

# The Thankful Villages

## KS2 Resource Pack



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# Notes for Teachers

This pack has been designed to allow you to print out the pages relevant to your lesson plan. Case studies can be selected from the list below, which feature various subjects and topics that may be of interest to your students.

This pack focuses on how the war affected each community and also highlights aspects of the war that students may not already know about. For example the role of the Royal Engineers, Army Service Corps, Military Mounted Police and Red Cross.

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## What are "Thankful Villages"?

*Almost every village in the UK lost someone during the First World War. There are more than 400 settlements and villages in Gloucestershire but only 3 villages were fortunate enough to see the safe return of all their men and women from the war. These villages have become known as the "Thankful Villages".*

The term "Thankful Villages" was first used in the 1930s by the British writer Arthur Mee in a book he wrote about the counties of England. There are thought to be about 54 "Thankful Villages" in England & Wales. However Scotland and Ireland seem to have none at all.



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**A Soldier leaving home**

The thankful villages are unusual, and some might say lucky, because everyone who went off to fight in the First World War survived and returned home again.



**Soldiers saying goodbye as they leave for France in 1915**

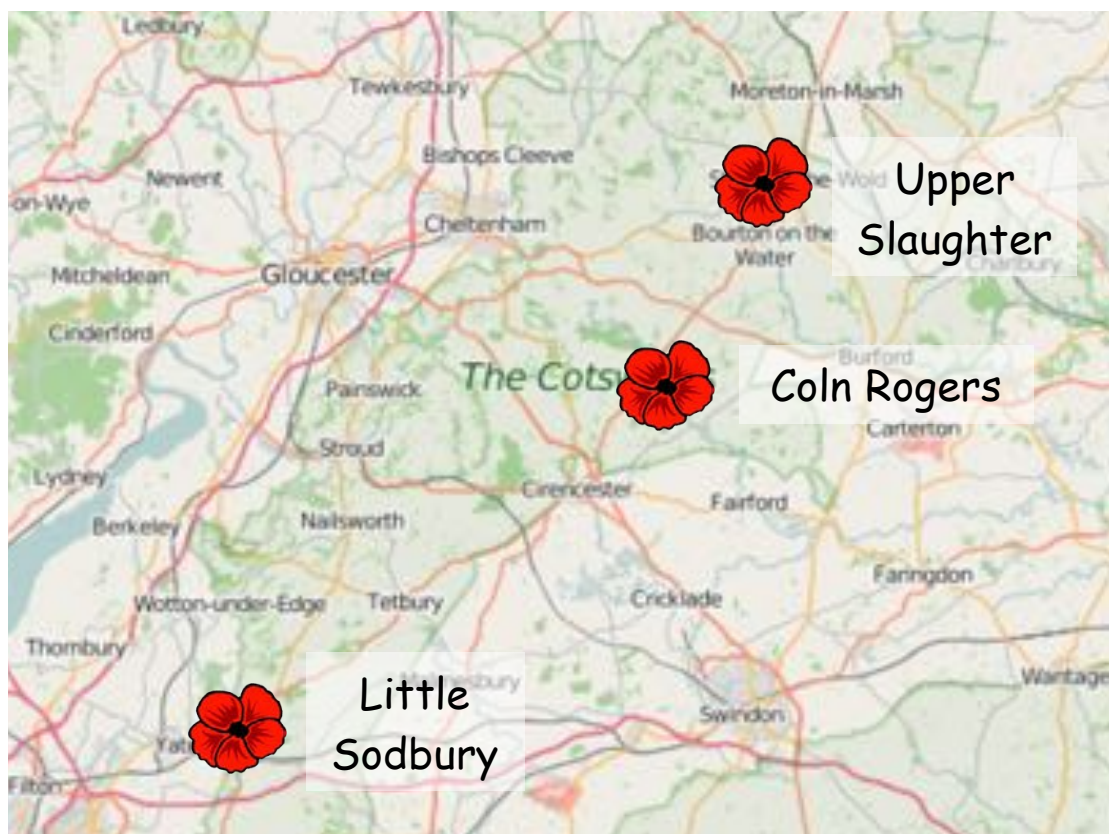
Despite their apparent good fortune many men still witnessed terrible events in battle and had to spend long periods of time away from their families. Others returned with life-changing injuries or found it difficult to adjust to life after the war.

We know of at least 53 men and 2 women from the Thankful Villages in Gloucestershire who served during the war.

These were ordinary people who left families and jobs behind to serve with the Armed Forces or the Red Cross. We will be exploring some of their stories to help you decide whether you think the Thankful Villages really were as fortunate as they seem.

The Gloucestershire “Thankful Villages” are:

- Upper Slaughter
- Coln Rogers
- Little Sodbury





# Little Sodbury



*Photograph by Rod Morris*

Little Sodbury is a small village located near to Tetbury and Chipping Sodbury. It is a popular picnic spot for walkers and has a lot of interesting history like an Iron Age Hill Fort. It is known for its connection to William Tyndale who was the first person to translate the Bible into English.

**Did you know?** During the First World War most British soldiers were issued with a Bible, which they usually carried in their left breast pocket. There are several stories of men whose lives were saved when bullets and shrapnel were blocked by the Bible they carried.

St Adeline's is the village church and was built in 1859. This is where many of the men who fought during WWI would have been married or baptised. Six soldiers who served during the war are remembered inside the church.



*Photograph courtesy of Gloucestershire Archives*

# Coln Rogers



*Photograph by Rod Morri*

Coln Rogers is a small rural village located near Cirencester. It takes its name from the River Coln which runs through the Coln Valley and the Knight Roger de Gloster who owned the village over 900 years ago.

**Did you know?** During the war people were not allowed to ring the church bells. An act called the Defence of the Realm Act (or DORA) was passed in 1914, which meant church bells could only be rung in an emergency such as an enemy invasion. DORA was basically a list of things people weren't allowed to do during times of war. Some of the other things included not being able to buy binoculars, spread rumours about military matters, light bonfires or feed bread to chickens (as bread was in short supply).



*Photograph by Rod Morris*

St Andrew's church in Coln Rogers would have played an important part in village life during the war. The church was a central feature of most rural villages and a place of support and community for families missing their loved ones. The 23 men and 1 woman who served during WWI are commemorated in St Andrews.

# Upper Slaughter



Upper Slaughter is a Cotswold village located next to the River Eye, near Bourton-on-the-Water. It has an old school house, small chapel and Parish Church called St Peter's.

There is also a village hall, which was opened in 1920 to give thanks for the safe return of all the villagers who fought in the war.

There is a plaque inside the hall, which lists their names.



**The Manor**



**Copse Hill**

Before WWI the village mainly consisted of two big estates. The owners employed many of the local people and owned a lot of the surrounding land. These estates each had a large house, farmland and cottages. The Manor was owned by Major Witts and Copse Hill was owned by Lt Colonel Brassey. Both men served during the war and Copse Hill was also used as a hospital for wounded soldiers.

## Why don't they have a war memorial?

At the heart of most villages you will find a memorial remembering those who were killed during the war.



## A War Memorial

Because no one living in the thankful villages died during the war, they don't have a war memorial. However the sacrifices and bravery of the people who served their country has not been forgotten. Each Gloucestershire thankful village has a plaque expressing their gratitude for their good fortune and lists the names of the men and women who served in the 'Great War' of 1914-1918.



# Coln Rogers



## Little Sodbury

War was declared in August 1914. Let's look at what the villages were like before the war...



# Life before the war



Ploughing with Oxen

Before the war the pace of life would have been fairly slow. Most rural people worked in jobs like farming or looking after horses. Some people worked in domestic service and others practised a trade like woodwork, or blacksmithing. Most women didn't work and those who did had pretty limited options.

In smaller village communities people tended to know each other very well and residents from all backgrounds would have come together to worship at the village church. Most children would have attended the local village school and generally ended up working in similar jobs to their parents. If you worked on a farm or in domestic service you would usually be given a cottage or room as part of your job, so people often didn't have a lot of choice over where they lived.

Most working class people wouldn't have had the opportunity to travel very far before the war. Many families stayed in the same villages for generations and some descendants of the men who fought during WWI still live in the villages today.



Upper Slaughter Village School

All of that was about to change forever...

# Your country needs YOU

When war was declared Britain only had a small army. Something had to be done to quickly boost the number of soldiers.



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There was a huge campaign to encourage men to sign up and 'do their bit'. People were very patriotic in those days and most felt a strong sense of duty to serve their King and country. Men across the country flocked to the recruiting offices to 'enlist' after seeing posters like this one.

*The man on the poster is Lord Kitchener, who was very well known during WWI. The Kitchener posters first appeared in August 1914 and by September 1914 almost half a million men had enlisted!*

The reasons people joined the armed forces were very varied. Some wanted to experience the world and saw the war as an adventure. Others felt a sense of duty or wanted to escape a life of poverty. The army promised regular meals, reasonable pay and a pension for your family if you were killed or injured.



# Conscription

The number of men volunteering was not enough, so in 1916 the Government introduced conscription. All healthy, single men between the ages of 18 and 41 were 'called up' to join the armed forces. These men had no choice and soon found themselves many miles away from home in the muddy trenches surrounded by exploding shells, machine gun fire and gas attacks. Later this rule was extended to include married men up to the age of 50.



A man leaving behind his family

At the start of WWI only 20% of the population was allowed to vote. 100% of women and 60% of men had no say over who was in government. One of the most contentious things about conscription was that young or working class men who had no vote were ordered to fight and die in a war they had no influence over.

## Objection

Some people objected to fighting on religious or moral grounds. They were known as conscientious objectors. These people would have been brave to voice these opinions as they risked being sent to jail.

People could also ask to be exempt on grounds of domestic hardship (being poor), doing work of 'national importance', or medical unfitness. Many farms struggled with the lack of men to do the usual manual work so this was sometimes considered.

Jessie Leach, an Engine Man from Coln Rogers and John Richards a shepherd at Pindrup Farm both appealed being called up.



# The Role of Women



Before the war most women who worked were either in domestic service or took in piecework like laundry and sewing. In rural villages they would have also helped with farm work such as milking or harvesting, but usually wouldn't have been involved with the heavy labour. During the course of WWI the role of women changed considerably. They played a huge part in the war effort and had to fill the void the men left behind when they went away to fight.



Women took on varied roles such as munitions workers, railway porters, and nurses. They had to take over food production including ploughing and using heavy machinery. Many skilled farmers had gone away to fight and a number of farm horses had been sold to the army so these tasks became even harder.



You can watch 2 short videos about women learning how to farm during WWI here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjtTGVacB98>

*(silent footage produced by the BFI)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mg97YuhDjLA>

*(produced by the NFU)*

Jobs women did before the war also became harder due to food and coal shortages. Most women were still looking after a family and home in addition to working long hours. The war affected all classes and it wasn't just working women whose roles changed. Wealthy women got involved by entertaining wounded soldiers, nursing, fund raising and sending parcels of food to the troops & POWs.



# Scouts & Children

The Scout movement was very active during the First World War. The Scouts worked tirelessly to help grow food and assist with farming. They did their bit to defend the home front by undertaking sentry (guard) duties and carrying messages and also helped support the families of soldiers who were away fighting. The older boys were taught how to shoot in case they were needed in the event of an invasion by Germany.

You can watch a short video about the scouts in WWI here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyiWn9IMMBE>



Most children were expected to help the war effort. They did this doing useful items for the home like recycling, or gathering firewood, eggs and berries.

They also collected recycled materials and sent parcels to the soldiers at the Front. Many women had to work while the men were away so girls also had to help with the cooking and cleaning.



# Wounded Men

When someone was injured in battle there were a number of places they would receive treatment, and if their injuries were severe they would often be sent home to recover. However it was usually a very long journey home.

Basic medical aid was usually available from **medical aid posts** and **stretcher-bearers** who moved the wounded men away from immediate danger. It could take a long time to be rescued and stretcher-bearers regularly risked their lives to save injured men.



Here you can see stretcher-bearers up to their knees in mud, trying to get an injured soldier to safety.

© IWM (Q 5935)

They were then taken to **dressing stations** where they would receive further treatment and either be sent back to their regiment or moved to a **casualty clearing station** if badly injured.

Casualty clearing stations were usually basic hospital wards in tents or huts located a few miles away from the fighting. The casualties would normally be moved here by **ambulance**, on foot, by horse drawn waggon or sometimes by rail.

Many men died in these makeshift hospitals but if you were likely to survive you would eventually be moved by ambulance to a larger and better equipped **Base Hospital**. From here men were often then sent to a **Military Hospital** or **Red Cross Hospital** in England to recover.

# The Home Front

*Life at home was not always easy during the war. We are going to be looking at the Manor in Upper Slaughter to see how the war affected this household.*



The Witts family

Before the war Canon Broome Witts and his wife Margaret lived at the Manor with their eight children. In 1913 Francis died leaving his eldest son Edward to look after the estate. During the war Edward and his four brothers served with the Army. His sister Agnes also volunteered as an ambulance driver with the Red Cross.

There were also a number of staff working at the Manor, such as servants and grooms. Several male members of staff were called up for military service during the war.

Edward's youngest brother Frederick wrote to his mother in 1916 *"I'm glad the two Easts, Butler and Pittaway have been refused but I'm afraid you will soon lose Fuller, if not already gone."*



Staff at the Manor before the war

The family's groom **George Pittaway** was initially exempt from military service due to a knee injury but was conscripted later in the war. Mrs Witts wrote to the Army to appeal. She said that she was left with several horses to look after and no men could be found to take Pittaway's place. In her letter she also explains *"I have no gentleman with me and all my five sons are serving"*.

She describes that she was rarely able to hear from her eldest son (Edward) who was posted abroad with his regiment in the Balkans.



**Mrs Witts**

Although her sons had all been sent to various countries around the world Mrs Witts still wrote to them regularly. The post took a long time to reach them so the news was usually several weeks if not months out of date. She also sent them items from home like local newspapers, socks and food hampers.

Families could go without seeing loved ones for months and sometimes years on end, so the Postal Service played a significant role during WWI. Letters were extremely important as they were the only way to communicate with soldiers fighting on the front lines or loved ones back at home.



*Patriotic postcards became popular during the war and people also collected photographs showing key battles like the Somme.*



It was important to the war effort at home to carefully monitor what information was being sent back. Every letter sent from troops serving overseas was opened and read and almost four tons of letters were censored each day at the height of war.



As well as being isolated from your family there were other challenges faced by those left at home. It became difficult to import food during the war due to the risk of ships being attacked by German submarines. Food and coal shortages were common and food prices more than doubled during the war.

Towards the end of the war rationing was introduced for foods like bread, meat, butter & sugar. Even the King and Queen had to have a ration book to make sure everyone got their fair share.



Slogans like 'spare bread, win the war' were used to remind people not to waste resources that could have been sent to feed the 'brave troops fighting in the trenches'.

In letters between Mrs Witts and her son Frederick they discuss the conditions in Upper Slaughter. In one letter Frederick writes:

*"...you must be really starving and undergoing worse hardships than we are out here. You must shut the house up if you can't get enough coal to be dry and comfortable."*

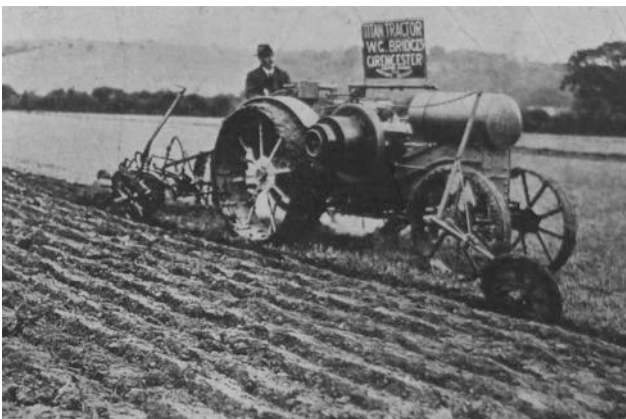


Unfortunately Mrs Witts was ill for a number of years and the conditions on the 'Home Front' would not have helped. She can be seen here in her wheelchair opening the new village hall in 1920. She wrote to her son Fred *"I open the room at 2:30 but am not strong enough to go to Copse Hill and give the medals away."* Mrs Witts lived long enough to see Frederick one last time when he was allowed home on leave in 1921.

# Life after the War

The war left a huge void within society. Although no one from the thankful villages died, many men would have returned changed and scarred by their wartime experiences. Injured soldiers were often unable to go back to their old jobs and many found it hard to readjust to civilian life. Some people hadn't seen their family in years and their children grew up not knowing them.

There was a lack of skilled, healthy men after the war so, during the 1920s, early tractors and machinery started to be used more in farming. This led to big changes in rural communities.



Some women were given the vote in 1918, in part this was due to the substantial role they had played during the war. Their expectations had changed drastically and by the 1920s it had become more acceptable for women to work and undertake more varied positions. Because so many men were killed during the war a large number of women never married, so had to become more independent.



People's attitude towards the upper classes also changed and there was a general decline in domestic service jobs and a move towards trade and industry.

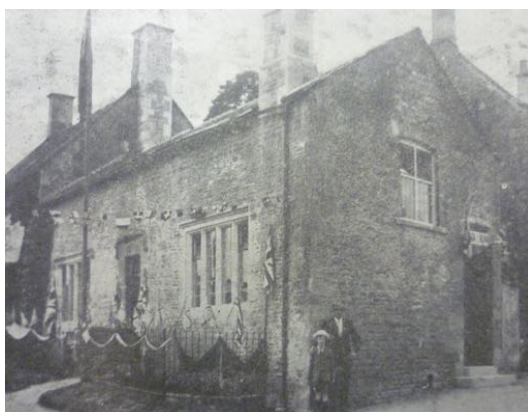
# Remembering the War

Survivors were often reluctant to speak about their wartime experiences and because so many people died during the war it would have been considered in bad taste to celebrate their good fortune. Each thankful village had their own way of remembering the service given by their villagers.

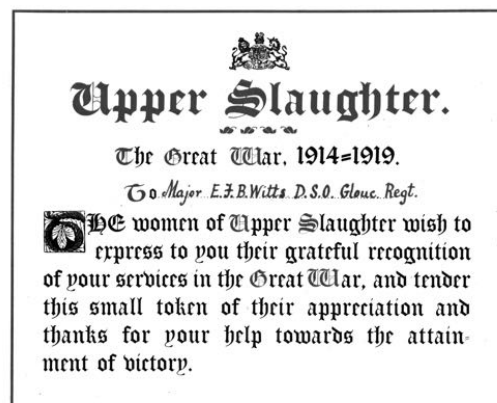
In 1920 a new reading room (village hall) was opened in Upper Slaughter in gratitude for the safe return of all the men & women from the village. Mrs Witts opened the hall and the event was pictured in the local papers. It also included a fete and ceremony at Copse Hill where all the men who served were presented with a medal by Lt Colonel Brassey. Servicemen were also given a certificate of thanks from 'the women of Upper Slaughter'.



*Here are some servicemen from Upper Slaughter with their medals.  
Unfortunately we've not been able to identify them, can you help?*



The new Village Hall



A certificate of thanks



# What are 'Doubly Thankful Villages'?

14 UK villages are considered to be 'Doubly Thankful', which means everyone who lived there returned safely from the First World War *and* the Second World War. Upper Slaughter is officially thought to be a 'Doubly Thankful Village', which is very unusual. In 2013 the Little Sodbury Village Newsletter also claimed that Little Sodbury is a doubly thankful village.

Amazingly, despite there being a bombing attack in Upper Slaughter in 1944 during WW2, no resident villager lost their lives in combat or at home.



These pictures show Upper Slaughter after the bombs were dropped in 1944. You can see some barns have been destroyed and a hayrick on Major Witts' farm is on fire.

Luckily several bombs didn't go off so some residents emptied out the gunpowder and kept them as souvenirs!



*(Images courtesy of Cheltenham Library & Gloucestershire Echo)*



# The Forgotten Villagers...



The 'thankful villages' didn't escape death all together. Only people who were officially living in the village at the time of the war were considered to be a resident. This means **people who grew up in the area** and later moved away would not be included in any statistics. It also doesn't take account of **families living in the village who lost a relative** during the war.



For example Thomas & Agnes Hazell who lived at Hill Farm Cottage in Upper Slaughter lost their son **Edward Hazell**. He died in France at the battle of Loos in 1915 aged 25. Many more families from the villages would have lost sons, brothers, fathers, uncles and nephews during the war.

There would also have been **men who died as a result of their injuries** after the war had ended. Anyone who died after August 1921 is not officially remembered as a casualty of the war.



*This picture shows Frank leaving Buckingham Palace after he'd collected his Distinguished Service Order*

**Frank Witts** fought in both world wars and sadly died on active service in 1941 during the Second World War. He is listed as a resident of Upper Slaughter during WWI but, because he didn't own a house in the village at the time of his death he is excluded as a resident during WW2. The Witts family had a very strong connection to the village and according to his nephew "*Frank's home was very much at Upper Slaughter*". There is a memorial to Frank in the village church, but Upper Slaughter continues to be considered a 'Doubly Thankful' village.

# Remembering WWI Today

## The Thankful Villages Website

Norman Thorpe, Rod Morris & Tom Morgan run a website about the Thankful Villages. This includes information about each UK thankful village and photographs. Rod has visited many of the villages, written text for the website and taken photos. He was kind enough to let us include some of his images in this resource pack. <http://www.hellfirecorner.co.uk/thankful.htm>

## The Thankful Villages Run

In 2013 Welsh bikers Dougie Bancroft and Medwyn Parry set out on their motorbikes to visit all of the Thankful Villages in the UK. They raised money for the British Legion and presented each thankful village with a plaque to mark the centenary of World War One.

You can watch a video of them in Little Sodbury church presenting a commemorative plaque to Roy Gowan. Roy is the grandson of WWI soldier William Gowan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0V9x8mKyEQ>



They were given special bikes by Triumph, which were decorated with poppies. Triumph motorbikes were used by the army during WWI.

## ThankfulVillages.co.uk

Musician Darren Hayman is visiting each of the 54 Thankful Villages and making a piece of music and a short film for every one focussing on different aspects of village life. Some take the form of instrumentals inspired by location, some are interviews with village residents set to music, others are new songs with lyrics or local traditional songs.

<http://thankfulvillages.co.uk/category/villages/little-sodbury/>





Remembering the  
'thankful' villagers  
who served in  
World War One



# Upper Slaughter

## Villagers who served in the 'Great War of 1914-1919

Sapper <a href="#">Frederick Alder</a>	Royal Engineers
Corporal <a href="#">Frederick Bateman</a>	7th Bn Gloster Reg
Private G Beams	9th Bn Gloster Reg
Lt Col <a href="#">Edwin Percival Brassey</a>	Coldstream Guards
Gunner C A Burtonshaw	Royal Field Artillery
CQMS <a href="#">Francis Geo Brain Collett</a>	7th Bn Gloster Reg
Sergeant R Griffin	Cameron Highlanders
Private <a href="#">Albert Edward Guy</a>	12 Bn Gloster Reg
Leading <a href="#">Stoker F Hazell</a>	Royal Navy (DSM)
Driver F H Hazell	Royal Field Artillery
Major <a href="#">Killingworth M F Hedges</a>	Army Service Corps (DSO)
Driver J Hill	Royal Field Artillery
Private <a href="#">Frank Jones</a>	Lancashire Fusiliers
Driver <a href="#">Frederick William Lockey</a>	Army Service Corps
Private <a href="#">James Ollett</a>	Army Service Corps
Private W J Parker	Tank Corps
Private W J Tarling	Army Service Corps
Private <a href="#">Arthur S Winfield</a>	Ox and Bucks Light Infantry
Major Edward F B Witts	9th Bn Gloster Reg (DSO)
Captain George B Witts	14th Bn Gloster Reg
Major John T Witts	3rd Bn Gloster Reg (MBE)
Captain <a href="#">Frank H Witts</a>	Irish Guards (DSO, MC)
Major <a href="#">Frederick V B Witts</a>	Royal Engineers (DSO, MC)
Driver <a href="#">Agnes E B Witts</a>	Red Cross VAD
Private A E Woodward	Devon Regiment

For King and Country



# Frederick Alder

Frederick grew up in Upper Slaughter and lived with his parents John & Lydia at the Gas Works Copse Hill. His father made something called acetylene gas, which would have been a fairly dangerous job as the gas is highly explosive. It was usually used for gas lighting and also had a reputation for its foul smell.

Fredrick was a carpenter before the war and when he signed up at Bourton-on-the-Water in 1916 he joined the Royal Engineers (RE) and quickly became a 'Sapper'. Sappers were usually skilled tradesmen like Frederick.

Early in the war Frederick's regiment was sent to Ireland during the Easter Rising. The Easter Rising was an armed 'rebellion' launched by Irish Republicans who wanted independence from British Rule. The army was sent to suppress the Rising, which lasted for six days.



**A Group of R.E.'s Somewhere in France.**  
All of them have been through the recent fighting around Mount Kemmel and neighbourhood.  
Standing.—Sapper A. Jackson (Birkenhead), Sapper C. F. Cottrell (Swindon), Sapper F. Alder (Copse Hill, Lower Slaughter).  
On ground.—Sapper C. Jones

*Image courtesy of Cheltenham Library*

Frederick later served in France and his photo appeared in the local papers in 1916.

The Royal Engineers built and maintained everything the army needed from trenches to bridges. They laid communication cables and barbed wire, maintained roads and drainage, dug tunnels and undertook reconnaissance missions to help the army plan attacks.

Frederick's military records show he was demobilised (allowed to go home) in 1919.

# Frederick Bateman



Stables at Copse Hill

Before the war Frederick lived in Upper Slaughter and worked as a groom, looking after horses. He was in his 30s when he joined the army and left behind a wife Elizabeth and young daughter Rhoda. It seems he was known in the village as Fred.

Fred served with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment who were sent to Turkey where they fought at Gallipoli. His battalion were later moved to Egypt and Palestine. Although the war had mostly ended by 1918, people couldn't always leave the army straight away. Another village resident Frederick Witts wrote a letter in July 1919 saying that he was surprised to hear '*Fred Bateman has been sent back to Palestine*'.



Gloucestershire Troops in Egypt

Fred's wartime experiences would have been very different to the quiet rural life he was used to in England. He probably went a long time without being able to see his family and letters would have taken many weeks to arrive from so far away.

# Edwin Percival Brassey

Edwin Brassey lived at Copse Hill in Upper Slaughter, having inherited the estate just before the war. Before joining the army he was educated at Eton College and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Edwin was a keen horseman and used to race and hunt.

During the war Edwin served with the Royal Horse Artillery. His regiment were responsible for the guns used to provide cover for the cavalry (mounted troops). Later in the war he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and served with the Coldstream Guards. He also allowed his house, Copse Hill, to be used as a Red Cross hospital for injured soldiers.



Edwin returned to Upper Slaughter and when the new 'Reading Room' (village hall) was opened in 1920 he presented medals to all the WWI servicemen from the village. During the 1920s and 1930s Edwin was joint master of the Heythrop Hunt and can be seen in the photo above riding on the Copse Hill estate.

# Francis George Brain Collett

'George' grew up in Upper Slaughter and seems to have been well known in the village. Before the war he worked with his father Francis who was a carpenter & wheelwright. His mother Margaret was the schoolteacher in Upper Slaughter for more than 30 years.



The Collett Family



George

George served with the 7<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment in Mesopotamia (Iraq). He was a CQMS (Company Quarter Master Sergeant) who was usually responsible for the food, water and ammunition supplies. His photo appeared in the local papers in 1917 after he was 'wounded in action' and sent to a convalescent camp in Amara to recover. Frederick Witts who was also posted in Iraq mentions seeing George's name in the hospital book: *"I also found George Collett's name in the books. He...was marked 'Sandfly fever'."*

George is unusual in that he served in both the world wars. Being the local builder and carpenter he also made the boards which hang in the village hall to remember the service of the villagers. His son Tony still lives in the village today and you can see a video interview with him here: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/10976875/First-World-War-centenary-The-13-lucky-villages-where-all-men-returned.html>



# The Air Force: Fred Collett

During WWI the idea of an 'Air Force' was still fairly new but by the end of the war in 1918 the Army Flying Corps and Naval Air Service had joined together to form the Royal Air Force as we know it today.

Pilots flew basic planes made from wood and canvas, which were often unreliable. The cockpits were open to the air, so they had to wear goggles, boots, gloves, thick coats and hats to keep warm.



© IWM (Q 57566)

The best pilots became known as 'Aces' and battles between planes were referred to as 'dog fights'. Planes could get a good vantage point over a battlefield and were also used as fighters and bombers.

We only know of one airman from the thankful villages but there may be other untold stories we are yet to discover...

Fred Collet was the younger brother of George Collett and son of the village schoolmistress. However Fred Collet is not listed amongst the names of villagers who served during WWI. This is possibly because he signed up after the war had officially ended or he may have been a cadet due to his young age.

In one letter sent from Frederick Witts to his mother he wrote:

*"Fancy Fred Collett in a aeroplane, I can imagine some excitement in the village".*

# Albert Edward Guy

Albert grew up in Upper Slaughter and lived with his widowed mother Alice who kept the family blacksmithing business running. When Albert was 13 he worked as a telegraph boy for the Post Office. Telegraph boys delivered telegrams and messages, usually on bicycle. They were expected to be well behaved, wear a uniform and complete daily drill (marching practice).

**Did you know?** Telegrams were a fast way to send information, as most people still didn't have telephones and relied on sending letters. Telegrams were sent using Morse code, which is a special code using taps or clicks to spell out words. The message had to be decoded at the other end and was then written on paper and given to a telegraph boy to deliver.



A Telegraph Boy

During the War telegraph messengers would have played an important role delivering news to the families of soldiers who had been killed or injured during battle.

Albert joined the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment, which was also known as "Bristol's Own" as most of the men came from Bristol. The Battalion fought in Europe and took part in all the major battles in France, Flanders (Belgium) and Italy. Albert was later moved to the Devon Regiment and at the end of the war was serving with the Army Ordnance Corps who dealt with the supply and maintenance of weaponry.

# The Navy : Frederick Hazell

© IWM (Q 18984)



It wasn't just the Army who fought during WWI. The Royal Navy played an important role in protecting the British Isles from attack and blockading enemy ports to stop food and supplies reaching them.

Being an island nation meant Britain had always been at risk of attack from the sea. In response to this threat it had one of the largest and strongest navies in the world, with hundreds of ships and thousands of sailors.



**Men at work on deck**

© IWM (Q 17944)

The Germans had a much smaller fleet so they developed submarines called U-boats, which were used to sink boats by stealth. The British also used submarines during the war.

There were many different jobs in the Navy such as stokers, engineers, gunners, wireless operators, stewards and cooks.



**A Navy Stoker**

© IWM (Q 18996)

Stokers fed coal to the fires, which powered a steam ship's engine. Leading Stoker F Hazell from Upper Slaughter served with the Royal Navy during the First World War. It is likely this was Frederick Ralph Hazell, who had worked as a farm carter. He joined the Navy in 1913, was quickly promoted and also received a Distinguished Service Medal.

# Killingworth M. F. Hedges



Major Killington Hedges lived at The Dingle in Upper Slaughter and was an engineer. During the war he served with the Army Service Corps in the Motor Transport section. After the war Killington served in Egypt and Sudan before leaving the army to be the head engineer for railways in Sudan. He was recalled to the Army during the Second World War, where he was in charge of motor transport.

Motor transport was very important to the armed forces during WWI. Tanks, ambulances, cars, motorbikes, tractors and trucks were all key to getting people and equipment where they needed to be.



© IWM (Q 3022)

For example the troops needed to be transported over great distance to get to the 'front line'. In the photo the waggons are taking soldiers to fight in the trenches at Passchendaele, whilst an ambulance can be seen in the background waiting to take casualties to the field hospitals.

Major Hedges earned a number of medals and awards during his military career. This included a DSO (Distinguished Service Order) during WWI. You can see him wearing his medals in the picture above.



DSO



# Fred Lockey

Fred Lockey was a farm labourer from Upper Slaughter. He signed up at Stow recruitment office in May 1915.

During WWI you had to be 18 to join the army and 19 to see 'active service' on the front line. Many boys pretended to be 18 so they could join the army. Fred was only 15 or 16 but he managed to pass the medical assessment and joined the Gloucestershire Regiment.

He was found out a few months later and sent home. It looks like the medical officer knew he was under age as they described his physical condition as "fair for a growing lad". Fred enlisted again later in the war and served with the Army Service Corps.



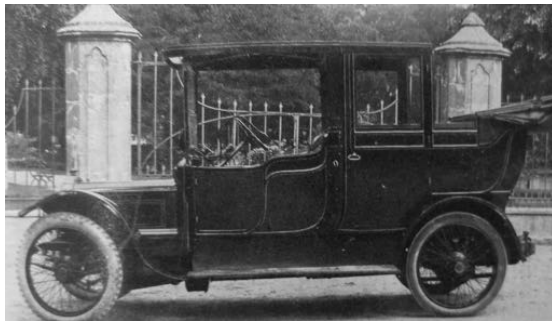
- Why do you think people tried to sign up underage?
- Would you have wanted to join the Army?
- Why do you think the Army sometimes let in underage boys?

# Frank Jones

Frank was the son of John and Elizabeth Jones. He lived in Upper Slaughter with his parents. His father worked as a farm labourer and it's likely Frank also worked on the farm. He joined the Lancashire Fusiliers during WWI and was still only about 19 when the war ended.

# James Ollett

In 1911 James was living in Middlesex with his wife Edith and son Frank. He worked as a domestic chauffeur, which would have usually involved working for a family, driving them around and maintaining their motorcar. In those days motorcars were very expensive and only the very rich could afford them. James' uncle Frank also lived with them and worked as a motorcar cleaner.

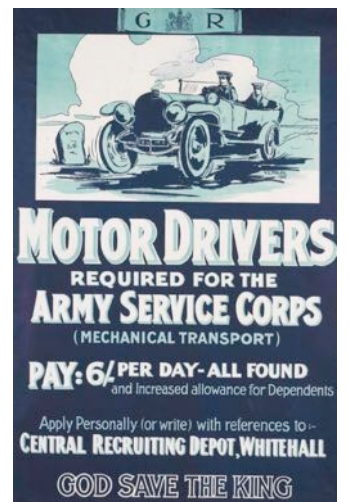


An old motorcar

It's likely James moved to Upper Slaughter to take up a job as a chauffeur at one of the 'big houses' in the village.

James joined the Army Service Corps (ASC) during WWI. The ASC were the unsung heroes of the war as they provided the things the army needed to function. For example, someone had to feed the thousands of soldiers and ensure they had the equipment and ammunition they needed. They also provided and maintained transport, motor vehicles and horses.

As he knew a lot about cars it's likely James served with the Motor Transport section, who drove and repaired the army vehicles.



© IWM (Art.IWM PST 13484)

# Arthur Winfield

Arthur was a farm labourer on Manor Farm, Upper Slaughter and his father William was a shepherd. He had 3 younger sisters and a little brother who would have been too young to fight in the war.

Arthur was born in Oxfordshire so he went to Oxford to sign up in August 1914 and joined the Oxford & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He was sent to France in July 1915.



*Image courtesy of Cheltenham Library*

Wearing a uniform was considered important and men in the Army were expected to keep their uniform smart and tidy and their boots and buttons polished. They had regular inspections to ensure these standards were kept.

We know from his service record that Arthur got into trouble in 1916 for having 'dirty boots' at inspection. However he was also described as being reliable and intelligent and on his records it says he was a 'specialist bomber'. His regiment was moved from France to Turkey & Greece in 1916.

Unfortunately in May 1917 Arthur suffered gunshot wounds to his bottom and right eye. Arthur was invalided home via Malta to recover. By December 1917 he was in a London hospital. It would have been a long journey home and taken many weeks.

After his injury Arthur wasn't fit enough to return to active 'front line' service so was moved to the Labour Corps until the end of the war.

# Frederick Witts

Frederick Vavasour Broome Witts was the youngest of the Witts children and grew up at the Manor in Upper Slaughter. He attended the village school in his early years and when he was 16 went to the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich. Frederick's career in the Army began in 1907 as an officer in the Royal Engineers. In 1912 he was posted to India where he served in Kohat (now Pakistan) and Roorkee, which was headquarters of the Bengal Sappers. Roorkee was located near to two large engineering projects; the Ganges Canal and a railway line linking New Delhi to the Himalayas and the border with Tibet.



**Did you know?** It really was a World War. In 1912 Britain still ruled a large Empire, which included places like India, the West Indies, Australia, New Zealand, Nepal, Canada and parts of Africa. During WWI India was much bigger and included Pakistan and Bangladesh. Many troops from the Commonwealth fought and died during the war. They came from many nations and many different faiths.



Indian Troops

In 1915 Frederick was sent from India to Flanders (Belgium) with the Bengal Sappers and Miners. They were part of the Indian Army and undertook jobs like trench digging or laying communication wires. It was muddy and dangerous work.

Frederick was then sent to Mesopotamia, which is now modern day Iraq. The Ottoman (or Turkish) Empire joined with Germany during the war and fought against the British and Allied forces in places like Iraq, Palestine and Turkey.



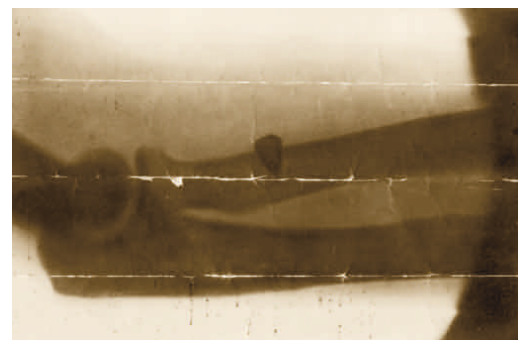
Soldiers found themselves all over the empire defending places considered to be 'British territories'. During the war Frederick was mostly involved with building bridges across the river Tigris. It seems to have been rather chaotic as the bridges were usually floating pontoons, which had to be 'opened' to let boats through.



A floating 'pontoon' bridge

Frederick wrote a lot of letters to his mother and describes how boats regularly crashed into the bridge he was building. People and animals crossing the bridge often fell off and needed to be pulled out of the water. Sometimes the bridge had to be repaired almost every day!

In 1916 Frederick lead a group of men to launch a pontoon in full sight of the enemy. They came under heavy machine gun fire but continued to try to complete their mission. Frederick took a bullet in his arm and was mention in the London Gazette for his bravery.



X-ray showing the bullet

During his time in Mesopotamia (or 'Mespot' as he called it) Frederick also undertook a top secret reconnaissance mission. This involved observing a new area and sending back details so an attack could be planned. It was important that the enemy was taken by surprise so he had to be very careful not to be seen.

By the end of the war he had spent a long time away from home but was finally able to return to Upper Slaughter in 1921. He'd not seen his mother for many years and she had been ill for some time. Sadly Mrs Witts died just a few weeks after he arrived home. Frederick remained in the army and spent the next 6 years in England before being posted to China in 1927. He married his wife Alice in 1929. His son Francis still lives in the village today and has contributed many of the photos used in this pack.

# Agnes Witts



Agnes was the youngest girl in the Witts family and grew up at the Manor in Upper Slaughter. From the very start of the war Agnes took an active part in the war effort, serving with the Red Cross VAD (Voluntary Aid Division) from 1915.

## Agnes in France

During the first few years of WWI Lt Colonel Brassey's house Copse Hill was transformed into a Red Cross hospital for injured soldiers. Agnes was listed as commandant in 1915 and can be seen in the centre of the photo below with the staff and patients. The hospital looked after soldiers recovering from injuries but would not have dealt with the more seriously wounded men.



The war opened up new possibilities for women and many found themselves working outside of the home for the first time. By 1916 we know both Agnes and her sister Edith had learned to drive a Ford car.

Agnes decided to become an ambulance driver for the VAD Motor Unit and spent 1916 to 1918 serving abroad.



© IWM Q107959

**Women ambulance drivers**

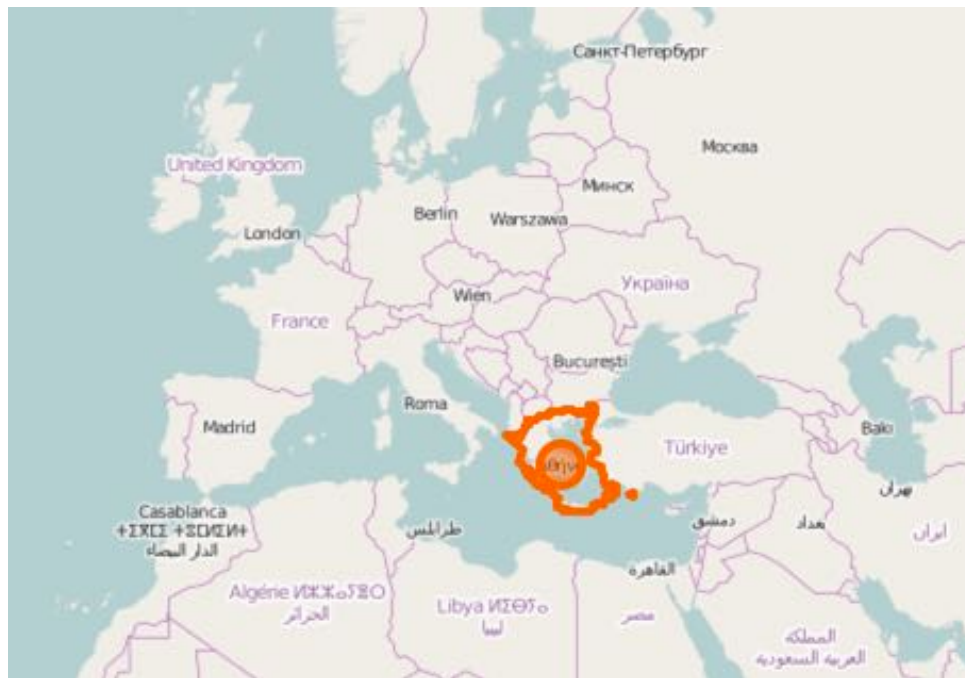
Agnes drove in Salonika (an area around Greece) from 1916. Her brother Jack was also posted in Salonika with the army and it seems that they were able to see each other occasionally when they were off duty. From 1917 Agnes was based at Rouen, France.



**Painting of The Manor by Agnes**

Agnes was a keen artist and after the war she considered taking up oil painting as a business. She travelled a little and found Upper Slaughter “[dull after her exciting life during the war](#)”. Many women found it frustrating returning to the more restricted lives they’d had before the war.

After her mother’s death in 1921 Agnes settled at The Manor with her eldest brother Edward who had inherited the estate.



## Salonika/The Balkans (Greece)



## Mesopotamia (Iraq)

© OpenStreetMap contributors



# Coln Rogers

Men of this village who served in H.M. Forces  
during the Great War of 1914-1919

Oliver William Bartlett

Ben Barton

John Jabez Bayliss

Worcestershire Regiment

H Curtis

G Day

F E Fry

H Gardener

J Green

J Guest

C J Harris

J W Harris

F Hiscock

R Hiscock

Jessie Richard Leach

Grenadier Guards

E H Newman

P Pawling

R Pawling

F Pool

Dennis Portlock

Gloucestershire Regiment

Richard Portlock

Royal Horse Guards

Sydney Portlock

Military Mounted Police

J O Ranger

F W Smith

C J Stephens

W G Stephens

Also Doris Barton (VAD)      Red Cross Nurse

All of whom by God's mercy returned safely.  
Thanks be to thee O God.

# John Jabez Bayliss

John Bayliss lived in Coln Rogers with his parents and worked with horses on a local farm. He signed up in September 1914 at Cirencester claiming to be 19 although it's likely he was younger. He served for more than 4 years in the Army during the war.

We don't have a photo of him but he is described as having fair hair, blue eyes and a "very good character". He joined the Worcestershire Regiment and after training was sent to France in 1916. He caught malaria in the trenches where disease was common and spent several months in hospital recovering.

When recovered John was sent straight back to France. We don't know exactly when, but he was promoted to Corporal and in 1917 was awarded the Military Medal for "bravery in the field". This was approved by the King and announced in the London Gazette, which would have been a big achievement.

Unfortunately in December 1917 John's luck ran out and he lost his right hand to a gunshot wound at the battle of



**Military Medal**



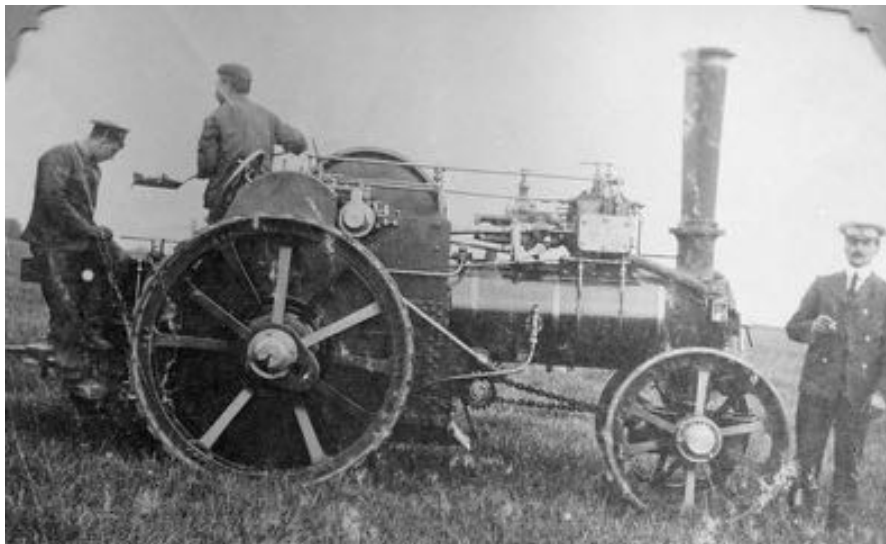
**Soldiers learning how to write using an artificial arm.** © IWM (Q 54574) & © IWM (OMD 5788)

This would have had a big impact on his life and he probably wouldn't have been able to go back to his job caring for horses after the war. The Army gave him an artificial arm in 1918 to help him learn to adapt to his injury but it would have been hard to find work in the countryside as most jobs were physical.

# Jessie Richard Leach

Jessie Leach was an engine driver from Coln Rogers. He was born in Oxfordshire and married Rose Green in 1913. They had a daughter called Rose Emma the following year.

Jessie was conscripted in 1917 but it seems he appealed the decision. His appeal was dismissed by the army and he joined the Grenadier Guards at Bristol. He was posted to France but we don't know which area he was sent to.



© IWM (Q 72856)

We generally think of an engine driver as someone who drives trains but during WWI there were also engine drivers who drove 'steam tractors', which were used to mechanise farming processes like threshing grain and ploughing. It's unclear which Jessie did, but living in the countryside it was quite common to see steam powered engines used in farming and the army used them too.

After the war farming became more mechanised, due to a shortage of healthy men to do traditional manual jobs. This is when we start to see ploughing with horses and oxen disappear and old farming traditions begin to change.

# The Portlock Brothers

The three Portlock brothers from Coln Rogers all served in WWI. Richard, Sidney and Dennis were the sons of Charles and Emily Portlock. Charles was an agricultural labourer and it seems that his sons also worked in farming as carters and cowmen.

Trooper Richard Portlock served with the Royal Horse Guards.

Sergeant Dennis Portlock served with the 'Glosters'.

Corporal Sidney Portlock served with the Military Mounted Police.



*This appeared in the local paper "A Patriotic Gloucestershire Family, all of whom are serving their King and country."*

**Did you know?** The military mounted police kept order amongst the troops and controlled civilians living in villages near to the front line. They made sure that soldiers didn't steal from local residents, get drunk or engage in illegal or immoral activities. They maintained discipline during battle and made sure troops didn't desert their regiment or refuse to go 'over the top' of the trenches. They also policed the mistreatment of animals, collected up lost or stranded horses and seized enemy carrier pigeons.



# Doris Violet Barton

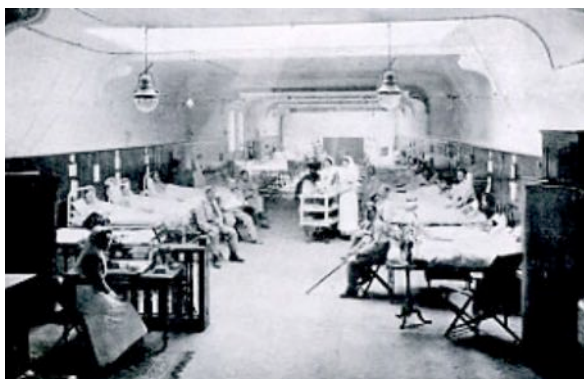
Doris and her brother Ben both served in WWI. They grew up in Coln Rogers and during the war Ben served in the Army and Doris volunteered with the Red Cross VAD (Voluntary Aid Division) as an unpaid nurse.

Doris was 23 when she volunteered with the Red Cross in 1914 and she worked for them throughout the war until May 1919.



She started her service at Cirencester VAD hospital. This was a well-equipped auxiliary hospital with an X-ray machine, operating theatres, wards and treatment facilities such as this rather odd looking 'galvanic cell bath', which was used to help men with muscle damage and trench foot.

Later in the war she served abroad in France at the Red Cross Base Hospital in Le Touquet. Towards the end of the war Doris nursed at the Woolwich Military Hospital. This is one of the places incoming army casualties would have been sent when they reached England.



Cirencester VAD Hospital

The war presented new experiences and an opportunity to travel for many women like Doris. However nursing would have been hard work and it is likely Doris witnessed some distressing injuries, especially during her year spent nursing in France.

# Little Sodbury

These served their King and Country in the  
Great War 1914-1919

William Gowan

South Staffs Regiment, Army Service Corps

Charles Grivell

William Leach

Leonard Taylor

Ernest William Warren

John Weare



# William Gowan

William worked as a GWR railway labourer and lived with his wife Annie in Little Sodbury. When he enlisted in December 1915 at Bristol he had three children Dorothy, Arthur and Violet. By 1917 he also had a son William.



© National Railway Museum and SSPL

**Railway workers laying track in Gloucestershire 1910**

William served with the South Staffordshire Regiment and was briefly moved to the Army Service Corps after he was injured by a gunshot wound.

Towards the end of the war William was captured by the Germans and sent to a prisoner of war camp. He was first sent to Dulmen and then to Minden, which was one of the worst POW camps at the time. Prisoners were locked in a small yard block, where they slept in bunks with leaky roofs, outdoor toilets and rats. Food and hygiene were poor; men had nothing to do and little or no medical care. It would have been a bleak experience.



© IWM (Q 56595) **A Prisoner of War Camp**

William's grandson Roy Gowan was presented with a plaque for the local church in 2013.

[http://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/10580697.Thankful\\_village\\_Little\\_Sodbury\\_is\\_honoured\\_for\\_its\\_war\\_heroes/?ref=rss](http://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/10580697.Thankful_village_Little_Sodbury_is_honoured_for_its_war_heroes/?ref=rss)

# William Leach

William was a farm labourer from Little Sodbury. He served with the Army during WWI and was injured whilst he was in France. His young wife Mary was so worried about him she travelled to his sickbed in France and brought him home herself.

Although it was unusual for a young woman to travel to France alone during the war, if a soldier was considered 'fatally' injured families were encouraged to visit. Special hostels were set up for visiting family members and the Red Cross paid for those who couldn't afford the travel expenses.

For many working class people the war offered an opportunity to travel for the first time.



© IWM (Q 30306) **Soldiers and nurses in a hospital ward**



# Charles Grivell

In 1911 'Charlie' lived at Balls Cottage, Little Sodbury with his parents James and Ellen. His father and elder brother Albert both worked in farming and it's likely he would have followed in the family tradition of working on the land.

We know that William was still only 14 when the war broke out in 1914 so he would have grown up seeing men from the local area going off to fight and being called up to join the army. Unless he lied about his age he would have only been old enough to join the army for the last few months of the war.



Ploughing using horses in Gloucestershire before WWI

## Acknowledgements

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