

railways, John McGetrick was a nurse at the Workhouse and



*Westbury's Workhouse*

Hubert Backhouse, son of the tenants at Westbury Court, was a chartered accountant. Frederick Cook had probably finished his training as a teacher by the time he enlisted while young Robert Boughton had barely started his career in banking when he was conscripted. The occupations of the others are unknown.

From this one parish, they fought and died all over the world. Predictably enough, the majority died in France and Flanders, but there were also two who died in Gallipoli, two in Greece, two in Iraq, one in Egypt, and one in Germany as a prisoner of war. Four more died in England, before being posted abroad or on their return.

The oldest of Westbury's fallen were two of the professional soldiers - Sergeant William Owen, a veteran of the Boer War, who was 41 when he died of his wounds in 1918, and Major James Carnegy,

who was also 41 when he was killed on the Somme in 1916. The youngest to die was 18 year old Robert Boughton, killed in 1917, as British forces advanced towards the Hindenburg line. Frank Tombs who died in Salonika (Greece) in April 1917 and Percy Martin who died at Ypres in October that year were both 19 years old.



*Ypres in 1917*

While the war forced many of these men into situations of extreme hardship and unspeakable horror, their lives before the war had also often been hard and their living standards poor. First World War recruiters found that around 36% of volunteers were entirely unsuitable for military service on the grounds of poor health. From what I can see their young lives had often been shadowed by premature death even in peaceful Westbury. Many had already lost brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, and very few were strangers to bereavement and grief. But nothing could have prepared them for what was to come.

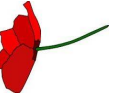
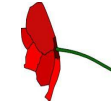
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# Westbury Remembers

Written by Di Landon

and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



During the first World War, forty young men from Westbury left their friends and families and their normal, working lives and signed up to fight. Some will have had high hopes of returning home in triumph, others may have enlisted for the chance of travel and adventure, or for regular pay and meals. Several joined because they were conscripted and had no choice. Whatever their reasons for enlisting, they died, along with 10 million others, in battle, from their wounds or from disease.

The list of names engraved on our war memorial tells us little about who these men were, what they suffered or where they fought and died. To mark the centenary of the war, the Parish Council wanted to find out and publish more about them, so that we, and future generations, can see these men as individuals and appreciate what their families, and the community, sacrificed in this first 'total war' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I am no expert in the history of the 'Great War' but I wanted to set each man's personal story in the context of the progress of the war itself, so the task grew rather larger than we originally intended. I became concerned that telling the tragic stories of the deaths of forty young men in one booklet would somehow devalue them as individuals and so this leaflet is just by way of an introduction which will be followed at intervals by the stories of just one or two of the forty men who died.

This has been a rewarding but difficult task and I am conscious that I may have got some things wrong. However, I am hoping that if I share what information I have, other facts may come to light, mistakes may be corrected, and gaps in our knowledge may be filled.

Much information about those who served was lost when more than half of the 1914-18 army service records were destroyed by a bomb which struck the War Office repository in 1940. Another difficulty arises from the huge number of casualties. For example, Arthur Morris is listed on our Memorial, but 59 men called Arthur Morris were killed in the war and so it is hard to be sure which is the one commemorated in Westbury. One or two names have stumped me completely as I can find no record of them at all and so, for the time being at least, they will sadly have to remain just names on the Memorial.



**The Village in 1914**

The population of Westbury in 1914 was around 1800 people, which is probably about the same as it is now. However, there was a higher percentage of children under 15 and a lower percentage of over 65s. The two

schools were well attended with 90 children at Westbury School and a further 92 at Walmore Hill.

Nearly half of the working population was employed in agriculture, growing crops such as wheat, roots and beans alongside orchards of apples, pears and plums. The village had a shop, two post offices, one at Westbury and one at Northwood Green, a railway station at Grange Court, a police station and a workhouse which had been enlarged to accommodate 300 inmates.

For most people, wages were low, families were large, the diet was poor and housing was basic and overcrowded. There was a clear social hierarchy, with the nobility, gentry and clergy at the top, but Westbury was fortunate in having



*Maynard Colchester-Wemyss*

Maynard Colchester-Wemyss, one of the most philanthropic and benevolent of country gentlemen, as its squire.

We, too, are fortunate in that his regular correspondence with King Vajiravudh of Siam, who had been his house guest as a young man in 1902, has survived in Gloucester's Record Office and gives us many glimpses of parish life that we would not otherwise have.

In many ways, life in Westbury just before the Great War was continuing as it had done for a century or more, but the parishioners would also have been aware that England was experiencing an unprecedented combination of political strife and labour unrest. There was a constitutional crisis over the powers of the House of Lords, suffragettes were resorting to militant tactics to win the vote for women, the question of Home Rule had almost led to civil war in Northern Ireland and there had been a series of massive strikes in which workers had often defied the discipline of their leaders. There was also tension between the Church of England and dissenters which had a corrosive social effect on some parish communities.

### **The First Days of the War**

Just after war was declared, Maynard Colchester-Wemyss observed the "almost absolute unanimity with which it has been accepted as inevitable". He was clearly relieved that the word had "gone out both from employers and labour leaders that trade disputes must for the time be laid aside. The militant suffragettes have for the time being buried the hatchet and are offering themselves as nurses and as workers in other capacities for the common weal."

By September, Lord Kitchener was calling for 100,000 recruits and there was "a wave of popular enthusiasm



*... which with the young men manifests itself in a desire to enlist. In Gloucester, we have enrolled*

*1000 men since Saturday."* However, he also remarked on the absence of jingoism and bombastic talking about the War.

As Chairman of the County Council, he was soon overwhelmed with arrangements for housing the hundreds of Belgian refugees that were arriving in the county, and was also horrified at the loss of 1200 lives when three Royal Navy cruisers were attacked by a German submarine on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. On 9<sup>th</sup> October 1914, he writes that "*It is a terrible, terrible war this; the loss of life is simply appalling.*"

### **The Men**

By 1916, there were 143 men from Westbury in combat. Of the 40 who died, I have only been able to trace 38 with any certainty. Of those, only four had been professional soldiers, and only one was an officer. Sixteen were employed on the land, as labourers, stockmen, grooms and lime burners, and four were tradesmen – a painter, a bricklayer, a shop assistant and a postman. Frank Ingram and George Mills were employed on the