

# Transcript of an article in the Sevenoaks Chronicle of November 24<sup>th</sup> 1922

## PLATT WAR MEMORIAL

### DEDICATION OF VILLAGE HALL AND UNVEILING OF TABLET

The ceremony of dedicating the Platt War Memorial, which takes the form of a handsome new Village Hall, was performed on Saturday afternoon by the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Rochester in the presence of a large gathering of relatives and friends of the men of St Mary's Platt who laid down their lives in the Great War. A beautiful Tablet commemorating the dead was unveiled at the same time by Brigadier-General C. Wingfield-Stratford C.B., C.M.G., and the scene was one which made a deep impression on all who witnessed it.

The Guard of Honour was provided by twenty seven members of the local branch of the British Legion under Sergt.-Major H. J. Grimwood, who were drawn up in a single rank in the centre of the road and inspected by General Wingfield-Stratford accompanied by General Sir Lionel Stopford, K.C.B.. The former stopped to exchange words with each man as he went along the line, and after the inspection ascended the steps to the Memorial Tablet, in front of which the clergy were already grouped, the Bishop being accompanied by The Rev. J. H. Bradbury Hon. C. F. (Borough Green) who officiated as his Chaplain, and the Rev. C. E. Elder (locum tenens of St Mary's Platt). By a series of smart movements the ex-Service men were turned about to face the Hall and allotted positions at regular intervals, with the Sergeant Major a pace in front and by his side two buglers from the Royal West Kent Depot, Maidstone. On one side was to be seen the large emblematic banner of the Court "Pride of Wrotham" No.7520 Ancient Order of Foresters and opposite stood the members of the War Memorial Executive Committee, consisting of Mr. P. Minter O.B.E. (Chairman), Mr. A. E. Collings, Mr. & Mrs. Pascall, Mr. W. Hall, Mr. P. Heron Maxwell, Miss Somerville, Mr. G. Bennett (Secretary) and Mr. L. Curtis (Treasurer). Behind these and continuing round to the opposite side in a great semi-circle congregated the general public, representative of all classes, and including many women in mourning, and as the impressive dedicatory service progressed not a few were visibly affected by the solemnity of the occasion and the poignant memories it revived. In the background the Union Jack fluttered at half mast.

The ceremony opened with the hymn "All people that on earth do dwell", the singing being led by a choir recruited from the Singing Centre of the Platt Women's Institute, with cornet accompaniment by Messrs. R. Bangay, J. T. Bowles and E. Newman of the local British Legion band. The Rev. ELDER read an appropriate passage from Romans XII 9-18, and after the recital of the Lord's Prayer the BISHOP offered four special supplications for God's blessing "of this building and the uses to which it may be put", and also "those who shall frequent it".

The CHAIRMAN of the Executive Committee then mounted the steps and formally asked General Wingfield-Stratford to unveil the Memorial.

The General did so, the Union Jack with which it was covered falling away from the Tablet and the forty five names of the fallen inscribed thereon were revealed for all eyes to see. Addressing the assembly General WINGFIELD-STRATFORD said it was a great honour for him to be invited to unveil the Memorial - the Tablet on this Memorial Hall which had been erected to the honour and in the memory of those brave men who went from this parish and laid down their lives for their King and Country. These Memorials were erected all over the land, in nearly every parish, in memory of the departed heroes, and it was well that there should be these Memorials, because if it had not been for the bravery of our sailors and soldiers we should have lost that freedom which every Englishman held so dear, for assuredly if we had lost the war we should have lost our freedom also. Referring to some notes which the Chairman of their Committee had given him, with reference to this building, he saw that various schemes had been discussed at public meetings, and in the end a large and enthusiastic majority decided in favour of a Memorial Village Hall, on the exterior of which should be inscribed, on the Tablet, the names of the men connected with this parish who fell in the War. The Hall was designed by Mr. Kingsley McDermott, F.R.I.B.A., and built by Messrs. Simmonds, Wrotham, while the Tablet was the work of Mr. H. Murphy of Platt. The site was given by Messrs. Jude, Hanbury & Co., of Watlington. A large number of parishioners of all classes including numerous working men and women had contributed to the fund, and the Women's Institute had given financial help. About £800 had been obtained, and it was hoped to clear off the balance by means of entertainments. It would be used for a Men's Club, Women's Institute meetings and classes for educational, musical and social purposes. It was a handsome building and well designed for the purposes mentioned, and had been constructed on a commanding and appropriate site on a main road, where it would bring to mind to passers-by what the heroes of this little parish had done. Above the Tablet would be a light to illuminate the words "Lest we forget". It would be a lasting memorial to those brave men whom they wished to honour and to be honoured by future generations. On the Tablet were inscribed the names of 45 men who had fallen for their country out of 200 who had joined up from this parish, which had a total population of 1200 - a very heavy toll indeed. To do honour to this ceremony the Lord Bishop of the Diocese had, out of his much-occupied time,

come to dedicate the Memorial, their vicar being prevented by illness from attending. The Guard of Honour had been furnished by ex-Service men who had done their share in the Great War - members of the British Legion, which was formed to look after the interests of the relatives of disabled and those who were suffering from the effects of having done their duty.

He thought it would be well to dwell shortly on a few lessons which might be gathered from the example set to us by these heroes. Recently we were all stirred by Armistice Day and what took place thereon - the Memorial Services and the wonderful two minutes' silence which brought back to us so many glorious and also so many sad memories. The lessons which had been set to us by our departed heroes were these - patriotism, devotion to duty, endurance and self-sacrifice. Patriotism was love of our country - it commenced on the mother's knee with the love of the parents, it continued to the love of the home, of the parish, of the county and then of the country. It was a feeling which was encouraged in the Navy and Army where it was known as esprit-de-corps. Those who joined Regiments or ships were told to remember all the glorious deeds of their predecessors, and they were often prevented from doing something which would not be right by the knowledge that they should do nothing to tarnish the reputation of the unit to which they belong. It was a great power which brought all the men together, and in this connection he would like to quote the words our Saviour used, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend". That is what these brave men had done, and done for them, and they should take this lesson of patriotism home with them, love their country and parish and those around them, and try to make it a happier place.

Then there was devotion to duty. It was a very hard thing to many of those who joined up, especially civilians, to go through that hard training and strict discipline which was absolutely necessary in order to win the war. Many of them here today knew what it was - those training camps in all weathers, continuous work and the feeling that they could never answer back. They learnt how to obey an order, and it was exemplified perhaps more than in any other way - that solemn moment on the eve of a great attack, when the men were assembled in the trenches. At that time there was a most solemn silence - it was uncanny. All the artillery fire had lifted, and the men were waiting to go over the top. While they were there the deeds of a lifetime came before them. They were all determined to do their duty, and he thought that many of them, when they got the signal, said "God help me to do my duty". His hearers would have occasions in their lifetimes where they would have their duty to do, and they should remember the example set them by their comrades who had fallen.

The third quality, endurance, was a marvellous thing, and seemed so characteristic of the English race. There was no greater example of this "sticking to it", to use a familiar phrase, than in the salient at Ypres. For four years that was held, and was the means of preventing the Germans from getting to the Channel Ports. It was a wonderful case of endurance during that time, when it seemed as though the war were never going to end. He could remember getting the very confidential and secret order that they were to put their backs against the wall, but there was to be no despondency. And that great attack by the enemy gradually filtered out, the gaps were filled up, and then that wonderful counter-stroke of Marshal Foch took place and the victory was won. It was won by endurance and they might be proud of those men who stuck to it. They had their lesson from this, to stick to it if it was hard and it would come right in the end.

He need say very little about self-sacrifice, but he could assure them the instances he saw of sacrifice by the men were wonderful. The strong man helped the weak - often a man had been almost overcome with his nerves at a critical time, and a strong man had helped him. There were cases in which men had to be restrained from going over the top and losing their lives in the effort to save somebody else. We, too, could practise self-sacrifice every day of our lives, and do it remembering the self-sacrifice of the men who had made the supreme sacrifice.

Though they took a pride in what the men had done for us there was another side of the picture. There was the sorrow when a young life was cut away in its prime, full of promise. They felt sympathy with the relatives who suffered - they must all agree that the women of England in this war were wonderful, and he was sure they would all feel deeply for them. He had heard, though he had never read it himself, that in some of the leading papers recently there had been reports of schools in some big towns where young people were taught that there was no God, that death simply meant the earth being wiped out, and there was nothing more. Thank God we were a Christian nation and had that sure hope of the Resurrection. He would remind the relatives of the fallen of those beautiful words of Newman, "In the morn those angel faces smile, which I have loved long since and lost awhile". We must not forget that we owed our victory to God, and the following words which he took out of that old Book, the Bible, were very appropriate to this occasion. They came from the song of triumph of Deborah and Barak, after their marvellous victory. "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel - when the people willingly offered themselves".

Immediately after the General had finished speaking, the "Last Post" rang out from the bugles, and then followed two minutes' impressive silence, broken only by the rushing of an up train,

which served to accentuate the dead stillness when it had died away in the distance. After what must have been an eternity of waiting to some the "Reveille" was blown, and up went the Union Jack to full mast as the Bishop turned, and in measured tones said - In the faith of Jesus Christ we dedicate this Memorial to the glory of God in gratitude to those who laid down their lives: in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The dedication was followed by several prayers, the last one, "That we may be worthy of those who have given their lives for their King and Country". The hymn. "O God, our help in ages past", was sung, - the Bishop pronounced the Blessing, the first verse of the National Anthem rolled out, and the service was over.

This was the signal for the placing of a large number beautiful floral tributes at the foot of the Tablet, and the top step rapidly became a mass of colour. The way was led by Private W. Chapman, D.C.M. (with bar) and Croix de Guerre, who, on behalf of his comrades of the British Legion, deposited a wreath of Flanders Poppies, inscribed "We will not break faith with ye who died". Other wreaths were:- "In grateful memory of our gallant lads, from the people of St. Mary's Platt, and its hamlets"; with the first verse of "O valiant hearts" (red and white flowers); "In remembrance from the members of the Platt Women's Institute" (leaves and berries); "From the Officers and members of Court 'Pride of Wrotham', No. 7520, A.O.F., in remembrance" (laurel and berries); "From the little children of Platt School, in loving memory of the soldiers" (yellow and red chrysanthemums and laurel leaves); From Platt Cricket and Football Clubs; and relatives of the fallen.

The Hall faces the main Sevenoaks-Maidstone road, and is built of bricks manufactured at Platt. It is lighted with gas, has two doors on either side, and is 60 feet long by 30 feet wide. It will be roofed by local tiles as soon as the money is forthcoming, but although the Hall is not yet quite completed, an annex remaining to be built, no difficulty is anticipated in raising the balance of £400 towards the total cost, which amounts to £1200.

At each side of the bronze Tablet are two semi-circular seats, and about the Roll of Honour are inscribed the words:- "St Mary's Platt, 1914-1918", while following the names is the inscription; "These laid down their lives in youth that we might live to age in freedom".

The following are the names on the Memorial Tablet:- Richard Andrews, Joseph Baldwin, Reginald Bowen, Sidney Bridgeland, John Bowen, Alfred Bathurst, Jesse Bush, Charles Eldridge, James Ellis, Harry Gilbert, Louis Hayes, Sidney Hollands, Frederick Ingram, William Merritt, William Neaves, George Parris, Thoms Pascall, Peter Piper, William Rogers, James Ryadean, Arthur Sparks, Reginald Thorndycraft, James Bance, Herbert Ashdown, Thomas Bance, John Barnes, Edwin Best, Harry Bradford, George Broad, Albert Croucher, Edward Ellis, William Evans, Percy Grace, Walter Hoblyn, Walter Humphrey, George Lacey, William Mount, Edward Newman, Leonard Parris, Joel Piper, Bertram Reaves, Ernest Rosem, Stephen Sears, Thomas Terry, Edward West.

After the ceremony refreshments were served in Mr.G.Bennett's store room under the supervision of Mrs.Bennett, Mrs.Pascall and Mrs.Winter. The police arrangements were admirably carried out by Supt. Wratten, K.C.C., assisted by Sgt.Murkett, and P.C's. Waterman, Pearce and Gilbert.

A meeting was held in the new Hall on Wednesday evening, when the building was formally handed over to the Parish.

The following is an extract from a letter received on Saturday from the Rev. John Brand, Vicar of Platt, by the Memorial Hall Committee:-

"I thank for your kind invitation to me to take part in the service of dedication of the Village Hall today, and I welcome it as an expression of your feeling that your first thought should be that our Churches should thank God for the lives given and laid down for us, for our villages and our homes.

I congratulate you on the consummation of our wishes to build this Hall, because when you and I have long been forgotten, the building will stand as it were side by side with the Parish room, each with its great responsibilities and high purpose reaching forward continually to their larger fulfilment - this to raise and ennoble the social life and brighten the homes of the people, the other to carry on and intensify the life of the Parish and to be the handmaid of the Church by the side of which it stands.

I shall never forget, and I am sure that you will never forget, the Memorial services for the men, one by one as they fell. Those solemn services, held in God's house, standing in God's acre where Platt mourners have laid their dead in the years that have past, seemed to bring home and near to us and your buried dead the men whose bodies lay on the battlements of France and Belgium, of the East and faraway lands. So, in order that we may keep them with us, may this Memorial which you have erected here be a help to the living along the path of life, as we hope the Memorial to be placed in the Church will keep in continual remembrance that higher life which is won only by the law of self-sacrifice."