

FOR REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 10TH NOVEMBER 2024

It is a very special Remembrance Sunday today as not only are we remembering those who gave their lives in service to this country in war, but we are also celebrating the 100th anniversary of the opening of this Memorial Hall in 1924 to honour those men from this village who had been killed in the Great War of 1914 - 1918. We extend an especially warm welcome to those of you here today who are descended from the men killed in conflict whose names are inscribed on the new bronze plaques which will be unveiled shortly, and we offer our thanks to all the village organisations and individuals who kindly donated towards their cost.

The slaughter of young men in the First World War touched every corner of the nation and hit small communities like North Marston particularly badly. In the space of four years, sixty men left this village to fight across the seas and, of those, twenty-four young men were killed. Scarcely a family in the village was not touched by the loss of a father, son, brother or uncle; an entire generation disappeared and it cast a long shadow over the village for many years afterwards. Four sets of brothers from the Gowin, Cheshire, Holden and Ward families were killed and 13 of the dead have no known grave. Ashley Bernard Cheshire and James Gowin are the only ones buried in North Marston. Two from this village (Samuel Henley and Henry Price) even died together on the same day at the Somme in July 1916. A memorial service was held in the church every time another sad death was announced and sometimes there were joint services. Many of these soldiers left us poignant reminders in the form of photographs taken before they went off to war, proud and confident in their new uniforms, specially photographed so their family or sweetheart would have a keepsake while they were away. On studying these pictures one can see faces of fresh innocence, totally unaware of what lay ahead. Many of these photos are exhibited in the Schorne Room today, along with information about the soldiers themselves and many wartime artefacts. We do hope you will have a look at this exhibition before you leave.

Soon after the end of the war, communities everywhere sought ways of creating a permanent reminder of those that had made the ultimate sacrifice and in North Marston fund raising began for a Memorial Hall. The building cost £1290 and this money was raised by public subscriptions. Mrs Henry Brazier from Stevens Farm gifted the first "ten poles" of land (about 250 square metres) valued then at £7 for the hall building itself which was designed by Mr H Cripps of Winslow and built by Mr A Thorne of Weedon. The land which is now the play area was bought in 1921 for £220 by the Parish Council. The new hall was quoted as having a central room for 200 people with a men's room on one side and a ladies' room on the other. The lighting was from oil lamps suspended from the ceiling. It was opened by Lord Cottesloe, Lord Lieutenant of the County, on Monday 21st April 1924 (though the date on the stained glass window is 1923). Lord Cottesloe was introduced to twin sisters, Eleanor and Ada Buckingham, who were born during the war but whose father Robert had been killed and buried in France in 1917. Photos of the original Memorial Hall and its opening can also be seen in the Schorne Room

In 1939 when the Second World War broke out, many men from this village joined up to serve their country but this war was only to claim the life of one North Marston serviceman, Sergeant George Tattam, an air gunner in the RAF 487 Squadron, who

died in a Lockheed Ventura bomber on 3rd May 1943 in a low-level attack on an Amsterdam power station in occupied Holland. Of the ten planes in his squadron which took part that day every one was lost. George had lived in Church Street and was a regular bell-ringer at the church.

We also remember today the six crew of the Wellington Bomber which crashed in a field at the bottom of Quainton Road in January 1945 shortly after taking off from RAF Westcott, killing all on board. They were aged between 19 and 23 and three were from New Zealand. In 2015 a specially commissioned plaque was erected to these boys in our church and this service was attended by many of their relatives from both the UK and New Zealand. We are delighted that 3 of their relatives are here today. Several of us are old enough to have heard first-hand from our parents their account of that evening when the plane soared low over Quainton Road and of the ensuing fireball in the field near Brook Farm. The crew's photos are on display in the exhibition room and a book about them entitled "Six Young Lives" is available to purchase.

After the Second World War ended this village lost another young man in armed conflict. George Heath who had lived in a cottage on the High Street near the pub was a regular soldier with the Royal West Kent Regiment. He had fought in the Far East during the Second World War, had been captured by the Japanese in Singapore and held as a Prisoner of War. Miraculously he survived and after the war he was back in service fighting in the Malayan Emergency that was to claim the lives of over five hundred British personnel between 1948 and 1960. Ambushed in the jungle in October 1951, George (aged thirty-three) and ten others were killed.

Shortly all the names of those who died serving their country will be read out. Behind each name lies courage and bravery but unbearable sadness for their loved ones. Life for their families was never to be the same again.

In the Bucks Herald newspaper article about the opening of the Memorial Hall in April 1924 was written "It is hoped in due course to erect a memorial tablet in commemoration of the men who died in the service of their country". Now, 100 years later, that has been accomplished.