



Remembrance Sunday 2011 - An Article by Peter Wadlow

Many of you will be aware that 2011 sees the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Royal British Legion. Fewer of you though may also be aware that 2011 is the 90th anniversary of the unveiling of our own Walsoken War Memorial in the cemetery.

It was on Sunday, 6th February 1921 that a large crowd assembled in the cemetery at 2-30pm for the official unveiling of the War Memorial by Mr N. Jodrell, the Member of Parliament for the Kings Lynn Division.

Music at the Ceremony was provided by The Wisbech Town Silver Prize Band and among the Clergy present were Rev John Young, Rector of Walsoken, Rev J.A. Snaith Rev W. Bryant and Captain Manson of the Salvation Army.

The First World War 1914-1918 affected every city, town and village in the country. The War started in 1914 on a tide of patriotic fervour as young men rushed to volunteer to join the Armed Forces in what was universally believed to be a short war. It was certainly no different in Walsoken as men flocked to enlist and the local newspapers printed weekly lists of volunteers who had joined the army in Wisbech, March, Kings Lynn or Downham Market in response to the call of Lord Kitchener, Minister of War, for a million volunteers.

The war lasted 4 long years and saw death and destruction on a huge scale. When the war finally ended in 1918 more than three quarters of a million British Soldiers were dead, 192,000 wives had lost their husbands and 360,000 children had lost their fathers. In excess of one and a half million soldiers had been wounded. In the aftermath of the First World War all over Britain communities began to consider how these deaths should be honoured and remembered.

Walsoken was no different and a Walsoken War Memorial Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Mr D Watt and with Mr J.W. Wing as Honorary Secretary. The War Memorial Committee selected the design of the Memorial and launched a public appeal for subscriptions to the fund to build the Memorial.

The cost of the memorial was £500 and the largest donation was £50 and the smallest was 2d.

The design of the War Memorial is of a life size private of the Norfolk Regiment in Aberdeen granite standing on a composite plinth of red granite with panels of polished granite each face bearing the names of the Fallen. In all there are 119 names engraved on the monument. The Memorial was built by Miller and Sons of Wisbech.

The Ceremony on Sunday, 6th February 1921 was attended by a large crowd of relatives and parishioners. A platform had been erected on which stood the Clergy, Mr Jodrell, Mr Watt, Mr Wing, Mr Weston-Miller and Mr D Shawl. The hymns were led by All Saints Church Choir.

The Memorial was draped in a large Union Flag and the Ceremony began with the singing of "O God, our help in ages past" after which Rev J.A Snaith read Psalm 90 and the Secretary of the Committee read out the list of names inscribed on the panels. A prayer was then said by Rev J.W. Bryant and Mr Jodrell unveiled the Memorial and made a long speech. This was followed by the singing of the hymn "Days and moments quickly flying" and the Rector read the Collects.

The Last Post was then played and a laurel wreath was laid by the Chairman of the War Memorial Committee. This was followed by wreaths and tributes laid by relatives.



Reveille was then played by the Bugler and The Rector gave the final Blessing. The Ceremony concluded with the singing of "Abide with me"

The above was the first Remembrance Ceremony at the Walsoken War Memorial and every year since then a Service has been held outside at the Memorial. Before the Second World War it was held on Armistice Day, 11th November but since 1945 it has been held on Remembrance Sunday. Readers who watched the cine films of Walsoken in the 1930's will have seen the Armistice Day footage for 1936 and will have seen the large crowds who attended then.

The Memorial had a panel added after the Second World War to commemorate the 6 men who died in that conflict.

This year Remembrance Sunday is on November 13th and to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the Unveiling of our War Memorial a wooden poppy cross named for each individual listed on the Memorial will be laid at the base along with wreaths from Walsoken Parish Council, Walsoken War Memorial Committee and Walsoken Parochial Church Council.

It is hoped that members of the congregation attending the Service will collect some named crosses from inside the church and help with the ceremony at the Memorial. The Service at the War Memorial will begin at 10-50am and will be preceded by the church bells being rung half muffled.

In forthcoming issues of the Parish Magazine I intend to give some details about the men whose names are engraved on our Memorial. For this issue I will just give some details of a few of the men.

From the First World War there is Donovan Bright. At the start of the First World War he joined the Royal Navy and served on board HMS Ghurka (note the spelling and not as it is spelt today). HMS Ghurka was a Tribal class destroyer built by Hawthorn Leslie and Company at Newcastle upon Tyne and launched on 29th April 1907. She was 255ft long and powered by 3 steam turbines and had a top speed of 33 knots. She was fitted with 5 12-pounder guns and 2 torpedo tubes.

During the First World War HMS Ghurka served in the North Sea and English Channel as part of the 6th Destroyer Flotilla. She was sunk on 8th February 1917 after hitting a German mine off Dungeness Buoy on the Kent coast. Donovan Bright drowned along with most of the Crew and only 5 survived.

At the unveiling of the Memorial in 1921 a wreath was laid in his Memory with the inscription "In loving memory of our dear Don from Dad, Mum, his brother Jack and sister Marge". Donovan Bright is also commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial.

Some Walsoken men died in the trenches on the Somme or in Flanders but also some died at home such as Bernard Charles Cockett of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry who died at home of spotted fever on 21st March, 1915 aged 21. Bernard was the son of Alfred and Gertrude Cockett of the Mount, Norwich Road Walsoken and he is buried in Wisbech Borough Cemetery.

Some Walsoken men died as Prisoners of War in Germany such as Harry Albin of the Suffolk Regiment who was posted missing at Le Cateau on 26th August 1914 and died in a German Prisoner of War Camp on 8th April 1915. Harry Albin lived in Money Bank Walsoken.

Some Walsoken Parents lost 2 sons such as Mr and Mrs Draycott of 7 George Street Walsoken. Their sons were killed with 3 weeks of each other in 1915. William Draycott of the East Lancashire Regiment died on 6th April 1915 aged 29 years and his brother James of the York and Lancaster regiment was killed on 23rd April 1915 aged 25 years. William is buried in Boulogne Eastern Cemetery and James' body was never identified and he is commemorated on the Menin Gate in Ypres.



A particularly poignant episode concerns William Filby. William lived at 1 Pear Tree Court George Street and was married to Lucy Filby. He was born in Tilney All Saints and originally enlisted in the Norfolk Regiment. In 1915 he was in a Reserve Battalion of the Norfolk regiment based in Felixstowe and along with 173 other members of the Battalion he volunteered to transfer to the Essex Regiment. On 28th July 1915 William boarded the Royal Edward a troopship bound for Gallipoli. On board were 1367 officers and men and a crew of 220. On the morning of 13th August 1915 the Royal Edward was struck by a single torpedo fired from a German submarine and sank within 6 minutes. Over a thousand troops and crew were drowned including William Filby who is commemorated on the Helles Memorial in Turkey.

Although the First World War ended on 11th November 1918 deaths caused by the War continued in the years following.

One of these was C W Archer of the Northamptonshire Regiment who transferred to the Labour Corps and died of wounds received on 13th December 1919. He is buried in our cemetery and his War Graves Commission gravestone is to be found on the north side of the path leading from the tower to the War Memorial.

Although there are only 6 names of Walsoken Men from the Second World War 4 of these died in terrible conditions as prisoners of war of the Japanese. Rowan Beakley died on 18th August 1943 aged 22 years, George Kemp died at sea in a hospital ship on 21st September 1944 aged 24 years, F J Miller died on 1st October 1943 aged 24 years and Henry Mattless died on 1st August 1943 aged 27 years.