

The Great War  
Our Community Commemorated

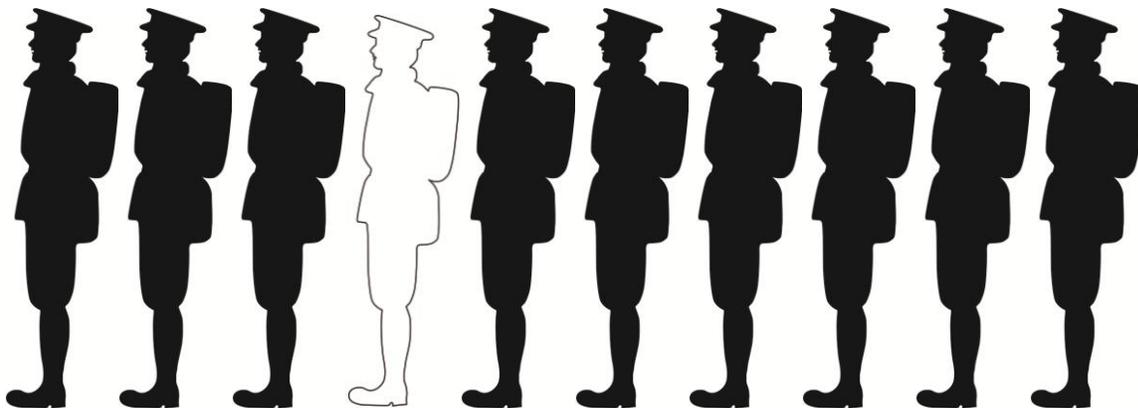
# Village People 1914 - 1918

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Booklet 2: Barbara Jackson edited by Rod Cameron

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Holmes Chapel and District U3A Local History Group

This booklet, second in a series about the effect of the First World War on Holmes Chapel, portrays a number of the families who lived in Holmes Chapel and district at the time of the War:

- 1 – The village community before the War:
  - Dr Lionel Picton** of Sadler's Close
  - Mr & Mrs Frank Howarth** of Sandiford Cottage
- 2 – The Vicar, **John Hornby Armitstead**
- 3 – The **Carver** Family of Cranage Hall
- 4 – The **Reiss** Family of the Hermitage
- 5 – The **Blease** Families
- 6 – The **Bishop** Family
  - The **Sankey** Family
- 7 – Lance Corporal **Wilfred Norbury**
- 8 – Misdemeanours
- 9 – Conclusion

*Ref: The photograph on the front cover is of the Square, Holmes Chapel, at the time of Alison Carver's wedding in 1915.*

## **1. The Village Community before the War**

In the census year of 1911 Holmes Chapel was a community of just under 1,000 people, three quarters of them being born in the village or in Cheshire. They were living in a cross section of property sizes with 23 smaller dwellings, 152 average size having 4-9 rooms and 12 gentry sized houses. Only 13% of these were owner occupied but since Cranage Hall, The Hermitage and Sandiford Cottage were all occupied by tenants at one time, not too much can be inferred about wealth from this figure.

Most people were employed in the service industry with the biggest single sector being agriculture (farming/market gardening). The railway employed at least 12 people. Interestingly, there was a mix of chauffeurs, drivers, stable staff, carters and carriers demonstrating that this was the period in history when there was a gradual change towards mechanically driven transport. Some travelling salesmen and well to do business people had no doubt been attracted to the village by the presence of the main line railway station.

The villagers had a choice of three church communities: the Parish Church (of England), the Wesleyan Chapel and the United Methodist Chapel. All had their special seasonal services and events and Sunday schools with their anniversary services and outings.

There was a small private girls school (run by Miss Kendall in the tall building opposite the parish church doors) but most of the children went either to the Church of England school at Cranage or to Macclesfield Road Schools. This was the council school and was for children from 5 – 14 hence being referred to as 'schools' even though it was one building. The headteachers, Mr Hodgkinson at Cranage and Mr A. Oakes at Macclesfield Road, had considerable extra responsibilities in the community such as auditing society accounts, organising War Savings, running evening classes and both kept the

register of volunteers for the harvest season.

There were plenty of clubs and societies from social and sports clubs to reading rooms and horticultural societies. During the war most societies were heavily involved in the war effort, raising money, gathering food provisions and making clothing. These were for the Christmas Boxes for the soldiers and for the hospitals. Fund raising efforts involved whist drives, concerts, entertainments, dances and competitions which, whilst they had a concrete aim, no doubt enhanced the social life of the village across the social strata.

Medical needs were attended to in the village by Dr Lionel Picton and by the District Nurse, who was paid for by charitable subscriptions. If necessary, people could go to the Winsford Cottage Hospital where Dr Picton might treat them. Dr Picton was mostly evident in the local press as a 'first responder' to all accidents of which there seemed to be many. For example a horse pulling a lorry (a four wheeled wagon) over the bridge at Goostrey took fright at a passing train, both boys on the lorry were thrown to the ground and injured. Dr Picton and Nurse Fern attended. Again, when several government motor wagons were lined up outside the Red Lion one of the drivers was caught between a stationary one and a moving one and severely crushed. The doctor attended.

In the summer of 1916 there was a tragic accident at the weir at Cranage Mill. John Steele, an eighteen year old engraver's apprentice (at the wallpaper factory) went out for a swim with several other youths. He was seen by others to be in difficulties. A companion, John Metcalf, made several attempts at heroic rescue. The undercurrents were so strong the victim was pulled from his grasp. Metcalf was so exhausted he nearly lost his own life and would have perished but for the fact he seized a rope thrown to him by Tom Massey. Dragging operations were commenced by P. Brown and P. Goulding, employees of the Mill, they boarded a punt and tried to recover the body. They

pulled it out after 45 minutes. Dr Picton, his wife and members of the local ambulance corps applied artificial respiration for two hours without success. Dr Picton's wife had been a nursing sister at Bart's Hospital and so was well able to take her part in her husband's practice in a nursing and 'social worker' capacity.

In November 1914 the doctor gathered funds, materials and VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurses and left the village for a short time to establish a hospital in France. Dr Picton ran regular St John's Ambulance/VAD classes at his home, Sadler's Close, when men and women were trained separately in such things as the use of rolled bandages, home nursing, stretcher bearing and military sanitation. The participants were examined by an outsider after each course. Before the war the doctor had looked after the staff at Somerford Hall so it was natural that he became medical officer for the hospital at Somerford and was responsible for training the hospital staff. He was also a lay representative of the church. Sadler's Close was on the site of the present day George and Dragon. In 1911 the doctor was living there with his wife and three young children and a live-in staff of four, two of them being children's nurses. (Arthur, born in 1911, later succeeded his father as the village GP.) He also had staff who lived out: there were two laundry women and staff to care for the livestock and garden. The doctor's house was built on a field called The Close, which he purchased from a saddler, hence 'Sadler's Close'.

### **'Several Influential Gentlemen at once Responded Handsomely'**

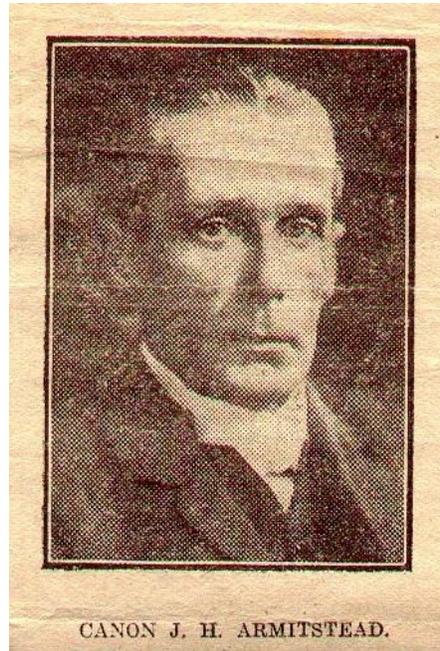
Dr Picton was a part of a social group much in evidence in the war-time life of the village. His role centred on medical issues whereas the others were occupied in organising and fund raising. There were the Carver family of Cranage Hall, the Reiss family of the Hermitage, the Bolland's of Brooklands (where the new estate is being built south of the A54) and the Howarths of Sandiford (where the shopping precinct is now). Mr Young, who was the Principal at the Agricultural College at

Saltersford Hall, was also was an active member of the community in that he commanded the Holmes Chapel section of the Cheshire Volunteer Regiment. His wife Charlotte was the secretary of the Girls' Club and teaching staff from the College also helped the village by giving talks on horticultural matters.

There were several of the Howarth brothers active in the village - Frank, Frederick and Jesse - though Frank of Sandiford Cottage is the most evident. He was on the founding committee of the Home Guard Defence Corps and, along with the other Howarths, after training, passed the marksman test. Frank was a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Community and was reported as presiding and giving the sermon at the 'choir service'. He spoke at the War Savings public meeting becoming treasurer to the committee. For a while he ran the Boys' Club at the Assembly Rooms.



**Dr Picton and family, taken at Sadler's Close.**



**Newspaper cutting of Reverend John Hornby Armitstead, taken in 1930s**

At the December 1914 recruiting meeting he was in the chair declaring that 'we are fighting against tyranny and the oppressor'. Frank, like all the other 'influential gentlemen' was always generous when funds were being raised, giving £60 towards the Somerford Hospital Fund. Like the Carvers he opened his garden in aid of funds. It was on one of these occasions when Crewe Works Brass Band played.

His wife, Mrs E. Marsh Howarth, ran the committee of the District Nursing Association and was on the Social Club Committee donating money, along with Mrs Carver, for entertainments. She also took part in the St John's Ambulance classes and passed the examinations. And one of the Mrs F. Howarths organised the collection of goods for the Christmas parcels for the soldiers.

## **2. The Vicar, John Hornby Armitstead, 1868 – 1941**

John Hornby was the fourth generation of Armitsteads to be vicars and significant property owners in the area. His great grandfather John had come to the area in 1809 to be vicar of Goostrey, having bought the

advowson of Sandbach, which gave him the power to appoint the vicars of Sandbach and Goostrey. He also bought Cranage Hall in 1814, his son Lawrence adding The Hermitage and Cotton to the estate in 1829. John Hornby Armitstead became vicar at Holmes Chapel in 1899 while his father John Richard was vicar of Sandbach. He was vicar of the village until 1919 when he left to become vicar of Sandbach after his father died.

He lived at The Vicarage, next to the bridge over the Dane, with a housekeeper and a house boy who was a local lad from Cranage and in 1911 was 15 yrs of age. (This boy was Alfred (Laddie) Brown who died in February 1916 in hospital in England having been wounded two weeks before whilst on active service.) Around this time the vicar let out the Vicarage and reputedly moved to live at Park House which was on the boundary of Cranage Hall grounds. Cranage Hall was the property of his father and was leased, in 1900, to the Carver family. There was a great friendship between Alison Carver and John Hornby Armitstead, despite the 24 year difference in age, and they were expected to be married. However Alison met Dick Sheppard, vicar of St Martin in the Fields in London and in 1915 she brought him home to the Hall, a wing of which was at the time being used as a hospital for officers, to recover from a bout of ill health. Within a few months, in June 1915, they were married at St Luke's. The Archbishop of York, Cosmo Lang, who was a friend of the groom, the groom's father and John Hornby Armitstead officiated at the ceremony. Even though this was war time this was a huge event in the village.

The village and church were decorated, the guests included many dignitaries and there was a garden party at the Hall to which two people from every household in the village were invited. The newspaper published a full list of wedding gifts from royalty, from the local gentry and from local societies. HRH the Prince of Wales gave a silver jug, J. H. Armitstead a photo frame, the Holmes Chapel Boy

Scouts a silver vase and the inhabitants of the village a set of silver vases and an ink stand. Perhaps the most bizarre gift to modern eyes was the mounted hoof of a hunter pony ridden by Alison as a child. A total of 280 gifts are on the list which even included a Railway Guide Case, presumably for the famous "Bradshaw's". In his address the Archbishop advised the couple "Not to sacrifice the sanctity of their home life" in their dedication to the church. Later events showed that this was not a successful marriage. Alison returned to live in Cheshire in the 1930s. She later went to live at Sandbach Vicarage as housekeeper to John H. Armitstead and nursed him in his final illness.

At Sandbach, where John Hornby inherited a church which had suffered neglect as his father had continued in his post as vicar into his nineties, it is said of him that he showed the prominent traits of the family in his "active mind, remarkable energy and determination to succeed". It can only be said that he showed similar energy during his twenty years as vicar of Holmes Chapel.

He served the community on many committees, being a member of both Holmes Chapel and Cranage Parish Councils, the Arclid Workhouse Board of Guardians and Congleton Rural District Council. He was present as a member of Congleton Board of Guardians when a letter from Mr Carver was read out requesting a piped water supply to Cranage. He represented Mr Carver in that he relayed the promise from Mr Carver that he would only use the supply at night. He was a member of Cheshire Education Committee which met at the Crewe Arms Hotel every month and must have found travelling by train to the meetings very convenient. In May 1914 he was appointed Chaplain to the Cheshire Yeomanry.

He was a member of most village committees, an example of this being that he chaired the new Social Club which was set up when Mr Carver, the owner of the Assembly Rooms, said that he wanted a group to be formed to run the rooms.

He was active, often in a leading role, in most of the committees set up to help the war effort. He was the assistant quartermaster to the Somerford Hospital set up in the family home of the Shakerleys to treat soldiers. He was in the chair at the first meeting to establish a War Savings Committee and was a member of the Committee thereafter. He was on the committee of the Volunteer Training Corps which was established to train, as a home guard, men who had not been able to enlist in the services. There were many fund raising events in the village during these years to provide materials for groups such as the Sewing Guild, to send equipment to the forces or to supply the Somerford Hospital which was the responsibility of the Holmes Chapel community. The vicar was usually in evidence at such events by contributing prizes or in making donations and subscriptions. He, for example, gave £60 subscription to Somerford Hospital. Again, for the war effort the village established an allotment association and it was the vicar and his father who supplied the land for this on the corner of Chester Road and Middlewich Road.

Rev Armitstead's church duties must also have taken much of his time. Apart from regular services there were christenings, weddings and funerals and the Sunday School services to attend. The village had a strong community of Methodists but the services of the vicar were required even for Methodist funerals as the Wesleyans shared the churchyard. He, of course, ran the Vestry meetings and reported on these in the Parish Magazine. There were extra church duties at this time as there were many memorial services and some church parades. It is likely that many of the unsigned articles in the Parish Magazine were written by him. He wrote in the Magazine of November 1914:-

“Up to the present some 30 recruits have gone from this parish, but we hope that that number will before long be considerably enlarged. What of those who, some weeks ago, signified their intention of offering themselves for service, but have not yet done so? Are they still

thinking it over? If so, let them at once make up their minds and answer their Country's call."

His church duties were further increased when in 1917 his brother, Edward, vicar of Goostrey, left his post to do National Service and John Hornby with the Rector of Brereton looked after the services at Goostrey.

The Rev Armitstead was a JP County Magistrate and often presided at Middlewich Petty Sessions which took place at 11am every third Wednesday at the Town Hall, Middlewich. He was not presiding in 1916 when Dr Picton was fined for showing a light between the curtains but it was he who fined Mr Young, Principal of the Agricultural College in Holmes Chapel, 2s 6d for the same offence. It was also the vicar who was presiding in court when the Holmes Chapel butcher, Herbert Bolshaw, was fined 5s in 1917 for allowing a dog to be at large without a collar with the 'owner's name and address inscribed thereon' and a further 5s for not having a dog licence.

There were other Armitstead enthusiasms which John Hornby also maintained. He was said to be keen on country sports and, like his father, was a keen cricket player. The cricket ground in the village at the time was in the north east corner of the London Road and Station Road crossroads now occupied by houses. As he did not keep a groom we can assume he had a car. He was undoubtedly wealthy enough to do this and his responsibilities obviously involved him in much local travel.

The evidence suggests that it is thanks to John Hornby Armitstead that we have access to information on Holmes Chapel during the war years. One of our primary sources is the Parish Magazine, it being a detailed account of much of the life of the village. We have no Parish Magazines for the period following the vicar's move to Sandbach so they were either not published or not kept and safely deposited. Events in Holmes Chapel were well reported in the District news

section of the Winsford and Middlewich Guardian. Again, however, once the vicar had left the village in 1919 the Holmes Chapel news items are much reduced being mostly confined to Methodist Chapel events. Some major occurrences, such as the death of a farm labourer when he fell from the threshing machine of Mr Davies as it was negotiating the corner around The Bull public house in the Square, did appear in the paper in 1919. This would imply that it was possibly the vicar who was keeping the paper informed of village events.

Just as the village owed much to John Hornby Armitstead in the first two decades of the twentieth century, so do we as we try to get a glimpse of village life during the years of the Great War.

### **3. The Carver Family of Cranage Hall**

The family came to the area in 1900 when they leased Cranage Hall from Canon John Richard Armitstead, vicar of Sandbach and father of John H. Armitstead, vicar of Holmes Chapel. The Hall had been built by the great-uncle of the vicar in 1829 and had just been refurbished inside and out, having had electricity generators installed when Mr Carver took out the lease. William Carver owned a cotton mill in Marple and no doubt the existence of the railway station on the Manchester line in the village influenced his choice of home. Twenty years later Mr Carver bought the house from the vicar who had by this time inherited the Hall. He had already bought much land around the property and had built Cranage Club (now the Village Hall) for the community and a row of cottages, opposite what was then the main entrance to the Hall, for staff dwellings.

At the time of their arrival, the household consisted of Mr William Carver, Mrs Kate Bentley Carver and four children aged four to fourteen. There were also eight live-in servants and other servants living in Cranage. By the outbreak of war they had been in the village

for fourteen years and had become significant figures.

Mr Carver was on many committees of village societies: the Cricket Club, the Horticultural Society, the Belgian Refugee Committee, the Gooseberry Society and, after he had bought the Assembly Rooms (south side of Church Walk), was the president of the Social Club. He was a manager of Cranage School and he and his wife took a keen interest in the children, arranging entertainments and presenting prizes.

At a meeting in the Assembly Rooms in December 1914 he was, amongst other dignitaries, on stage with his 22 year old daughter, Alison Carver. He made the closing speech in which he commented that 60 recruits had enrolled and 70 people had gone from the parish. During the war years he was seen to be generous on many occasions, giving £60 to the fund for materials for the Sewing Guild, contributing to the fund which Dr Picton needed for his mission to start a hospital abroad and promising to add one shilling (5p) to the War Savings of every child by way of encouragement.

Mr Carver was 59 years old when his son, Oswald, enlisted. It is possible that, as his son had been a manager at the cotton mill, William may have had to spend more time in Marple after 1914. The women of the family were free to devote their time to the community.

Mrs Kate Carver, within three days of the outbreak of war, had started Holmes Chapel and District Sewing Guild. This was established to make articles to send to hospitals locally and abroad and to the men serving away from home. The needlewomen met regularly at different venues throughout the war. Much fundraising was needed and accounts had to be kept and progress reported in the Parish Magazine. It would seem that Mrs Carver was responsible for much of this. She also ran many functions in Cranage Club some to raise funds for the war effort and some which must have been prompted by her sense of moral duty.

She held Bible classes for young people and lectures on the benefits of education. As a result of this, evening classes were established in the Cranage School. Mrs Carver also ran the local branch of the British Women's Temperance Association entertaining them to tea at the Club, often helped by her housekeeper, Mrs Dickinson. An offshoot of this was the Y club which was the youth branch of the society. She also became quartermaster for the Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital at Somerford. In 1908, Mrs Carver had built, at her personal expense, an orphanage in the grounds of the Hall. This was staffed by a hospital trained nurse and probably other domestic staff. At one time there were six children living there; they took the name of Bentley from Mrs K. Bentley Carver. The children were not of local origin.

Mrs Carver also regularly opened her gardens in aid of fundraising for the hospital for which the Holmes Chapel community was financially responsible. She must have been very busy before the wedding of her daughter in June 1915. This was not only a high society occasion but also a local event when the gardens were again put to good use. Two days later her second son, Oswald, was killed in action and it is understandable that her name does not appear in records of local events for a time after this.

Oswald was married to Elizabeth Hobart, who became Mrs E. Carver, also known as Betty and often identified by her husband's nickname as Mrs Waldo Carver. After the death of her husband, she came to live at Cranage, bringing her two sons with her. Within twelve months of becoming a widow she was supporting her mother in law in her social duties and by May was training members of Mrs Carver's BWTA group in performances for fund raising entertainments. Twelve months later she was similarly training the Y group for entertainments. By 1917 she was running the Girls' Club which had been established in 1912. This group had its own premises in Middlewich Road but later relocated to Saltersford in order to release their cottage for Belgian refugees. Here

they mostly seem to have been involved in “social knitting” for the soldiers. This group closed in 1918 probably in favour of the girl’s branch of the Y Group which, until August 1917, was being run by Betty. Mrs Waldo Carver also ran the Boy Scouts in the village. Her husband had been a strong supporter of the Scout Movement during his time in Marple. Like the rest of her family, Betty was also generous in giving to fund raising events such as those which were established in aid of the Christmas boxes for soldiers. After her father in law bought the Assembly Rooms Betty became the secretary for the Social Club which ran the rooms.

Betty eventually met Major Bernard Montgomery (who later played a major role in the Second World War) and they were married in 1927. A year later, Betty’s third son was born. She died of septicaemia, following an insect bite, ten years after her second marriage.

Miss Alison Carver, the only daughter of William and Kate, was on stage at a recruiting meeting in the village. She was clearly part of the community but within ten months of the start of war was married and would have gone to London with her husband. They were, however, still in the village two months after their wedding when her husband, the Rev. Dick Sheppard, Chaplain to his Majesty, was still recovering from illness and so was still available to preach at the Sunday School anniversary.

All the Carver sons went to war. Alan, the oldest, was injured in 1916 and was discharged unfit having survived the campaign in Gallipoli. He later married the governess of Alison’s children.

Oswald, by December 1914, was a captain in the East Lancashire Royal Engineers. He was injured in the back at Gallipoli and had died within three days of being shot having served less than nine months. He had been married for three years and left two sons aged two years and 12 months. At the age of twenty he had been an Olympic medal winner

for rowing and died aged 28. A report and photograph appeared in the paper.

Guy was a departmental manager at the family mill. He was 25 years old at the outbreak of war and joined the army immediately. He was ADC to General McLeod and survived the war, marrying in 1915.

The youngest son Basil was just eighteen when he obtained his commission at the outbreak of war. He was a Second Lieutenant in the Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and died on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1916, an event reported in the Parish Magazine:-

*“He was with a party of engineers, and seeing that they were overcome by the poisonous gas he attempted to rescue them, and lost his own life in the attempt ... We would, on behalf of the parish generally, express our sincere sympathy with Mr and Mrs Carver in this, the second terrible loss, they have sustained during this war.”*

He was nineteen years of age.

#### **4. The Reiss family of the Hermitage**

The family leased the Hermitage and its estate in 1909 from Mr Hubert Wilson who had originally leased it and then bought the house from the wartime vicar's father. Mr Henry Reiss was from a German Jewish family who had come to England to look after the family business; he described himself as a shipping merchant. His wife came from Peover and in the census of 1911 they were a household of ten children and 18 live-in servants, though three sons seem to have been away at school at the time of the census. Although the family left the village after the war, it was they who presented it with the hand painted Roll of Honour which now hangs in the church.

Like the Carvers they were quick to respond when war broke out. Mr

Reiss and his son were on stage with William Carver in December when speeches were made to encourage enlistment. Mrs Constance Reiss soon became the Commandant of the Voluntary Aid Detachment and would have worked closely with Mrs Carver. At this stage the VAD was to supply the military hospital which the village envisaged being set up at the Agricultural College. By March 1915 Somerford Hall was being used as a hospital so Mrs Reiss and her committee withdrew their offer to the College and from then on supplied Somerford.



**Four of the Reiss children at play: Peter, Vincent, Raymond and Nancy Reiss**

Mrs Reiss then became Commandant of the Somerford Hospital resigning in August 1916 when Mrs Shakerley of Somerford Hall took over. In October 1915 Mr Reiss presided at a public meeting at Macclesfield Road Schools to collect funds for the VAD.

Like other gentry families they were generous in their financial support for the war effort. Mr Reiss matched Mr Carver when he gave £60 to support the hospital; he gave money to the Belgian Refugee Committee and donated funds for Dr Picton's effort to start a hospital in France. Mrs Reiss was still giving money in 1918 when she donated to the Holmes Chapel Hospital Supply Association. They were active in the community in other ways.



**Oswald Carver**



**Willoughby Reiss**

Mr Reiss was a sidesman in church and was president of the Home

Guard Training Corps when it was first established after a meeting had been held at the Macclesfield Road Schools (now the Catholic Church). In 1917 he became President of the Allotment Association and offered to supply tools. This was set up as part of the war effort to provide food. Mrs Reiss and her daughter joined the St John's Ambulance classes run by Dr Picton and were successful in passing their exams which were held at Sadler's Close, the home of the doctor.



**Raymond Reiss**



**Vincent Reiss**

In August 1918 both Mrs Carver and Mrs Reiss attended a garden party

held at the Rectory at Byley in aid of the Red Cross. The two women were part of a closely knit social scene, as evidenced by the Reiss family giving wine stands as a gift at the celebrity wedding of Alison Carver.

Mrs Reiss had seven sons and at the outbreak of war four of them were aged between 24 and 16, the others being younger. The three oldest boys joined the forces immediately in 1914. Willoughby joined the Manchester Regiment, Public School Corps and, like Oswald Carver, was killed in the summer of 1915 at Gallipoli, aged twenty five. Again, like Oswald, he had been working in his father's business before the war.

Raymond was 19 years old when he joined the Public School Corps then the Leinsters. During his service career he conducted Winston Churchill on a tour of the front line trenches. He fought in Palestine and survived the war, eventually becoming a teacher. He died at the age of ninety.

Peter joined the army straight from school aged seventeen but was not sent abroad immediately. He went to the Somme in 1916 and survived the war despite becoming a pilot.

Vincent, who was only sixteen at the outbreak, joined the Artists' Rifles, a unit founded in London and favoured by public school boys, in August 1917, probably straight after leaving school. He too survived the war, going on to work at Bletchley Park where he ran the transport section.

## **5. The Blease Family**

Of the men who went to war from the village, both those who are named on the Roll of Honour and those who are not, half were born actually in the parish or within ten miles. Thirty five percent came from the parish of Church Hulme and fourteen percent from Byley, Sproston, Sandbach and similar. The Blease family are an example of this with six

cousins enlisting.

The grandparents of the Blease soldiers were living in Cranage at the time of the census of 1851. William was born at Old Withington near Chelford and was married at Prestbury as Old Withington was a parish of Prestbury. He was a miller and presumably moved to Cranage in order to work at the corn mill. Between 1850 and 1864 they had seven children, four boys and three girls. By 1901 William's son George was living in Macclesfield Road, Holmes Chapel with his wife Anne and three of their four children: a fifth, Ida, was born after the census. Their oldest son William was away from home aged 14 in 1901. For children to be living and working away from home at that age was by no means unusual. In 1911, not long before war broke out, George and his family were still living on Macclesfield Road. George at 55 years was a builder's labourer and his son Samuel at 22 years was a domestic gardener (as opposed to a market gardener). William the oldest son was already married by this time to Harriet Buckley from Holmes Chapel and was working as a coal miner in Oldham. They already had two children. George's youngest son, Frank, was away from home at 18 years and was working as a waggoner at Stockery Farm between Holmes Chapel and Congleton.

George's younger brother John married a widow from Holmes Chapel with three daughters. By 1901 the family were living in the village centre with five children of their own, three boys and two girls and one of the step daughters. In the census of 1911 they too were living on Macclesfield Road, in a house of five rooms. Father John was a roadman working for the Council, son John was a labourer at the corn mill and his brother Wilfred aged 15 was a clerk at the corn mill. So both of them were preserving a family tradition (following their grandfather and also their father, who had been a miller's apprentice at Audlem at the age of 12). It was this generation of cousins that went to war from the village.

George's oldest son, William, as previously stated, became a collier. It is possible that he joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Manchester Regiment but this is uncertain as there were no further reports, though his name does appear on the Roll of Honour. Samuel aged twenty six went to Middlewich in December 1915 to enlist in the Royal Artillery. It is known that he was in hospital in Yarmouth in December 1917 and moved from there to Norwich with an eye complaint so spent over a month in hospital at this stage of his military career. He received both the Victoria and British medals. He survived the rest of the war and was discharged in October 1919.

Their youngest brother Frank was posted to the Army Reserve in December 1915 aged 23. He was mobilised in July 1916 and joined the 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Regiment. One year later he was discharged from hospital in Birmingham to return to duties having suffered from trench foot. He had developed this while serving for three months in France during the spring of 1917. Following his recovery he spent the next two years in France. He was discharged in September 1919 having spent three years in service. After the war he worked at Massey's Mill and the wallpaper works and lived in Macclesfield Road. He was married in Sandbach in 1925 and died aged 73.

Cousins to these three men were John's boys John, Wilfred and Harry. John enlisted at the outbreak of war and by August 1915 was serving abroad. He became Battery Sergeant Major in the Royal Army Medical Corps. By June 1918 he had spent at least two months in hospital. He must not have recovered from his injuries as he was discharged from service by September. This was the category of man that was sent for agricultural training in order to cover the shortfall in farm labourers which occurred during the war. In John's case this would have been at too late a stage for him to undertake training.

Wilfred joined the Army Ordnance Corps in 1915 aged 19. (In 1918 this became the Royal AOC and was responsible for the supply and

maintenance of weapons and machinery.) This was as a result of a recruiting meeting held in the Square on 20<sup>th</sup> April. Only 6 men joined and the authorities were said to be disappointed with the result. Wilfred rose through the lower ranks becoming a Lance Corporal after one year, corporal the next year and Staff Sergeant by February 1919. He had served in Mesopotamia and Basra receiving the Meritorious Service Medal in August 1918. He returned to the UK for demobilisation in September 1919. Wilfred preserved the tradition of living in Macclesfield Road and died at The Limes there, aged 59, in 1956.

Their younger brother Harry joined the Royal Field Artillery at the outbreak of war aged sixteen. In May 1916 a newspaper report appeared in the Winsford and Middlewich Guardian saying that, *“Mr and Mrs J. Blease of Macclesfield Rd. have received information that their son Private H. Blease of the South Lancs. Regiment was seriously wounded on 10<sup>th</sup> May. Before enlistment he was employed by Holmes Chapel Wallpaper Co”*. He was still in hospital in France in July. The February 1917 edition of the Parish Magazine reported that, *“Holmes Chapel man, Harry Blease, has lain down his life fighting for King and Country. He joined the South Lancashire Regiment at the age of sixteen. He went to France a year ago and since last August not a word of him. His Company Sergeant wrote a month ago that he was killed in action on September 3<sup>rd</sup>”*. We can only imagine what it was like for his parents John and Harriet during those months. Their anguish was typical of that suffered by other villagers. Harry had no known grave and is remembered, along with 72,000 others, at the Thiepval Memorial in France.

## **6. The Bishop and Sankey families**

As has been shown with the Blease family, when a common family

name appears many times on the Roll of Honour, research will often show the families had a grandparent in common. There were, for example, twelve Streets on the list - some of them must have been cousins and brothers. Other common names occur: - six Bolshaws (butchers), five Williams (grocers), four Leas (farmers) and four Henshaws (plumbers and decorators).

The Bishops were a family of five brothers who went to war and their mother was congratulated on this in the Parish Magazine. They were not a local family but came from Cheetham in Manchester, first appearing in 1901 living in Park House, Cranage and then other houses in Cranage. By 1911 the brothers were scattered: Stanley was living with Frederick, his fourteen year old brother, in Fir Tree Cottage on Station Road; Clarence was in the Royal Navy and later seems to have gone to Canada. His brother Leonard also seems to have gone to Canada and was later described as coming over with the Canadian contingent. Herbert, despite his possible education at Sandbach Grammar School, was living with another family in Cranage as a market garden labourer. By the war years, the parents had also taken up residence in Fir Cottage.

Clarence Bishop, known as Tom, was discharged in November 1916 having being wounded. Frederick enlisted in 1915 when he would have been eighteen years old. He eventually became a gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery and survived his experiences. Herbert enlisted at the outbreak of war when he was twenty years old. Like his brothers he had periods of service abroad and periods in hospital. He too survived the war. Leonard was wounded in the jaw in December 1917 and, after his discharge from hospital, came to Holmes Chapel on leave. While he was there he presented prizes at a whist drive: his father was one of the winners. In 1918 he was wounded so badly that he was discharged and returned to Canada. Stanley enlisted in the Cheshire Regiment in November 1916 and was quickly promoted to Lance Corporal. He was

wounded repeatedly, first in the head and then in the foot. In February 1918 he was discharged from hospital following a bout of sickness but by April he had been killed in action aged twenty nine. He is buried at Martinsart on the Somme.

Ralph Sankey was the father of four men who went to war. He was more fortunate than Mr and Mrs Bishop in that all his sons returned.



**Harry and Isobel Sankey in front of the Post Office**



**The Post Office in relation to St Luke's Church.  
It is now the Estate Agent located next to the Fire Station**

He first came to Holmes Chapel in 1881 to marry Martha Phillips. They were both eighteen years old and began their married life in her father's house on Saltersford Road. His older brother Daniel also moved from where he was working in Crewe to live at Saltersford Road. Daniel did not have any sons of the right age for enlistment but his daughter Edith Alice was married to Charles Ackerley, who is remembered on the Roll of Honour.

In 1894 Ralph, who was at this time working as a clerk at the railway station and living in Rose Cottage on Manor Lane, became the village postmaster. As soon as his older daughter Bertha was old enough to run the Post Office he returned to the railway. Bertha was later joined by her younger sister Isobel and a cousin, Pattie. They ran the Post Office until it was sold in the 1950s.

The oldest son, James, is reported in the Parish Magazine to have enlisted at the outbreak of war and would have been thirty three years old. By this time he was working in the engineering industry in Crewe and seems to have continued in that trade during his service years. There were ten years between James and the next brother who was Wilfred. Wilfred was already in the Royal Engineers by 1911. He too continued in that trade during the war and by August 1915 was serving abroad.

By December 1914 the next brother, Percy, had joined the Cheshire Regiment aged about twenty one, having worked as a grocer's assistant before that. In July 1916 he wrote home to his parents at the Post Office that he had been promoted to sergeant, *"I don't know what for.....but it is supposed to be for good work in the great attack. We have been in heavy fighting which has been awful this last week"*. In a second letter three days later Sergeant Sankey says, *"Our lot were in the thick of heavy fighting but I came out alright only got a bullet scratch on my knee, but nothing to speak about"*.

HARRY SANKEY. 1917



Harry Sankey



Wilfred Norbury

A year later the newspaper of August 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 reported that Sergeant Sankey had received the Military Medal for bravery. *“He has been at the front for more than two years and has been through all important engagements”*. He wrote that he had received the parcels. *“I am keeping first class and hope all at home are keeping well. I am enclosing a card and a letter I had sent to me. The card was from my divisional general and the letter from my commander”*. The General referred to his *“gallant and soldierly conduct”*. By 1918 Percy had been granted a commission and had hopes of being transferred to the RAF.

The fourth and youngest Sankey boy, Harry, was born in 1898 and joined the RNVR in 1917 as a telegraphist. He was based on the tug boat "Coringa", which was employed in the Atlantic to rescue convoy ships which had been damaged by German U boats.

## **7. Lance Corporal Wilfred Norbury 1896 - 1916**

Wilfred was born on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1896 to Henry and Harriet Norbury of Smallwood. The family moved to Primrose Farm, Back Lane, Sproston from Smallwood in 1894, before Wilfred was born. He was the second child in a family of three boys and four girls. By the age of fifteen, he had left school and was working on his father's market garden. It is reported that he enlisted in the Cheshire Regiment at the outbreak of war at the age of eighteen. He was quick to gain promotion and was selected for the machine gun section.

On the morning of June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1916 he wrote a letter to his parents saying goodbye to his family and sailed for France later that day. The Middlewich and Winsford Guardian, in August 1916, records that he was officially posted missing on June 29<sup>th</sup>.

In mid May 1917 the same paper reported that his father, Henry, had received official notification that Wilfred was killed in action on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1916, i.e. some ten months before. His family and friends had continued to hope he was still alive throughout that period. A memorial service, conducted by the Vicar J. H. Armitstead, was held at St Luke's Holmes Chapel on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1917.

Before enlisting he was a regular attendee at the United Methodist Church and Sunday School.

He had only just passed his twentieth birthday at the time of his death.

Though his death is remembered at a memorial in Belgium, he has no known grave. His family still have the framed certificate presented by

the parish of Church Hulme in recognition of his sacrifice.

Wilfred's older brother also enlisted, probably in December 1915. He was wounded but lived to return to his wife and daughter in 1919.

Wilfred's last letter, on YMCA official paper for letters home, is reproduced below:-

*L. Cpl Norbury 27438*

*June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1916, 9.15 am*

*Dear Mother and Father*

*Just a line to let you know that I am going to do My Bit.*

*We left Birkenhead Station at 11 o'clock last night and landed here in Folkstone at 8 o'clock this morning. I have been expecting to hear from you since I wrote to you last Monday night. But I suppose I shall be in France before I can give you any address to write to. That is if I get the chance when I get there. I have heard that all communication is stopped.*

*It is a bit hard, I would have given anything to come and say Goodbye to Emily and All at Home. But perhaps if I had come I should have had a hard job to get back again. I am going out with a good heart so I hope you won't worry about me. Just Pray to God to keep me safe to return home in His Own Good Time. Remember the old saying, What God sends is always well, though why it's often hard to tell.*

*We are going out to the Thirteenth Battalion Cheshire Regiment somewhere in France. I believe we are sailing this afternoon, so I shall be in France tomorrow.*

*Well I shall have to say Good bye now. I know that you wish me the Best of Luck and God Speed.*

*Please remember me to all my friends and show this letter to Ted and Annie.(his brother and sister in law)*

*I am your affectionate son Wilfrid (his spelling)*

## **8. Misdemeanours**

The Petty Sessions were held in Middlewich and usually presided over by Rev J.H. Armitstead, vicar of Holmes Chapel. The police officers named in the newspapers are PC Robinson, PC Woodward and Sgt Bowyer. PC Woodward retired during the war, his son was invalided out of the Cheshire Regiment having been buried in earth as a result of a big explosion. Before enlistment he had worked at Holmes Chapel Railway Station.

The Police Station at the time was a detached house on the south side of Middlewich Road, just after what is now the accountant's offices. One of the police families lived on the premises as they did later when the Police Station was moved to Chester Road.

Newspaper reports covered local crimes:-

On Wednesday the Rev J.H. Armitstead and other magistrates had before them the case of Robert Glover, farmer from Davenport, summoned for not having proper control of his horse and cart. PC Robinson stated that on December 21<sup>st</sup> he saw a horse and cart standing outside the George and Dragon, Holmes Chapel, for 35 minutes and on going into the taproom he saw the defendant who stated that he had a bad cold and was getting something warm. Fined 5 shillings and costs.

Mark Wilde of the Three Greyhounds was summoned for using a cart without having his name thereon and gave a novel defence. Wilde said "If it is not on it must have blown off. I have had my shed blown down." He was ordered to pay costs.

Arthur Hales, from Bedford, was fined 10 shillings for having driven a

heavy motor car at a speed of 9½ mph at Cranage. A man from Chorlton cum Hardy was drunk in charge of a motor car at Cranage. Sgt Bowyer said in court that a car passed him at a terrific speed and in a zigzag manner. The police followed the car on their cycles and found that *“At the junction of Knutsford and Northwich Road the car was drawn up and about half a dozen men were stood round quarrelling”*. There was an argument in court as to whether the man was drunk or not. He was fined 10 shillings.

Dr Lionel Picton, Sadler’s Close, summoned under New Lighting Order for not effectively screening a light in his house. PC Woodward saw a “brilliant light shining in a southerly direction” as the curtains were not drawn properly. Sergeant Bowyer said he had cautioned the doctor twice before. Dr Picton explained there was a two inch gap in the curtains and the light came from a candle on his desk. He was fined 2s 6d and warned there would be a heavier fine next time.

Dr Lionel Picton was summoned a second time for contravening the light order. PC Robinson said “At 10.35 on May 18<sup>th</sup> a powerful lamp was burning close to the window and the blind was not drawn”. The doctor explained that it was a hot night, the window was open and it disturbed the curtain. The doctor pleaded guilty and said it was a pure accident. He was fined 5 shillings.

A case came before Middlewich Police Court involving a man from Harpurhey who had stolen a bicycle, the property of Leonard Robinson, on October 15<sup>th</sup>. The culprit was a Manchester youth tramping through Holmes Chapel on his way back to Manchester. He took the bike and cycled to Manchester. The following day he was discovered attempting to dispose of it and was arrested. Mr Robinson, from Brereton, had been visiting a house in Holmes Chapel and had left the bike at the gate. He collected it from a Manchester police station and the prisoner was handed over and escorted to Middlewich police station. He was jailed for twenty one days.

James Cooke, a farm bailiff of Newcastle Road, Holmes Chapel was caught riding a bike with no lights. Constable Robinson said he met the defendant on April 20<sup>th</sup> at 11pm in Congleton Rd. He had no rear lamp and the front light was out. Cooke was fined 2s 6d for each light.

## **9. Conclusion**

Here we have a picture of a community that was small enough for all the families to be known to each other. Holmes Chapel was typical of similar sized communities in that the vicar, the headmaster and the doctor took leading roles in many aspects of village life. The wealthy gentry and business people also led the organisation of all sorts of societies and then supported them financially. These people also concerned themselves with the moral and spiritual welfare of the villagers. A hundred years ago there was obviously a bigger gap than nowadays between the villagers and the gentry in terms of their wealth; the wealthy, however, clearly took a responsible role which was even more evident during the war years.

The whole community worked together charitably and socially in fund raising events such as concerts and garden fetes. There seems to have been a great acceptance and trust on the part of the ordinary people in the authoritative leadership of the gentry. They were unelected and unpaid for their service. As far as we can tell from the accounts available to us, the system worked. Somerford Hospital was supported, thousands of items made to send abroad, Christmas parcels funded and sent and the Home Guard were trained.

Thanks to the Parish Magazine, written largely by the vicar, the whole community knew of, and therefore could support the soldiering families. This applied equally to the well-to-do families as to the ordinary families. The vicar wrote in September 1916,

*“I should be very grateful if parents or friends of our men would kindly let me know, as soon as possible, when they receive information about*

*them being sent abroad, wounded, sick etc, so that I may at once include their names in the list read out in church each week."*

## **Winsford and Middlewich Guardian – November 15<sup>th</sup> 1918**

### **The Armistice**

*"As soon as the good news reached the village on Monday (11<sup>th</sup>) the local mills ceased work and the employees were given three days holiday. Work was also suspended at the station. An abundant display of flags and bunting was soon in evidence and the peals on the church bells were rung until nearly midnight".*

It would be the Autumn of 1919 before many of the men returned to the village. Sadly, Spanish flu had already taken its toll on Holmes Chapel.

## **10. Sources**

A Journey Through Time, Holmes Chapel History Research Group 1996

A Stroll Through the Past, Holmes Chapel History Research Group 2001

Holmes Chapel Parish Magazine 1914 -18

National Birth, Marriages and Death Index

Ministry of Defence War Records

Winsford and Middlewich Guardian 1914-19

Congleton Chronicle 1914-18

Census 1851-1911

The Cheshire Armitsteads by Kenrick Armitstead

The Reiss Family

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](http://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.

Research Group Members: Bill Barber, Cath Cameron, Rod Cameron, John Clowes, Peter Cotton, John Cowburn, Stella Freer, Gwen Hayhurst, Barbara Jackson, Lynda Kappes, Val White, Janet Yarwood.



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