

SERMON – REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2021

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our [St Edmund's Allestree]War Memorial was unveiled on 19 December 1920, and was designed and made by Beresfords at Belper, a company that still produces gravestones for our churchyards. During Covid our friend Anne Newman, who actually lives in Saffron Walden – our daughters were in choirs together – used the power of the internet to research all the men who are listed, from the First and Second World Wars. As you can see she has filled two large folders with information – using that information we can remind ourselves that the people listed are not just names, they are men – men who used the Red Cow, who were educated across the road in our school, and who came and worshipped here. We need to remember the human cost of War – and if anyone ever wants this information as the starting point of more research, please do get in touch.

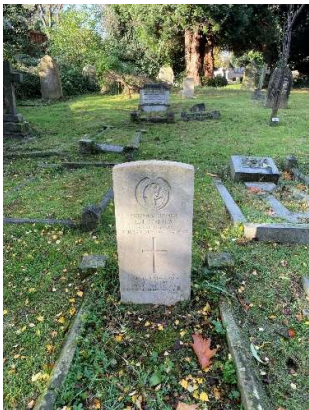
As well as that memorial, there are four Commonwealth War Graves in our churchyard – men who are buried here. The photos in the Order of Service show they graves, and you can go and find them if you like. Thank you to our Groundforce team who meet on the first Saturday of each month to care for the churchyard – they always appreciate extra hands if anyone would like to join them.



There's only one grave from the First World War, of a man called Frank Fisher. He had been baptised at St Edmund's in 1890, in 1911 he lived at Park Side, Allestree with siblings Lizzie, Edith, William, Florence, Mary Ellen and Alfred (big families in those days). He married Sarah Fisher and by 1920 they were living at 4 Alma Street, Derby. He died there on the 11th August 1920, aged 29 of cerebral embolism. I have no idea what caused his cerebral embolism, but he was counted as a war death, and his wife received a payment of £7. It's interesting that his name was not added to our War Memorial – and it is sad that he is not remembered by name every year, I think we need to change that.



We have three from the Second World War. George Muir Gee was a Pilot Sergeant in the RAF. He was the son of George and Lilian Gee of Derby, and husband of Catherine Gee of 73 West Bank Road, Allestree. Before the War he worked as an Insurance Agent. He died on 14 January 1942 in an aircraft accident in a Wellington bomber at the 22nd Operational Training Unit, Wellesbourne in Warwickshire. In the plane were another four men, two of whom were members of the Royal Canadian Air Force – a reminder that this was a World War.



Eric Francis Cotton was born in 1906, as a child he lived at 24 Cavendish Avenue, then he married Jane, of Well in Hampshire. He died on 17 January 1944, aged 37, at the Military Hospital at Stannington in Northumberland, just half a dozen miles from my last parish. He was buried in our churchyard on 21 January 1944 by the Vicar, Walter Greenhalgh. Interestingly his name is not on our War Memorial – which seems very odd since he is buried just a few yards from it. I need a trip to Hampshire to see if he is listed on theirs’.

Knowing how long it takes to organise a funeral these days, I was impressed by the fact Eric was buried only four days after his death – you wonder whether it was the army who transported his body south, or whether there was a Derby firm of undertakers who did that job. In pondering this, it is an opportunity to say “thank you” to Coop funeralcare who have produced this Order of Service

for us, it is lovely you are here remembering with us – and thank you, and your colleagues (as they say “other firms are available”!), for all your work, especially through this pandemic. And, while we’ve got our councillors here, can we also say a thank you to the Bereavement Service team of Derby City Council. During the worst of the pandemic, when there was a funeral every half hour in each of the two chapels at the Crematorium – in other words, a funeral every fifteen minutes – I saw how hard the team was working, coping with grief, coping with families, cleaning the chapel again and again and again. The staff were shattered, but always caring – and they deserve our thanks.



Back to the Second World War, Rayner Alfred Hargraves was the son of Samuel and Ethel Hargraves of Derby, husband of Nellie Hargraves, 25 Fairway Crescent, Allestree. They had two children, Rayner and Roy. He died on 18 September 1945, aged 29, his children were both under the age of five when he died. I don’t know if either of them are still with us. In 1933 it is recorded that Rayner was a postman – so I imagine him walking up and down the streets we all know so well, and if you’ve got a house that dates to the 1930s or earlier, perhaps he knew your front door. Interestingly, he served in the Postal Unit of the 6th Airborne Division, of the Royal Engineers – the army seems to have realised his skills and used them! We don’t tend to think much of the people who served in the War doing the basic jobs – like postman – but imagine how much their work was valued. Nor do I know how a postman came to be killed, and then buried in our churchyard – there’s a piece of research for someone to do.

As the generations who fought in the Second World War move on, we mustn’t lose these stories. We should be remembering the sacrifices of the two World Wars and work together, rather than putting up barrier after barrier between ourselves and our European neighbours. We have so much evil that needs fighting, and so much work we need to do together. We know that we are in a battle, a war, to slow climate change – a war that, if we lose, will lead to the deaths of many, many people. Actually, that’s me being too nice – men and

women are already dying because of climate change. Many of the refugees who end up in our city are men and women driven from their homes by climate change and the war and violence that it has led to – there has to be a better way to organise this world. We do need to fight against the evil, “the cosmic powers of this present darkness” as the Apostle Paul describes those forces – cosmic powers and earthly powers.

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus and he writes from house arrest. You can imagine a Roman soldier standing guard – and Paul uses him as a visual aid. Take up the whole armour of God, because we are fighting evil. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness – what you say, how you behave, how you handle your affairs – it matters. Put on the shoes that help you proclaim the gospel of peace, the good news of peace. Peace is shalom, fullness, wholeness, all that is good – work for it. Take a shield of faith, because the powers of evil will fight against you, try to injure you, harm you, depress you, destroy you. A helmet and a sword – God’s word and God’s power. Keep praying.

As I looked at the list of Vicars on the back wall here, I am imagine them sitting in their church day in day out saying their prayers – like we all do. And how do you pray, do you keep the faith, as news comes through of the death of the young men of your community. As you visit the widows and the children, as you stand beside graves articulating the grief of a community – and on the occasions when the burial (if there was a burial) took place in Flanders or France, and you have to help with grief when people cannot get together and grieve (and I know how hard that is).

“To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for the saints” – in other words, work and pray. Know that God is with us, and – in his strength - keep building a better world. We don’t just look back – we must look forward.

When you go home tell them of us and say “For your tomorrow we gave our today”. Amen.

Peter Barham 13 November 2021