



**One hundred years after
the First World War
Looking back, looking forward**

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Words of greeting

Greetings from the Palatinate Church

The film *Joyeux Noël (Merry Christmas)* – a 2005 war epic based on the Christmas truce of December 1914 – shows us horrifying words and horrendous pictures. It depicts children who, as a matter of course, talk about killing the enemy. These are memorised enemy stereotypes, instilled into the children in Germany, France and England. But that was exactly how it seemed in the hearts of many people in 1914. This was also preached from many pulpits. For instance, there were ministers in the German empire, right up to 1918, who advocated the argument that anyone who, while defending the Fatherland, shot an enemy soldier was thereby administering to him the Christian act of loving one's neighbour.

In contrast to them, a small group of peace activist ministers called upon German Protestants to take a lead against national militarism in the run-up to the First World War. In the spring of the year that war broke out in 1914, the Revd Otto Umfrid, a leading pacifist, spoke prophetic words on the impending doom: 'If the war faction in Germany actually succeeds in rushing us into this terrible future war, and if the blood of the young men of Germany who have been torn apart then lies there on the battlefield, then perhaps the German people will find an answer to the question of whether the person who loves the fatherland more is the one who did everything within his power to prevent this horror, or the one who sowed blood and harvested blood from it. Whether they will shout their cheers when he comes riding on his stamping steed across the charnel fields of the future, while the ghost of hunger grins from ruined huts?'

The First World War was described by George F Kennan, an American diplomat and historian, as the primal catastrophe of recent centuries. A war can never be won. In the end all are losers. The traces left by the First World War still pervade the crisis areas of the present.

According to Joschka Fischer, the former German Foreign Minister, 'Europe was born from pain'. Signs of reconciliation were and still are

the only thing that can heal the wounds of the two world wars. This was also the case when the outstretched hand of forgiveness by Congregationalists took the place of demands for revenge. Today, we still need further signs of disarmament as well as understanding between nations along with the dismantling of preconceived enemy stereotypes, such as the partnership between the (Protestant) Evangelical Church in the Palatinate and the United Reformed Church.

Our children should no longer have to learn by heart songs of hatred. No, they should be influenced by images of peace and we will join with them in songs of reconciliation to bring about what the prophet, in Micah 4: 1-4, foresaw: 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall each sit under their own vines and their fig trees and no-one shall make them afraid!'

Pfarrer Christian Schad, President of the Palatinate Church

Greetings from the United Reformed Church

Almost no-one alive today grew up in the First World War, yet few of us are without its effects upon our lives. Global politics bear its influence; national life is punctuated with its memorials; family stories include tales of this relative's permanent damage, or that one's derring-do. And for some of us of later generations it holds a fascination that hovers between respectful honour and repulsed horror. In truth, we live in the shadows of that conflict, which ended one hundred years ago.

Shadowlands are awesome places. They can at once be eerie, yet also inspiring. Shot through with grief, suffering and despair, shadowlands can be suffocating. Yet, often at the same time, they can be moments when service beyond the call of duty and love beyond the uttermost penetrate the gloom and intimate hope.

It would be wrong if this centenary did not find us lingering in the shadowlands of sadness. We cannot recall that war without prayers of penitence that humanity let such things happen. Then and now,

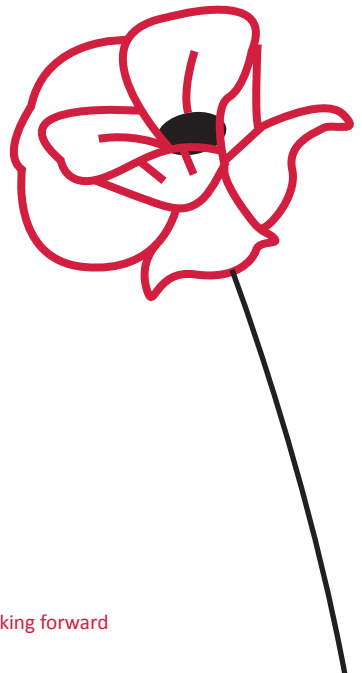
prayers of pleading that we learn to study war no more, and prayers of compassion for those whose lives bear its scars.

At the same time, the 100th anniversary of the armistice can launch us into celebration as we recognise that war is not the default position of human relations, but peace is. It's peace we long for and peace we strive for.

When Matthew records Jesus' Beatitudes, peacemakers are amongst the blessed. There is a tacit acceptance that war happens, otherwise there would be no need for peacemakers, but also that serious engagement with ideas about God sets us on a path to peace. It is such an engagement that this book offers, and for all who would be peacemakers it nourishes the Christian instinct for which we ultimately look to God in Christ, in the ever-present power of the Holy Spirit.

In gratefully reconciled partnership with the Church of the Palatinate, I commend this volume as an instrument of peace for these days when we yearn for 'peace in our time'.

The Revd Nigel Uden, Moderator of the URC General Assembly



Lest we forget ...

The aim of this booklet is to commemorate the centenary of Armistice Day 1918. The contributions to this booklet offer a rich resource of reflections, stories and poems – and its companion volume contains a selection of worship material. At heart, these booklets are about friendship and reconciliation – they represent the amity which has developed during the past 60 years between people whose parents and grandparents were once enemies. From today's position of peace, they jointly reflect on the horrors of conflict.

The poignancy of this 60-year amity is encapsulated by a remarkable Anglo-German story. Pfarrer Martin Henninger, Minister of the Lutherkirche in Frankenthal and convener of the Friends of the URC of the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz, and the Revd David Pickering, Moderator of the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland, made a pilgrimage to the Somme in May 2018. Their two grandfathers, Friedrich and Frederick, both served in – and survived – the First World War.

In the Somme, Mr Henninger and Mr Pickering explored friendship and reconciliation through a contemporary lens and shared a profound sadness at the carnage experienced by their grandfathers. In a very real sense, they were responding to the command seen written in Deuteronomy 4:7-9. This Old Testament passage tells us that nowhere is there 'a god so near as the Lord our God' and so we should 'take care ... so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children'.

In the UK, 'lest we forget', derived from this biblical quotation, are the words most associated with remembrance services. Just one year after the end of the First World War, the Manchester Guardian captured the palpable rawness of those painful memories during the first two-minute silence held in London on 11 November 1919:

'The first stroke of 11 produced a magical effect. The tram cars glided into stillness, motors ceased to cough and fume, and stopped dead, and the mighty-limbed dray horses hunched back upon their loads and stopped also, seeming to do it of their own volition. Someone took off his hat, and with a nervous hesitancy, the rest of the men bowed their heads also ... Everyone stood very still ... The hush deepened. It had spread over the whole city and become so pronounced as to impress one with a sense of audibility. It was a silence which was almost pain ... And the spirit of memory brooded over it all.'

The seeds of the relationship between the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz (the Protestant churches of the Palatinate region of Germany) and our Congregational forebears began with an act of Christian compassion, in the aftermath of yet another world war. In 1946, Mrs Radbone, a German woman who lived in west Sussex with her English husband, visited her relatives in Wolfstein, Germany. There she witnessed the utter deprivation of the period - and determined to do something about it. Mrs Radbone inspired the Congregational Church at Shelley Road, Worthing, to despatch two food parcels, which we know were received in 1947.

This practical act of reconciliation, involving ordinary people in local churches, started something special. It broke new ground for people to sacrificially support their immediate former enemies. In 1957 the relationship led to the formal signing of the Covenant of Pulpit and Table Fellowship between British and German churches and more than 60 years on, the relationship between the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz and the URC flourishes. Regular exchanges take place, often involving delegations of young people. This year, the theological consultation between the two Churches looked at the unifying influence of the Church in a Europe which is beginning to appear worryingly divided.



The imperative to pass on the message of friendship and reconciliation between the Churches of our two European nations is stronger than ever. It is right that our 'children and our children's children' should be encouraged to be part of it. One hundred years on from the end of one of the world's bloodiest conflicts, we are reminded of what happens when such human relationships break down.

*The Revd Philip Brooks - United Reformed Church
Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
September 2018*

Reflections on the historical perspective

'The European continent was at peace on the morning of Sunday 28 June 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie Chotek arrived at Sarajevo railway station. Thirty-seven days later, it was at war. The conflict that began that summer mobilised 65 million troops, claimed three empires, 20 million military and civilian deaths, and 21 million wounded. The horrors of Europe's 20th century was born of this catastrophe. It was, as the American historian Fritz Stern put it: "The first calamity of the 20th century, the calamity from which all other calamities sprang." The debate over why it happened began before the first shots were fired and has been running ever since.'

These are the opening words of *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to war in 1914* by Christopher Clark, Professor of modern European history in Cambridge.

He adds: 'It is a central argument of this book that the events of July 1914 make sense only when we illuminate the journeys travelled by the key decision-makers. To do this, we need to do more than simply revisit the sequence of international 'crises' that preceded the outbreak of war. We need to understand how those events were experienced and woven into narratives that structured perceptions and motivated behaviour.'

One of the 'narratives', as Mr Clark calls it, is the historical enmity between the French and Germans arising from the efforts of Louis XIV, at the end of the 17th century, to make the Rhine the Eastern border of France and the victory over the Germans, during the 1870-71 war, resulting in the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. With the wars of German Unification between 1864 and 1871 there arose a new power in the centre of Europe, which shook the foundations of the carefully balanced equilibrium worked out at the Vienna Congress in 1815. Even though Bismarck had succeeded, through a carefully weighted system of alliances, to allay the fears of the other European powers about this new major power in the centre of Europe, from 1890 Germany was increasingly staking its claim to play

an equal role in the circle of world powers which led, on the other hand, to increasing opposition from Russia, England and France.

At the beginning of the 20th century Germany was faced with the decision of whether to risk war by pursuing its own desire for greater prestige or to remain content with what it had achieved so far.¹

Before the beginning of the First World War there had indeed been considerable efforts to relieve the tensions. 'A decisive factor at the time was that the preservation of peace was not given any priority by the decision-makers in the European capitals - in each case a group of between five and ten people (monarchs, chancellors, foreign and war ministers, chiefs of staff). For them war may not have been the sole instrument for improving the external situation, but it was seen as legitimate and to some extent even desirable.'²

This attitude explains why the murder of the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, led to war. Bethmann Hollweg, the German Imperial Chancellor, assured Austria-Hungary of his unconditional support, without which Austria-Hungary may well not have responded to the murder with military force. The war against Serbia, however, led to the general mobilisation of the Russian army, because Russia felt itself obliged to come to the support of Serbia. Because of Russian mobilisation, the German empire declared war, first against Russia and two days later France. In this situation, politics was a prisoner of the military. In the case of a war on two fronts, as was now the case, the German military had already developed a strategy, the so-called Schlieffen Plan. This was to start by using its full military forces to conquer France, by marching through neutral Belgium before turning to attack Russia as a second step. This military strategy put politicians under intense pressure because it left no room for a flexible political solution.

Who was to blame for this war? 'By asserting that Germany and her allies were morally responsible for the outbreak of war, Article 231 of the Versailles Peace Treaty ensured that questions of culpability would remain at or near the centre of the debate over the war's origins.'³ In the 1960s, the Hamburg historian Fritz Fischer disputed whether governments 'slithered' into the First World War, as had

been generally maintained up to then, claiming that since at least December 1912 Berlin had been working towards the provocation of a war in order to win supremacy in Europe and 'daring to launch a bid for world power'.

Mr Clark, on the other hand, considers the outbreak of war as a 'tragedy, not a crime'.⁴ He writes: 'Acknowledging this does not mean that we should minimise the belligerence and imperialist paranoia of the Austrian and German policy-makers that rightly absorbed the attention of Fritz Fischer and his historiographical allies. But the Germans were not the only imperialists and not the only ones to succumb to paranoia. The crisis that brought war in 1914 was the fruit of a shared political culture. But it was also multipolar and genuinely interactive, that is what makes it the most complex event of modern times.'⁵ Mr Neitzel sums the situation up like this: 'In the summer of 1914 they all respectively felt themselves threatened and under attack by others, they all believed they were engaged in a war of self-defence.'⁶

What followed was more than four years of murderous slaughter, not the short exchange of blows that had at first been hoped for. The rapid German preliminary march through Belgium came to a halt on 9 September 1914 at the Marne. Both warring sides dug themselves in, built trenches topped with barbed wire fences. The Front solidified into a war of attrition. Both sides repeatedly attempted to make a breakthrough whilst suffering enormous losses. The battles of Verdun and the Somme saw the deaths of hundreds of thousands of soldiers without making much difference to the position of the front line. On the first day of the Battle of the Somme alone, the British lost

¹ Weltkrieg und Revolution, Sönke Neitzel, p16

² Ibid, p18

³ The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to war in 1914, Christopher Clark, p715

⁴ Ibid p716



57,000 soldiers. Anyone who has seen the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* recognises the futility of driving soldiers into the line of fire. Ernst Toller – who fought on the Western Front from March 1915 to April 1917 – gives a poignant description of the mental lethargy and routine function of a simple private: 'Great emotions are deadened, great words become small, serving at the front is a daily chore, heroes become sacrifices, volunteers are in shackles, life is hell, death is a bagatelle; we are all cogs in a machine which trundles onwards, no-one knows where, and then rolls back again, no-one knows why; we are put at ease, honed, tightened up, substituted, cast aside – any sense or meaning has been lost.'⁷

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918 did indeed bring an end to the two-front war for the Central Powers, consisting of the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. Despite that, the position of the Central Powers was hopeless, at least following the entry of the USA in 1917. They no longer had the men and the equipment to oppose the superiority of the Allies. In addition, the general population of Germany were less prepared to endure in silence the burdens of war, with the inferno on the front lines and the catastrophic supply situation at home, the more so since the point of the suffering was being increasingly called into question.⁸ The German Western Front was about to collapse, even though by autumn 1918 not a single foreign soldier had stepped onto German soil. It was this fact that contributed to the so-called 'stab in the back myth' formulated later, according to which it was the revolutionaries back home in Germany who had attacked the leadership from behind while still undefeated and had thereby brought about the conquest of the empire.⁹



Parliamentary democracy started in Germany with the double burden of the defeat itself and of the Treaty of Versailles, which laid heavy reparations on Germany and forced it to forfeit large areas of land in both west and east.

Several questions remain:

- How was it possible that in 1914 the leading politicians could not find any other alternative to war? If it was the case that a pattern of thinking characterised by a tangling up of military ambition and superpower aspirations contributed significantly to the outbreak of the First World War, then how should a strategy be devised that protects the options for peace in the face of conflicting interests?
- Can the roots of the Second World War really be traced back to the Treaty of Versailles? That is how it could be understood in the light of the prolonged suffering, the millions of traumatised soldiers and the immense financial debts that ensued. The consequences need to be borne in mind when a peace is concluded that humiliates the enemy.

Pfarrer Martin Henninger



⁵ Ibid p716-717

⁶ Weltkrieg und Revolution, Sönke Neitzel, p31

⁷ Ibid p59

⁸ Weltkrieg und Revolution, Sönke Neitzel, p144

⁹ Ibid p154

Telling the story of the First World War from personal and family memories

A pilgrimage to the Somme

In May 2018, Pfarrer Martin Henninger and the Revd David Pickering paid a pilgrimage to the Somme, where a century ago, both their grandfathers – Friedrich and Frederick had served on opposing sides. The ministers reflected on this experience in the form of a series of letters, beginning first of all with a note from Mr Pickering to his grandpa on the eve of the trip to Northern France.



Dear Grandpa

I'm shortly to set off for the Somme to meet a German, retracing the journey you took just over 100 years ago to face the Germans. I'm taking your identity tag inscribed with your name and military number, and scant memories of what you experienced. My uncle, your youngest son, told me that your service included collecting those injured and the bodies of those killed from no man's land. I wonder about the goodbyes you said, and if you had any idea of what you'd face. I wonder what it was like to first step into a trench and see the conditions of service. I wonder how you felt going over the top, experiencing the true horror of war. I wonder how you felt about those whose instructions you obeyed, or those whose weapons you faced. The enemy, or others caught up in the costliest of wars?

The German I'm meeting is named Martin, a friend from a partnership between the Churches we serve. We discovered that we each had grandfathers who served at the Somme. He like you,



was a Christian. You share Christian names too, you are Frederick and he is Friedrich.

As we meet, Martin will remember his grandfather and I'll remember you, and we'll both reflect on the folly of war. I wonder if in another 100 years, other friends may meet to remember the folly of conflicts fought in our lifetime, for we have not yet learned to live in peace.

Yours in love, sorrow and hope,
David

A prayer based on 2 Corinthians 1:2, (Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ') and Isaiah 49:16a ('See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands').

Dear God,

Thank you for our names,
Frederick or Friedrich, Freda or Frida,
echoes of peace in meaning,
engraved on identity tag in conflict,
inscribed on the palms of your hands in eternity.
Help us to forget 'sides',
recognise the child of God in each person,
and draw closer to living as sisters and brothers in peace.

A letter to our grandchildren in Britain and Germany

Dear grandchildren,

David Pickering and I have been spending a few days at the river Somme in France. There is a story behind this visit which we would like to share with you. As grandsons of soldiers who fought on different sides during the First World War we are writing to our grandchildren once again a generation further down. We are writing this letter in the hope that our grandfathers' experience may also encourage you, our grandchildren, to become peacemakers.

You must know that our churches St Andrew's in Leeds, and the Lutherkirche in Frankenthal, have been twinned for 47 years. Five years ago, we sat in the Manse in Leeds chatting when we discovered that both our grandfathers had fought in the battle of the Somme. David's grandfather had left him a box with name-tag, horseshoe and German war biscuits. My grandfather had left me an account of his time as soldier during the First World War in his memories and a box of letters written to his later wife. Interestingly they had the same Christian names: Frederik and Friedrich.

It was then decided that we as grandsons, who had become friends, would visit the area where 102 years ago both our grandfathers had fought on different sides.

We know little about their movements during the battle of the Somme, but we stood at the grave of David's grandmother's cousin and in the valley where David's grandfather's regiment moved forward to Mametz Wood defended by German soldiers. Here, and at other places, we learnt of the fierce fighting, the mowing down of men by machine gunfire the moment they left the relative safety of their trenches. We saw the craters caused by massive explosions. We tried to imagine what it must have been like to see 'the enemy' in 100 or 300 meters distance across no-man's-land and then marching towards you. To listen to the constant noise of the bombardment. To wait to 'go over the top'. Angst turning into aggression.

From many parts of the battlefield one can see the statue of Mary on the top of the steeple of the Basilica Notre Dame at Albert holding out Christ triumphantly to the town and the area. Significantly, in 1916 the steeple was hit by a shell almost bringing the statue down. It is as if war cannot not endure Christ the peacemaker to be presented to those fighting as a reminder of their wrong. Mary and child were almost falling over but not totally - as you can see from the picture on a wall close to the church the statue, now in a vertical position - it was still holding on. So, Christ was not absent from the terrible things that were going on during the battle, he was suffering, too. The real god is to be found in the brokenness. This was the experience my grandfather brought home from a terrible night of shelling at Misery, a village not far away, and it formed his life as minister.



Shot down in war and raised again - what a sign! It is a beautiful morning. the distance across the then no-mans-land and now fertile fields one can see the statue of the virgin Mary once again presenting Jesus to the world (see left). Our redeemer who died that even the evil of this most terrible slaughter might be forgiven. Can a united Europe, built on the debris of so much suffering and guilt, take on this message and become a lasting sign for reconciliation and peace? Can Europe do it without faith? What is our task as Christians in Europe?

Certainly, the generation before us tried to learn the lesson of two wars where people had been taught to hate each other. And Christians were at the forefront. That's the reason why our churches were twinned. That's the reason why a European Union has been created. But people forget. The British decided to leave the EU. And in other countries nationalism once again has become more prominent. Will the virgin with the child fall again?



The battlefield as it looks today; in the background the statue with Mary holding Jesus

Harry Patch, the last surviving soldier of the First World War, is quoted at Lochnagar Crater: 'It wasn't worth it. No war is worth it. No war is worth the loss of a couple of lives let alone thousands.'

What will the world be like in 50 years' time when you, our grandchildren, will oversee political and economic affairs and take a leading role in our Churches? Will you still be aware of the lessons of two world wars? Currently, we see war in the Ukraine and in the Middle East while western Europe is looking like a haven. Can we Europeans help other nations in conflict to learn from our past? Or does each nation have to make their own experiences? And would the same be true for each generation, too?

After the war my grandfather saw it as his calling to help people find peace with God as he had in the middle of the battle. I would have liked to talk this point over with him, and ask: 'Should the search for

inner peace not be complemented by an active commitment towards peace and reconciliation among people and nations?' It begins when people of different nationalities and religions understand each other as neighbours. It continues when we try to understand the historic and economic reasons for today's conflicts and our share in it. And it may not end with the problem of arms exports and the question whether we live at the costs of the poor. Because peace doesn't just come. 'Blessed are the peacemakers', says Jesus, and for this, our commitment, our prayer and our action will be needed.

Your loving grandfathers,
David and Martin

Remembering my grandpa

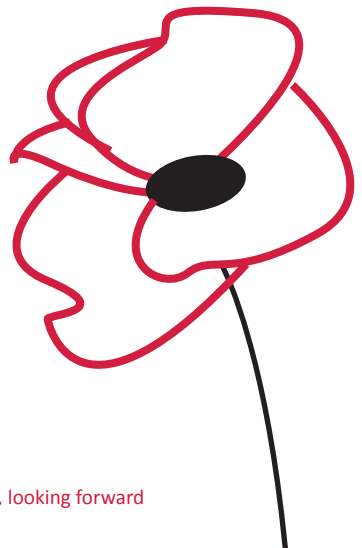
The grandfather of the Revd Tim Lowe, (the Minister who followed the Revd David Pickering at St Andrew's Leeds), also served in the First World War. Here he gives family memories about his grandfather.

The First World War has always fascinated me, since that was when my Grandpa served. I wished I'd asked him more whilst he was alive. But, as my son, Jacob, was part of a school history trip to visit the Battlefields of the Somme in 2014 I asked my dad to do a bit of digging about my grandpa's war story.

John William Parish (born 1892, died 1981) enlisted in the Grenadier Guards in December 1915. Having fought in both Battles of the Somme was honourably discharged in 1918 after having his left leg and forearm amputated and suffering 100% disability from chest wounds.

The following is based on hand written notes by my grandpa:

- He was involved in the fighting when the first tank battles took place around Cambrai but, was pulled out of the line



(possibly just before Christmas 1916) with frostbite at Saily. At the first field dressing station his boots had to be cut off and replaced with sandbags for the journey back to base hospital at Le Tréport on the coast.

- He had been involved that winter in fighting at Trones Wood, Delville Wood, Ginchy, Combles and Lesboeuifs but had some respite in the Carnoy Valley – staying in terrible billets deep in mud. He moved to a cleaner spot by order of the Prince of Wales who had ridden on an old hack as close to the front line as he was allowed.
- After frostbite had been treated, grandpa went back into the front line in 1917. My dad believes he was promoted at least twice but went back as a Private to look after his younger brother who had been in trouble.

Sadly, I do not know the name of the village where my grandfather was seriously wounded. He got injured when leading a small platoon through the cobbled streets when an enemy shell exploded in front of them and three quarters of the men were killed. Grandpa was injured by the flying cobbles. His left hand was blown off immediately and his leg badly injured, but he was supported on either side by two German prisoners as he hobbled for the best part of 24 hours back to the nearest field dressing hospital where the leg was partially amputated and the arm stump ‘tidied up’, as he described it, while the tents were under heavy artillery gunfire and rats were gnawing at the bandages.

The Revd Tim Lowe

A lasting legacy

As a small child, growing up in Kent, one of my best friends was Mr Judge. I never knew his first name and a mere 90 years separated our ages. Mr Judge always had time to listen to my endless questions – why do daisies have so many petals? Why is the sky blue? I in turn loved to hear his tales spoken in his deep, gruff voice and Kentish twang.

Most of his stories were of farming. How he ploughed with the big plough horses or slept nights in the oast houses as the hops were drying. Sometimes they were of childhood friends, dancing round the maypole on Empire Day, or playing cricket.

Just occasionally they were of the Great War, his face darkening, tears falling. Too old to fight himself his 'young lad', the apple of his eye, had joined up. On a quiet day Mr Judge claimed he could hear the guns firing. He worried about 'the lad', fearing he would never return. He didn't. The name etched onto the war memorial brought no relief to his father all those long years later.

Mr Judge never attended the village parade on Remembrance Sunday. He did however attend evening worship at our local chapel where he told me he prayed for 'all the young lads who never went home, and their families whatever nationality'.

Mr Judge never knew the legacy he left with me. It shines brightly, much brighter than the gold leaf overlay on that war memorial.

The Revd Helen Warmington reflects on the lasting impact of the words of a childhood friend

From the granddaughter of a soldier

The twinning of Castle Hill URC, Ipswich, with Johanniskirche in Mussbach (now in its 36th year) has meant that the granddaughter of a soldier has grown to love Germany to the point where she thinks of it as a second home.

I have visited Mussbach so often, along with many other parts of Germany. I have learned to speak the language and, consequently, have learned to understand its people better through our friendship and shared Christian faith. I also experienced the 2007 Kirchentag, in Koeln, which was a joy.

In the early days of the partnership my grandfather, who fought in the First World War, met with Angela, one of the daughters of our partnership family, when she visited Ipswich. He enjoyed her

company greatly and she left, he kissed her goodbye and his parting words were: 'I never, ever expected to kiss a German.' It was a very healing moment for him - it helped to wipe away the four years of hell he spent ankle deep in mud, crawling with lice and vermin, losing four years of his youth to a meaningless war. He was lucky to come out of it at all; alive and reasonably healthy. The word German was synonymous with war and fear, but after his meeting with Angela the word German had a human face, a beautiful, smiling face, and this made him feel so much better.

Mrs Heather Barnes reflects on the importance of Anglo-German church twinning



A selection of poems

Wounded. In the Head.

My grandfather was
an Ernest.
My grandma said
they wouldn't let him home;
he stayed in hospital one whole
un-whole
year after the War was done.
Wounded. In his head.

No blood
no bruise
no eyes gone
not deaf;
just wounded in his head.
Not deaf to shells
still breaking in his head.
Not blind to lights
still flashing in his head.

But bloody in his head,
bruised and wounded.
In his head.

They kept him long-long time in hospital.
At this far distance God knows why.
No-one, now, who we can ask why.
So many secrets kept the old quiet folk.
So many wounds in, oh, so many heads.

Was he too dangerous to be let go?
Or risky to himself?
Or risky in his truth.

When his French trench collapsed,
and he was buried in the mud and blood
and, (finally), dug out,
at first, they didn't see that wound.
But soon they saw it:
that wound that ached his days,
throbbled his nights,
kept him screaming, buried.

My grandma said,
when her Ernest came home
he was not out of his tomb;
lovely, but without joy, ever again.
And many wives of many other Ernsts
might say the same.

And many wives of all
the Fredericks and Friedrichs
the Johns and Johanns,
the Henrys and Heinrichs,
who came home safe.
But with that wound.
In the head.

by the Revd Lucy Berry, United Reformed Church's performance poet
© 2018, Lucy Berry



A Gentleman's War

*The First World War in East Africa*¹⁰

No victor but nature
One hundred and seventy-seven micro-nations
Men and women of all religions and none
from all quarters of the continent and more
had no national allegiance but rather to a leader
who would best meet their needs.
Changing sides and carrying arms was no issue but status
Serving in the enemy's hospital a duty and responsibility

Letters written
requesting provisions for prisoners of war
a note of congratulations and delivery of a medal
a request to stop that uncouth behaviour
yet perseverance to the end.
The letter suggesting ceasefire ignored
Duty to Empire was paramount.

A war of feet and endurance
across boundaries and borders
rivers and ravines
up mountain and plateau
on land, sea and lake
The large iron bird
caused amusement not fear.

News from home
at least six months old
leave was almost unheard of
unless recuperating in a convalescent home.

The jigger too close for comfort
some lost a toe or more
The tsetse and anopheles mosquito
held the record for death
The lion, hippo and crocodile
Were what nightmares comprised.

The rank and file
often led the officer -
They knew the land
they knew the way
By the end of the war
men were more equal
than at the start; friends.

In 1929 a dinner was had
in London for both German and British Empire officers
the divide eroded in Europe at least
The memory has all but faded
in Britain, Europe, Africa and afar
of the contribution made
by a people who had no understanding
of what the struggle was for
Not all have a marked grave or name engraved
But all are known unto God irrespective of belief.

*by Dr Anne Samson
Independent Historian, Coordinator of the Great War in Africa
Association and elder at St John's URC Northwood*

¹⁰ The First World War in East Africa is regarded as the longest running campaign of the Great War. It started on 8 August 1914 when Dar es Salaam in Tanzania was bombed by the British navy and ended on 25 November 1918 when the final surrender took place in Abercorn/Mbala in Zambia in line with the 11 November armistice agreement. Over one million porters are thought to have served throughout from at least seven countries with little recorded information available. From late 1916, most of the fighting was conducted by black Africans with white officers, irrespective of force.

For more information on the campaign and the war in Africa in general, see www.gweaa.com, Ed Paice's *Tip and Run* or Harry Fecitt's *Kaisercross/The Soldiers' Burden* articles at www.kaisercross.com/188001/188022.html and articles at www.thesamsonsedhistorian.wordpress.com and bwana-lettow.blogspot.co.uk

Generation Gap

With the Armistice declared,
school was closed
and the children all
ran hilty-silty
down the brae.
Mum burst into the house –
her brother's photo
already three years
on the mantelpiece.

Newly
promoted corporal,
he holds
the swagger stick
self-consciously,
glances to the side.

And now she's gone,
and those questions
one could ask about him
– dead on the Somme –
will need books,
the internet, research,
for any hope of answers –
and between me and my uncle
only the red hair
and my mother
forever saying
how much I reminded her of him.

© 2014, Mrs Joan McGavin



Peace Poem

Peace:

What a gift!

Grandparents still tell the story of the horrors of war,
of air raid sirens, of evacuation, of flight,
of the missing, the dead and the injured.

They have had the experience of children growing up without a
father,

and of how people had to beg for a piece of bread.

They still have in mind

destroyed houses and destroyed souls

a lost homeland and lost confidence.

But now there is peace in our land

What a gift!

We are so thankful, O God,

to you and to all those people who helped to bring it about.

Peace:

How little it can be taken for granted!

Peace lasted for only a short while after the First World War
and then the old war gave birth to a new war.

Peace is a fragile thing.

How often it has hung by only a thread in recent years!

There have been crises that were frightening
and people are constantly afraid of a new war.

There have also been threats that we have only known about in
retrospect.

Yes, peace has hung so many times by a thread.

And yet, it is still peace!

We are so thankful, O God,

to you and to all those who have acted with calm consideration.

Peace:

A miracle!

Former enemies have become friends.

Opponents in war have come together.

Barriers have been opened up
in heads as well as hearts.

Instead of warmongering there are school exchanges and twinnings,
people studying or working abroad.

Peace!

We are so thankful, O God,
to you and to all those have set out on the path of understanding and
have stayed the course.

Peace in our own land
and yet the pictures of war, civil war, terrorism come close to home.

The media bring the world into our living rooms:

we see bombs falling and people fleeing

and we cannot just react as if that had nothing to do with us.

Help us,

help those people engaged in politics and science

in economics, in the media,

that we may all contribute towards a more just world,

a world where everyone can find a home and make a living.

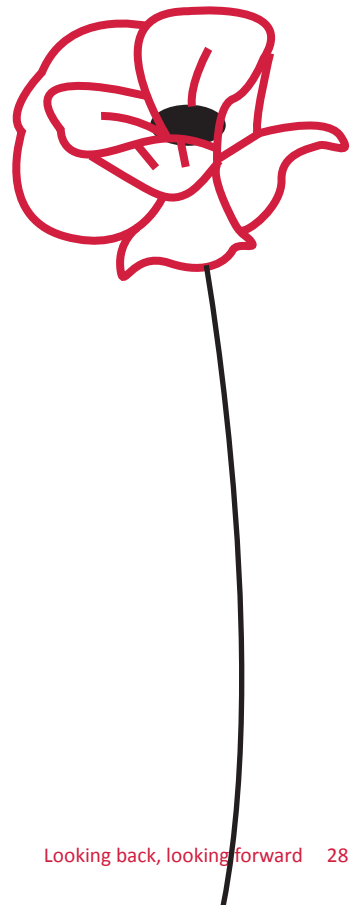
Help us all,

that we may do everything in our capabilities to contribute to greater
understanding and justice between people.

Help us to make peace!

Amen.

by Pfarrerin Traude Prün



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