. 3d. for War Weapons Savings week in 1941. In the very hard winter of 1942, fuel shortage accomplished what the German bombers had failed to do and the school closed due to the intense cold.

A Hampton Hill resident, Mr. T. V. Roberts, was seconded from the library service, for the whole of the war, to Civil Defence in Twickenham and became the Officer in Charge of the Control Centre, and records of the "incidents" which so disrupted borough - and particularly village - life were built up day by day under his supervision.

Formidable indeed were those days! Night after night the raiders came. The searchlight from across the Park flickered across the sky, contacting and criss-crossing with other more distant lights, sometimes picking out a raider in its beam, and then the anti-aircraft gun "our end" of the Park thundered out, as it did also when the bombers passed over the village on their way to the dark metropolis and then back again leaving a crimson sky behind them. On those nights St James's spire stood out clear in the moonlight, seeming to act as a signpost to the raiders and many of its erstwhile admirers had cause to wish it were not quite so prominent. The tell-tale reservoirs and even the Diana fountain had been masked with netting but there was no disguising the Jubilee Spire!

On October 10th, 1940, a high explosive bomb fell on Nos. 71 to 93, Uxbndge Road, seriously damaging six houses but only causing two minor casualties. A month later, on a night of sleet and rain, a British Wellington bomber, the crew of which had bailed out when their plane had become uncontrollable, due to icing, crashed on to No. 63, Park Road, the home of Lady Stanton. Luckily no one was hurt but the house was soon completely gutted and sparks and flaming debris showered the roofs of nearby houses. The Rev. F. P. P. Harvey was on firewatch duty that night and he paraded St. James's Road, sheltering under a large umbrella, keeping an eye on the roofs in case the fire spread. It was anxious work since the ammunition from the Wellington's guns kept exploding in the heat and it was thought at first that enemy planes were machine-gunning the fire.

In the morning it was discovered that the tip of the plane's wing had removed one of the

crosses from one of the four pinnacles at the base of St. James's Spire. It is missing to this day as a reminder of how close the parish church came to destruction.

The next night, November 15th, a land mine exploded on impact in Alpha Road, killing four people outright, while one died of injuries in hospital later. A further number of people were also seriously injured and others were trapped and buried in the debris. Buildings were wrecked and the Roebuck Inn was badly damaged. Damage was sustained to public utilities, gas, water and sewage and there was fire. In all, thirty people were evacuated and sent to rest centres. An anxious hour later an unexploded land mine, the companion to the first one, was found at the rear of a house in Park Road and directly behind No. 17, High Street, near to the junction of the High Street with Park Road. This resulted in rapid widespread evacuation of residents in the danger area to rest centres. For example, everyone between the High Street and St. James's Road was evacuated and the St. James's Road residents were advised to stay in the front of their houses away from glass. The mine was finally disposed of by a specialist Royal Navy contingent. Local rumour had it that although the mine was at the rear of the bakery, the intrepid baker went in and baked the next day's batch of bread - certainly there was no shortage of supply the following day.

A fortnight later, on November 29th, an H.E. bomb demolished No. 14 Links View Road, causing serious damage to houses and various public utilities. The road was impassable and the whole area was a shambles. Fortunately there was only one fatal casualty.

On June 19th, 1944, a flying bomb fell at Longford Close, causing very serious damage. One person died later in hospital and six persons were seriously injured. Some one hundred and fifty houses were damaged and there was widespread evacuation to rest centres including St. James's Hall. Later, no less than thirty-eight people had to be billeted as they could not return to their badly damaged homes.

These were the more serious incidents but there were many more "minor" ones. Minor in that considerable damage was often done but no lives were lost or serious injury caused.

In September, 1940, Cranmer Road was damaged by shrapnel and on October 10th, the same year, a high explosive bomb landed in Uxbridge Road between Hanworth and Windmill Roads. The noise was shattering and buildings in the vicinity rocked. When the villagers ventured out to investigate they expected to see serious damage and casualties but it was found that the most serious damage was to Swanhurst Nursery's glasshouses and the only casualties were a couple of chickens.

Six days later H.E. damaged 20, St. James's Avenue. There was a grand and noisy firework display on November 5th when H.E. damaged the electric cable on the railway line between Holly and Uxbridge Roads, sending sparks and flashes high into the air, and two nights later high explosive damaged 87, Uxbridge Road. Three days afterwards, on November 10th, a composite incendiary bomb narrowly missed the village and emptied itself harmlessly, though spectacularly, over Fulwell Golf Course. November 29th was a particularly noisy night, bringing more trouble to Longford Close in the shape of incendiaries and also to Holly Road. At the same time there was H.E. damage to 6, Park Road, 11, Seymour Road and also to Cranmer Road. The following night a high explosive bomb, probably aimed at the Laboratory or the A.A. gun, damaged the "Canadian School" in Bushy Park.

In the second spate of heavy bombing in 1944, on February 24th, high explosive fell at the junction of High Street with Windmill Road, damaging public utilities, and at the same time an oil bomb caused a fire at 16, Windmill Road and another at 85, High Street. In addition, Nos. 37 to 39, Edward Road were damaged by H.E. Altogether a memorable night!

In common with the rest of the country Hampton Hill enjoyed an upsurge of the old community spirit through these dark times. The shortages, queues, firewatching - not to mention the common danger - united the villagers as they had not been united since the early days of common hardship.

In May, 1945, at the cessation of hostilities in Europe, the church bells rang out at last. They had been silent so long, their chimes being reserved as an invasion warning. Never before had

there been such displays of flags and bunting and there was music and singing in the streets and parties in the open air. The schools were given holidays and later on the spire of St. James's was floodlit to mark the occasion.

There were, however, many villagers who could not share fully in the general rejoicing in remembering those who had fallen, both in the war that had just ended in Europe and was soon to end all over the world, and in the First World War. Altogether the names of one hundred and fifty-one men and two women from Hampton Hill are engraved on the parish war memorial in St. James's Churchyard. Many family names appear several times over - that of Job five times. Amongst those remembered are the only sons of two more Vicars of St. James's, the Rev, and Hon. Henry Bligh and the Rev. F. P. P. Harvey.

The memorial, with so many well-known names engraved upon it, bears the following inscription

"Their name liveth for ever more. These died the death of honour for God, King and Country."