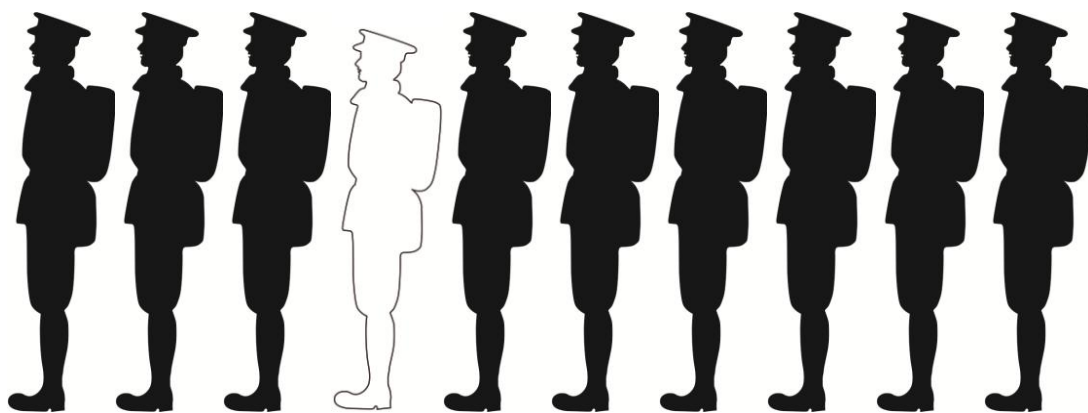


The Great War
Our Community Commemorated

Life Goes On



Booklet 11: Stella Freer and Lynda Kappes MBE



Holmes Chapel and District U3A Local History Group

This booklet, last in a series about the effect of the First World War on Holmes Chapel, describes life in Holmes Chapel during the war. Using information from various sources and especially the Parish Magazine a picture of how life was affected by the war is shown.

Photograph on Front Cover is the village around the time of WW1

“Life Goes On”

Although relatively few civilians died as a direct result of the fighting it was important for the morale of the public that life continued as near to normal as possible. With increasing casualties at the front and shortages beginning to bite at home it was vital to maintain morale because without public support the war effort might crumble.

A small village such as Holmes Chapel and the surrounding area was a reflection of what was happening nationwide on the Home Front. Social events carried on much as they did before the war with the emphasis perhaps shifting to include fund raising for the war effort as well as keeping the local people entertained.

In Holmes Chapel and district only two social events fell victim to the war, one the church annual choir trip at the very outbreak of war in August 1914 and the other the Harvest Festival Tea in October 1914.

In August 1914 the Church choir’s annual outing had been planned to Liverpool.

Tickets were priced at 3s 3d each for the return journey available from the vicar Reverend J. H. Armitstead.

It was aimed to leave at 7. 42 am and return at 8. 20 pm, the railway company had kindly agreed to arrange for the train to Crewe to stop at Holmes Chapel.

However all these efforts were to be in vain and the visit had to be cancelled due to the declaration of war on August 4th 1914.

The Church and Parish

The church, always the centre of any village in the early 1900s, continued to have a major impact on life in Holmes Chapel during World War One.

During the war years the parish thrived much the same as it had done in previous years. Sunday school prizes were awarded each year to boys and girls for regular attendance. Baptisms, marriages and burials continued as did Confirmations.

“Holy Baptism – We have mentioned lately when parents bring children for baptism they are unaware of the requirements of God Parents for the child would be 2 Godfathers and 1 Godmother for a male and 2 Godmothers and 1 Godfather for a female child.”

Confirmation classes were held after Easter at the Mother Church at Sandbach and ensuing Confirmations were held in May.

The Offertories were fairly healthy throughout these war years and annual accounts were submitted and audited thereupon.

Harvest Festivals also continued throughout the war period but on a much lower key. Thanksgiving services remained but in 1914 it was decided, under the circumstances, not to have the Annual Harvest Tea Party. “At the same time we realise that this will entail a great financial loss to the Church finances, as the Tea Party is generally the means of raising about £25 towards the Church funds, we earnestly hope that all who, in past years, have been good enough to give us very substantial assistance towards the Tea Party, will this year give an increased

amount in the offertory instead, so that our Church funds may not suffer so much.”

The Harvest Festival itself went ahead as normal on October 11th it was very well attended and the offertories amounted to £11 16s 7d. The amount donated had increased due to the additional contributions made by the people who would have attended the Tea Party;

Mrs. Young £1 00

Mrs. Beckett 10s

Mrs. Schofield 10s

Mrs. Stubbs 10s

Mr. G. Ellison 5s

This raised the fund to £14 11s 7d.

Role of Honour was listed in every one of the war years and as the war progressed inevitably the lists grew longer.

The Role of Honour began to mark the dead as well as the volunteers and calls to national days of prayer were made in the hope of peace as the war dragged on. A solemn service of Thanksgiving “for the cessation of hostilities and for victory granted to us and our allies” was held on 13th November 1918 with a large congregation of all denominations. The following Sunday the offertory of £13 6s was to be used to erect some suitable memorial to those in Holmes Chapel who had lost their lives.”

The Girls Club

Formed in 1912 (an early local version of the Girl Guides), the Girls Club, for girls over 12 years of age, held their monthly meetings in the rooms of a cottage on Middlewich Road.

In 1914 at the beginning of the war, the Girls Club were requested to give use of the Club Cottage to a family of Belgian Refugees. The club members gladly agreed and left their quarters temporarily; they also agreed to pay the rent of the cottage for the Belgians, and to be responsible for the furnishings of the upstairs rooms. In consequence of these arrangements, the weekly winter meetings would be held in a room lent by Mrs. Ramsden. During the Club evenings it was proposed to work for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association, which is a branch of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild

“During the summer we met once as a club, and had a long day at Llandudno. As three of our party had never seen the sea before, and as it was a perfect summer day, we think that their first impressions will not soon be forgotten. We spent our time climbing the Great Orme, boating, and listening to the negroes in “The Happy Valley.” The return journey provided a delightful ending to a happy day. Our party went by train to Chester and were there met by two motor cars, one kindly lent by Mrs. Eason and the other provided by Mrs. Young and Mrs. Ramsden. Holmes Chapel was safely reached soon after ten o'clock.”

During 1915 the girls worked hard and sent a large parcel of warm clothing to a soldier's family in Crewe and later to a family in Leeds. Mrs. D. Sankey received thanks for help with tailoring. A certain amount of knitting was sent to Holmes Chapel men serving at the front or in the Navy.

The Girls Club, in conjunction with the Scouts, organised entertainment by the way of farces, glees and songs in Macclesfield Road School, raising funds for the distribution of several parcels of clothing, knitting, etc. to those at the front. They continued to offer the Club Cottage to the Belgium refugees.

In May 1916 after the 4th winter of existence the Girls Club made sandbags and kitbags and then closed for the summer. The Club cottage was still rented @ £7.10s.0d. per annum, 1st May 1915 to 30th April 1916 rates 16/-d.

In February 1917 it was noted that the Club had opened for the winter months in October 1916. Members knitted but Thursday 28th December (1916) the usual Christmas festivity was observed. The members of the Holmes Chapel Girls Club held a successful Jumble and Pound Sale in the Saltersford Cottage Room on March 17th. "The room had been kindly lent to the Club by Mrs. D. Sankey, and we are glad to be able to say that it was crowded with buyers; we would like to thank all of those who helped us by coming to buy, and all those who sent "Jumble" and wares for our stalls; we are also very grateful to those who helped us to price and sell our goods."

"It has been decided to give up the Cottage in Middlewich Road, which for the past six years has served as a "Club Cottage"; our Headquarters for the summer will be the Saltersford Cottage Room in Macclesfield Road, and although no regular meetings will be held during the summer, yet we hope to meet frequently on Saturday afternoons."

The work done by club members during the winter months was sent to local men who were at the front, and to Shooters' Hill Hospital, Woolwich.

An Annual statement of the Girls Club Accounts was shown - E.G. Ramsden, Hon. Sec. – Balance Sheet for 1916-1917 shows a balance of

£24.6s.6 1/2d. Examined and found correct, March 25th 1917, B.W.S. Bolland.

In June 1918 the Girls Club, Middlewich Road, after a six year existence, was discontinued. From the last statement of the Club Accounts published in the Parish Magazine it will be remembered that the Club possessed a very satisfactory balance in hand. This sum, increased by Bank interest to £9, was at the suggestion of Miss Ramsden, and with the keen approval of the Girls' Committee, forwarded to Mrs. MacLeod, Hon. Treas., as a donation from the Club to "The National Institute for the Blind," Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Fund. An official receipt and most grateful letter of thanks were received in acknowledgement.

The Parish Council

Two issues dominated discussions in the Holmes Chapel Parish Council meetings all through the WW1 period, these were extending the sewer system and extending the mains water system.

The Sewer System and Mains Water

It appears some of the system existed extending to Sewerage Meadow but the plan was to extend it along Macclesfield Road to the school and elsewhere. There were many discussions with contractors and it appears there were two contenders for the contract. There was concern about new houses adding to the load on the system and in December 1914 it was mentioned that 18 new houses were under construction.

A supply was available from Middlewich but it was not secure and pressure was variable in 1914. There was therefore considerable concern about connecting new houses to the system. Several applications were made from Holmes Chapel residents but they were turned down. A request was also made by Mr. W. Carver of Cranage Hall to take water from the supply but this was strongly resisted through 1913 and 1914. However in 1915 an offer was made of a supply via a 1 and ¼" inch pipe available from 6 pm to 6 am. There would be a stop tap on the Holmes Chapel boundary and a meter and a UDC employee would be responsible for turning the supply on and off. The water would be charged at 1/6 pence per 1000 gallons.

There was talk of obtaining a supply from Congleton but by 1918 the supply seems to have improved and a letter was sent confirming satisfaction to Middlewich.

WW1 Issues

There was relatively little discussion of the war in Council meetings and nothing about residents who joined up.

The first reference was in March 1915 when a 'Recruiting Committee' was set up but no details of their activities are recorded. In May 1915 Mr. Williams suggested the sewerage scheme should not be discussed as 'all public works are being postponed'.

The Rural District Council

In January 1915, at the fortnightly meeting of Congleton Rural District Council, Mr. David Hulme presiding: a letter was read from the local Government Board asking to be supplied with a report from the Committee who had been appointed to consider the housing question in Holmes Chapel. They mentioned that their inspector had reported that at least twelve houses were needed of the three bedroom type, in addition to the twelve houses that were being erected by private speculation, most of which were of better class. There were many defects which they hoped the Council would see repaired. They concurred with the Medical Officer, who has drawn attention to the matter in his annual report. In reply to Mr. Smith, the Clerk (Mr. H. Ferrand) said the parishes Medical Officer had mentioned were Newbold, Astbury, Church Hulme and Elworth.

The Rev. J.H. Armitstead said that the communication was only based on the opinion of an under-strapper. "Where had he got his information from, and what justifications had the Board for concurring with the Medical Officer's reports," he asked.

Mr. Richardson (Sanitary Inspector) replied that the Inspector of the Board had been to Holmes Chapel and had visited the houses that looked in a dilapidated condition. He looked particularly for overcrowding but found none.

Mr. Edwards: "If he had, it would be a vote of censure on you for allowing it."

Mr. Richardson:" It would have been a censure on the Council for not building houses." The Clerk said a committee of the whole Council has

been appointed to look into the matter, and he had put the Board off last year by informing them of this. Now the Board wanted to know what they had done. It was decided that the Council should discuss the matter in committee in a fortnight hence.

Congleton Rural Council

Housing of the working classes at Elworth, Holmes Chapel and Astbury.

In February 1915 at the fortnightly meeting of the Congleton Rural Council, Mr. D. Holmes presiding, the question of housing accommodation of the working classes was discussed. The Medical Officer said that because of the scarcity of houses many people were in lodgings and it was his opinion that the paper factory in Holmes Chapel was the cause of the demand there. Mr. Scofield said he did not think Holmes Chapel required more cottages, and if they did, the proprietors of the paper factory were quite willing to build them, as they required them for their employees.

Church Choir

The church choir did reinstate their annual excursions and on August 2nd 1916 the church choir trip took place. The boys and girls went to New Brighton for the day and enjoyed the first choir excursion for three years. £14 was donated by subscribers towards the expenses of the trip and this just covered the costs. They also enjoyed a trip on August 24th 1917 to Belle Vue. The trip was accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Bollard and Mr. W Plant. A really enjoyable day was had by all.

In 1918 it was reported that the church choir had been sadly depleted during the previous three or four years. Since the outbreak of war the choir had lost, temporarily, fifteen choir men.

Several girls had come forward to help and were regular attenders at services and practices. However there was still a shortage of men and two or more men were needed to fill the spaces left by those away fighting. An appeal was sent out for those still left at home to come forward and help.

The Carver Family

As one of the most important families in Holmes Chapel the influential Carvers also supported the local efforts to keep up morale and raise funds. Cranage Hall was used on several occasions to help entertain the local people.

On June 16th 1916 an American Tea in aid of the local VAD branch of the St. John's Brigade was held at Cranage Hall. The grounds were thrown open and the weather being fine people from the district turned out in large numbers to inspect the beautiful gardens. Games, amusements and stalls were arranged for the afternoon.

A month later, July 14th 1916 the British Women's Temperance Association were entertained to tea by Mrs. Carver at Cranage Club. After the tea the garden was opened for the ladies to tour. The Stockport Branch of the Association were also invited the following day and were met by brakes and wagonettes at Holmes Chapel station. They were taken for a drive around the district and then to Cranage Club for tea.

Mr. A Plant catered for both events.

Cranage Hall gardens were once more opened on July 20th 1918 for a Garden Fete. The weather dawned threatening but kept fine until evening. There was a Fancy Dress competition for the children with Lady Shakerly acting as judge and various sideshows and stalls.

Miss Betty and Mr. Haworth performed a country dance and tea was dispensed by Mrs. Dickinson.

A total income of £87 2s 7d was raised, expenses amounted to £14 14s 5d and so a sum of £77 was handed over to the local Sewing Guild for the good work being carried out by them for soldiers and sailors.

Fund raising for the War

Although most of the established organisations and societies used their events to raise money for the war effort some social events were organised specifically to increase funds for local associations and clubs.

The first of these was a concert held in Middlewich on December 4th 1914 to raise money for the Belgian Homes Committee.

An entertainment was held at Cranage Club on March 25th and 26th 1915 by the Dramatic Society and succeeded in raising £12 2s 3d in aid of the Needlework Fund. The Dramatic Society also arranged a social evening for the same fund on December 10th 1915 in the Assembly Rooms. People who attended were entertained by an orchestra and singers.

Also for the Needlework Fund a dance was enjoyed at the Assembly rooms on January 14th 1916. Harry Venables acted as MC and Hassall's Band from Sandbach provided the music. It was reported that a "goodly sum" was raised.

On February 11th 1916 eighty people attended the Holmes Chapel Cadet Corps dance and raised money for the District Nursing Association.

To raise funds for the Christmas parcels for soldiers a Jumble Sale took place on December 7th 1917 and the children of Holmes Chapel and Cranage schools organised two concerts which raised £126.

A Whist Drive and Dance was held in the Assembly Rooms on February 1st 1918 to raise funds for the Winsford Cottage Hospital. Prizes were awarded as follows;

Ladies Prizes - a silver serviette ring was won by Miss A Lee presented to her by Sergeant L Bishop from the Canadian contingent. A box of hankies was won by Miss Brooks presented to her by the vicar.

Gents Prizes – a Treasury note case was won by Mr. Bishop senior presented by Mrs. A Calderbank from the Horticultural College. A silk tie donated by the vicar was won by F. Bolshaw junior.

The Byley Garden Party was held on August 2nd 1918 at the Rectory in aid of the Our Day Fund for the Red Cross. Tea was served by Mrs. Palfreyman with A. Garnett acting as waitress. Miss Tipping organised a stall and the Beswick Prize Band played the music. Mrs. Reiss and Mr. Carver were in attendance.

On Saturday October 12th 1918 a dance was held in the Assembly Rooms in aid of the soldiers' and sailors' Christmas parcels. Music was provided by the Ramsells band and Mr. Bright acted as Master of Ceremonies.

The Boy Scouts and The Women's Temperance Association

The two most active and prolific fund raisers were the local Boy Scout troop and the members of the local British Women's Temperance Association. The BWTA was founded in 1876 and agitated for the restriction of sales of alcohol and later for restrictions on gambling and highlighting issues around moral welfare.

The British Women's Temperance Association organised a social evening held at the Cranage Club Room on Wednesday January 19th 1916.

Mrs. Dickinson was in the chair and the address was given by Mr. A Oakes. A number of musical selections were contributed by the local orchestra and solos and duets performed by the Miss Lucas sisters of Brereton. Humorous items by Mr. H Walker of Dukes Oak Farm Brereton were heartily applauded by all present. Recitations were also given by Miss Bright.

A meeting was also held by the BWTA on Tuesday February 18th 1916. Mrs Carver was in the chair and the address was given by Reverend J. Huxley of Lostock. A Belgian lady living in the locality played the piano.

Another social gathering of the BWTA was held on December 22nd 1916 at the Cranage Club room. As each member was allowed to bring a friend with them the room was filled to capacity. There was an amusing sketch by Mrs. Dickinson, the housekeeper at the hall, and Mrs. H Tomkinson. Games and dancing were also enjoyed by those in attendance.

Both organisations worked hard, often working together, to provide entertainments for the local people whilst at the same time raising funds for the war effort.

On March 14th and 15th 1916 they organised an evening of entertainment held at Cranage Club donating the funds raised for the “comfort of soldiers and scouts”.

Negro spirituals were sung by the scouts.

A dance was performed by J.Henshaw, F.Snelson, V.Jackson and A.Johnson.

A short play entitled “A Couple of Scamps” was acted by S.Brown, C.Prescot, W.Plant, E.Veale, A.Gater and H.Oakes.

A play “Cranford” was also performed by F.Postles, E.Parrish, L.Bowyer, L.Hill, R.Cumberlidge, D.Manderville, H.Booth, D.Henshaw, N.Higginson and N.Lawton.

Mrs.O.A.Carver aided by Mrs. Dickinson trained the characters who were described as having “striking originality”.

On Tuesday and Wednesday March 27th and 28th 1917 an entertainment was held at the Assembly Rooms involving the Boy Scouts and members of the Y branch of the girls section of the British Women’s Temperance Association.

Tickets were available from Reverend Armitstead, Mrs. Waldo Carver and Miss R. Cumberlidge.

A dance in Gypsy costume was performed by Ida Blease and Dollie Henshaw.

A chorus of girls in Japanese costume performed two action songs.

A piano solo was undertaken by Miss Reynolds and solos sung by Miss Reynolds and Miss H. Darlington.

A short play was acted by the scouts and scenes from "Mrs. Wiggs of Cabbage Patch" by the girls.

Mrs. Dickinson trained the chorus and Mrs. Tomkinson provided the accompaniment.

It was a great success and raised £12 4s 6d which was divided between the scouts camp fund and the District Nursing Association.

It wasn't all work for the scouts though!

During Whit week 1915 the Boy Scouts organised a caravan trip, 23 people took part. The party walked to Nantwich from the Vicarage in Holmes Chapel.

Mr. and Mrs. Hornby entertained them when they arrived in Nantwich. The following day the tents were taken down and packed into the caravan and the group set off to walk to Malpas. They arrived tired, but happy in Malpas at 6pm.

On the way back home they stayed the night again at Nantwich and eventually arrived back in Holmes Chapel on Saturday evening. It was an enjoyable outing and during the week everyone walked 60 to 70 miles. All the boys stood up to the challenge really well and were pronounced none the worse for the trip!

Thanks were extended to;

Mr. and Mrs. Hornby and the Reverend and Mrs. Armitstead for entertaining them.

Mr. Massey for the use of the tent. Mr. Bolland and the Reverend Armitstead for accompanying the trip.

All those who had provided provisions.

Cranage Club

Cranage Club appeared to be an important venue for the people of Holmes Chapel and Cranage and was at the centre of many of the social events (as seen in the above) organised during the war years bringing the community together in difficult times. Starting on November 2nd 1914 the club was to be open for the community on three evenings a week Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. This must have provided a place of community support for the local people, somewhere to go to share experiences of the news from the front but also a place where maybe the horrors of what was happening to loved ones could be forgotten for a while.

On November 2nd 1917 Holmes Chapel Social Club was opened with a most successful entertainment. A large audience watched a performance by Crewe Pierrots.

The next entertainment was arranged for December 7th, a Whist Drive and dance to be held from 7 30pm to 9 30 pm.

The club had already attracted 200 members and anyone else interested in being elected to the committee was asked to give their names to existing committee members who were as follows;

President Mr. Carver Chairman Rev. J. H. Armitstead

Treasurer Mrs. Bishop

Secretary Mrs. Waldo Carver

Other members included;

Mrs. Carver, Mrs. Haworth, Mrs. Tomkinson, Mrs. Mitchell, Miss Ramsden, Miss Hodgkinson, Miss Young, Miss Evans, Mr. Hodgkinson, Mr. A Oakes, Mr. Baskerville, Mr. Bishop, Mr. McDowell and Mr. Connell.

To allow younger members to have a direct share in the management of the club it was decided to allow any members aged 14 to 19 to elect three additional members of the committee. The election was scheduled to take place on December 7th.

On December 7th 1917 the Social Club held the promised entertainment of a Whist Drive and Dance. For the first hour 100 members played Whist followed by dancing from 8pm to 9 30pm.

A short concert followed by dancing was held on December 21st 1917 and was attended by over 200 members.

The programme for the next two months was published as follows;

January 4th Dance

January 18th Whist Drive

February 1st Lecture

February 15th Miscellaneous Entertainment Assistance and any suggestions for future entertainments were welcomed from any members.

Miss E. Parrish, Miss J.Henshaw, Miss J.Blease had been elected to the committee to represent the views of the younger members.

A male representative was to be elected at the next meeting to represent the male point of view in the younger members.

The Club held its annual meeting on Friday August 23rd 1918.

At the meeting it was decided to hold meetings every Friday fortnightly during the coming winter starting on Friday October 11th from 7 30pm to 10 pm. New membership cards were made available from Mrs.Bishop and Mrs. Waldo Carver. A notice was to be placed in the Post Office as to the time and place these cards were to be given out.

Knitting!

In 1917 the Girls Knitting Club appeared to be very active in raising funds hosting social evenings on February 23rd and 27th April. They also organised a Whistling Competition for Men on November 23rd which was won by Seaman G.V.Williams. The money raised was shared between the local YMCA and the wool fund.

Perhaps inspired by the work of the established Knitting Club a Knitting class for the Y Girls Branch was to be started by Mrs. Waldo Carver in the small room at the Assembly Rooms. This would start on Tuesday October 1st 1918 from 7 30pm to 9pm and would produce comforts for the soldiers' Christmas parcels.

Other Community Events

Sunday July 28th 1916 saw members of the Volunteer Corps for Holmes Chapel, Knutsford and Chelford parade at St. Luke's church headed by Crewe Locomotive Works Military Band. After the parade the members

were entertained to dinner. In the afternoon they assembled in the gardens of Sandy Ford, which had been kindly opened to the public by F.A.Howarth, and played selections from their repertoire.

Also celebrated in the village in 1917 on Sunday July 20th was France's Day. Several local ladies attired themselves appropriately and used their best efforts in securing buyers of emblems which consisted of flags, roses and swords etc. A good amount of money was raised in aid of the hospitals in France.

Extract from a "Journey through Time"

"Village life seems to have continued nearly as normal through the war with reports of all the usual village societies and activities with the exception of the May Day Festivals."

So even during the difficult years of the war it seems that some normality of life was maintained by the people of Holmes Chapel, Cranage and the surrounding area. Clubs and social events carried on and no doubt provided some relief from the worry of those left behind about loved ones at the front. These events also provided an entertaining way of raising funds for the war effort again allowing local people to feel they were doing their bit to support the men and women involved in the conflict in France and Belgium. However some impact was felt by those organisations which relied on membership of young men such as the church choir, football and cricket clubs whilst they were away fighting at the front. Everyday life seems to have continued in much the same way as it did before the war started.

Sources;

Parish magazines 1914 – 1918

Parish council meeting minutes 1913 – 1919

Congleton “Chronicle” newspaper

Crewe “Chronicle” and “Guardian” newspapers.

“A Journey though Time”

Cheshire archive office.

Booklets in this series produced by the Holmes Chapel U3A Local History Group:

1. Holmes Chapel before the War
2. Village People 1914 – 1918
3. The Men Who Went to War
4. Refugees come to the village
5. Beating the Drum – Recruitment and Communication
6. The Community Response
7. Feeding the People
8. Rationing During the War
9. Rules and Regulations
10. Education
11. Life Goes On
12. Holmes Chapel at the End of the War

For copies of booklets see web site
www.holmeschapelhistory.co.uk

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WW1 and Holmes Chapel & District U3A

In 2011 the Holmes Chapel & District University of the Third Age (U3A) was set up in the village and one of the activities under its umbrella was a local history group. This attracted people who had been involved in research in the past as well as some new volunteers eager to learn more. After an initial period of encouragement and training for the newcomers it was decided that the group would work together on a topic - The Story of Holmes Chapel and district during the First World War.

This is one in a series of booklets describing different aspects of life in Holmes Chapel and district before and during the First World War. A full list of the booklets is given on the inside of this back cover.

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