

Whilton Local History Society

"The Whilton Men Who Went to War 1914-1918"

The subject of the November meeting had to be changed at short notice and instead the talk was based on "THE WHILTON MEN WHO WENT TO WAR 1914 -1918". This again was a centenary talk, as it took place not only on 11th November, Remembrance Day, but also coincided with the centenary of the end of the Battle of the Somme. Whilton was a small parish with a population of just over 200 in 1911, but in 1913 the Bevan family with their large establishment of servants and retainers had left Whilton Lodge for London and Radnorshire. The new owners were to use the Lodge as a hunting lodge, without keeping a large permanent household there. This significantly reduced the number of men in the parish who were eligible to enlist. By February 1915 ten Whilton men were recorded as having enlisted, and others were added as the war progressed. We followed the progress of some of these. Among them was Tom Higgerson, whose parents lived at Field View. His father worked as a plate layer on the railway, but they lived a quiet rural life in Whilton, with the occasional complaints that their chickens were causing a nuisance in the churchyard. Tom was about 24 when war broke out and joined up quickly. He was part of the British Expeditionary Force, sometimes referred to as the Old Contemptibles. He became a bombardier in the Royal Field Artillery and disembarked in France for the first time on 1st June 1915. He fought all through the war, and was awarded the Star, British and Victory medals at the end. He was back in Whilton after the war and attended a relative's wedding here in 1920, by which time his parents had moved across the road to the Old Cottage. Tom died in Reading in 1968, aged 78. One man who became a Whilton resident during the war was Oscar Woodhams. He enlisted in Northampton on 1st September 1914 when he was a wheelwright, living in Long Buckby with his parents. He served as a private in the Northamptonshire Regiment and went to France on 15th April 1915. He was wounded in his back in that year, in his hand in 1916, and in his thigh in 1917. By 1916 his parents had moved to Whilton and were running the Spotted Cow at the Locks, and this was the home to which Oscar returned on leave and after demobilisation. He too was awarded the Star, British and Victory medals. Oscar did not stay in Whilton, and by 1920 was living in Hanslope, Stony Stratford. The Local History Society is hoping to provide a Whilton trail, showing the places connected with the local men who went to War, as part of the September 2017 event commemorating Henry Reynolds' winning of the Victoria Cross.