

and that over three hundred soldiers were shot for desertion. The suffering of their families was only ended as recently as 2006, when they were all finally pardoned.

In money terms, the war had cost Britain over £3 billion (nearly £176 billion in today's money) and the effects would be felt for many years to come. Foreign trade had been badly damaged as countries that had been cut off from the supply of British goods during the war had built up their own industries. From being the world's largest overseas investor, Britain became one of its biggest debtors and inflation more than doubled between 1914 and 1920.

The war was also a factor in many other changes. The hugely important role that Commonwealth nations had played in the victory led to an increase in their national pride and a greater reluctance to remain subordinate to Britain. Also, when Britain's men went off to war, women took their place on farms and railways, and in factories, shops and offices across the country. Maynard Colchester-Wemyss had written that in spite of initial prejudice, the employment of women outside the home was "*gradually commending itself to the general public.*" Later in the war, he wrote "*I often hear heads of offices speak in the very highest terms of many of the women employed*" and by 1917, he felt

that it was "*wonderful how the feeling about the employment of women has shifted round. Lots of solid old business-men who began by regarding them as a necessary evil, to be put up with and endured somehow, now fully admit that they do their work well, that they don't talk and chatter anything like as much as men did, and they are more inclined to take an interest in their work.*"

The economic downturn and the return of men who needed to pick up the pieces of their pre-war lives meant that, despite their wartime contribution, most women were expected to return to their domestic roles. However, many had developed new skills and gained confidence and they were able to capitalise on these gains in terms of greater freedoms both at work and at home.

Undoubtedly, the war brought social change and advances in engineering and medicine, but at a very high price. For in nearly every village and town, families were mourning the loss of their loved ones, or struggling to come to terms with the terrible changes that the war had wrought on them.

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# Westbury Remembers

## Part 26 - The Armistice

Written by Di Landon

and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



As October 1918 drew to a close, Westbury's squire, Maynard Colchester-Wemyss, wrote rather cautiously that "*We seem to be on the eve of very important events. It looks as though we are a measurable distance from the end of the War.*"

Certainly, by then, Germany and her allies were exhausted. Their armies were defeated and their hungry citizens were beginning to rebel. By 4th November, all Germany's allies—Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire and Austro-Hungary—had agreed an armistice, and the German Supreme Army Command eventually decided that a cessation of hostilities must be sought. Kaiser Wilhelm's presence was considered an obstacle to any peace negotiations and he was forced to abdicate on 9th November 1918, after which a German Republic was declared and peace talks were arranged with the Allies.

A German delegation was driven through the devastated countryside of Northern France for ten hours to meet with the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, Ferdinand Foch. The talks took place on his private train, and the Germans were handed the list of Allied demands and given 72 hours to agree. There was little negotiation involved and at 5am on the morning of November 11th the armistice was signed.



Photograph taken in the Forest of Compiègne after the armistice was signed

The terms of the agreement called for the fighting to cease at precisely 11 am that morning along the entire Western Front. Even in those last few hours of the war, between the announcement of the armistice and its enforcement deadline,

the war continued and almost 3,000 men died in what seems the most tragic waste of lives in this whole sorry conflict. And so, eventually, at 11 am, after over four years of bloody conflict, the Great War was at last at an end.

That morning was a Monday morning like no other. In London the Cabinet were discussing how the momentous news that the war was over should be announced. There was to be a press release, church bells were to be rung throughout the country and maroons (a type of rocket which made a loud banging noise and a bright flash) were to be fired.

It is easy to imagine the feeling of relief for those still on the front and their families at home, but it is harder to know how those who had been damaged physically, mentally or emotionally by the war, or those who had lost loved ones, must have felt as the announcement was made.

Maynard Colchester-Wemyss was in Stroud when the news of the Armistice broke. He described how everyone immediately poured out onto the streets and as he was driven to Tetbury through the Nailsworth valley, which was lined with mills and factories that had made munitions or other war supplies, the works hooters were blaring out and all work had stopped for the

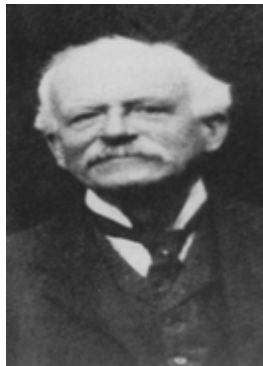


*Celebrations on the front line*

day. Everywhere men and women were pouring out of the mills, waving flags and “yelling for all they were worth.” Here in Westbury “we had the bells ringing

*all day, and a short service in the church in the evening, which was crowded. In fact all England went deliriously mad for the day.”*

David Price’s father, Will, was working in his office in the Ministry of Munitions of War in Whitehall. His granddaughter, Jan D’Ambrogio, has a letter which he wrote to his family on 11<sup>th</sup> November in which he described how he felt. *“What a day this has been! What a day to have lived . . . Naturally everybody’s nerves were strained almost to breaking point at the long delay in announcing the great news.”* He described how the moment the armistice was announced



*Maynard Colchester-Wemyss*

*“all the windows and balconies became filled – flags were unfurled and the Avenue and Square gradually filled with people. At first there was very little noise . . . a motor car passing with a few flags flying would start the girls in*

*the windows waving hankys and cheering but they were not spontaneous full-throated shouts. The crowd wanted a lead – and at 11 o’clock they got it. Suddenly one of the maroons was fired, followed by a dozen or more at intervals . . . and each bang was followed by tremendous cheers– thousands upon thousands raising their voices together, waving flags and hats, anything, and shaking hands and patting the backs of anybody within reach.”*

*“Shortly after 11 o’clock a sort of rag time drum and fife band crossed the square. How the crowd yelled! By this time the police had entirely lost control of traffic, and the people – soldiers and girls mostly – swarmed over any and every vehicle that came along. On one little Ford car, I counted 19 people. It was a sight never to be forgotten . . . Just by Downing Street – which by the way was clear and guarded by mounted police – was a little coster turnout comprising a small four wheeled wagon, a*

*little black pony and an unshaven driver which was commandeered by seven or eight young officers who were cheering and waving merrily as the pony trotted along.”*

As it got dark, the celebrations continued with more maroons being fired and searchlights playing,



*Armistice Day crowds in London*

*“with one beam fixed on Nelson for a few moments.” The weather turned wet which he felt may have been a good thing as some “horseplay” had already started and “goodness only knows*

*what would have happened in the darkened streets had not this rain driven so many people indoors.”*

As the excitement subsided over the next few weeks, the cost of the war could at last be counted. Nearly 900,000 British soldiers, sailors and airmen had been killed and over 1½ million more had been wounded. In total, around 21 million people had died in the four-year-long conflict. Many of those who survived had been permanently disabled or traumatised. Later generations have been horrified at the scale of the slaughter