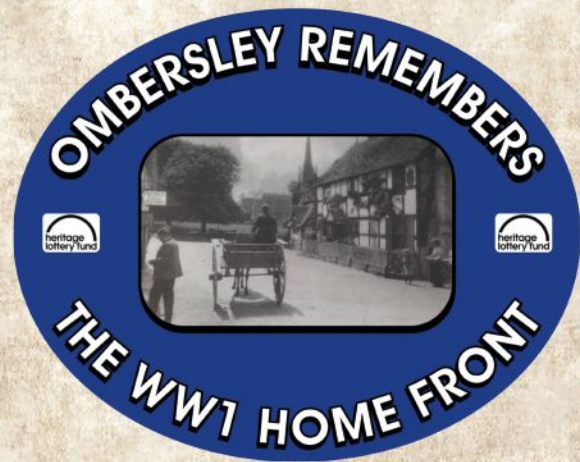


OMBERSLEY BLUE PLAQUE WALK

A heritage walk around the village.
Discover who lived in the houses during the First World War.



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Ombersley 1914-1918

During WW1, Ombersley was a busy place to live. The parish was well connected to surrounding towns by road and river.

Many landowners and residents moved to the parish from 'outside'. The tailor came from Northumberland, the grocer from Gloucestershire and the postmistress from Stoke on Trent. The new GP, Dr Johnston, trained in Dublin and originally came from the USA. One of the largest land owners was General Marindin of the Black Watch, who lived in Surrey. At Red Marley lived a retired silversmith from Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, and at Fern House we found the widow and daughters of a watercolourist from Sedburgh, Cumbria, who had regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy.

Agriculture and market gardening were the main activities. 31 people considered themselves farmers and 19 market gardeners. Five were fruit growers and another three farmers grew fruit. There were rural tradesmen including five blacksmiths, two millers, several bakers, grocers and butchers, carpenters, a cooper, a saddler, a threshing machine owner and dairymen. Major land owner, Lord Sandys, of Ombersley Court, employed a gamekeeper and gardener who lived in the village.

The parish had two schools at Ombersley and Sytchampton. Mr W Page, head of Ombersley School, was 62 in 1914 and had intended to retire. He was persuaded to stay on until 1917 to free able bodied male teachers to serve at the Front. The school children worked by making goods for fundraising for the troops and absenteeism increased due to helping with harvesting or illness.

Tribunal reports show that some local men were exempted from military service because of their vital roles on farms or in local trades. Women in the village worked on the land or as servants in the larger houses; some undertook voluntary work, possibly at the VAD hospital at Hartlebury.

Even in wartime, Ombersley was a quaint destination for sightseers. The Birmingham Post includes regular suggestions for motoring or cycle tours or advertisements for pleasure steamers at Holt Fleet. Visitors and locals alike would have received refreshment at one of the four pubs and seven beer retailers in the parish, although the wartime introduction of licensing hours must have come as a shock to many.

Ombersley Memorial Hall was built in memory of those who served in the Great War. A Roll of Honour is displayed at the hall listing those who served King and Country.

Ombersley Remembers the WW1 Home Front

Our project has focussed on the Home Front and what it was like in Ombersley during the war years.

Ombersley Memorial Hall was awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant of £10,000 to mark the Centenary of the First World War 1914-1918. Project Coordinators Marie Jones and Lesley Welch.

1 SINTON FORGE
With its distinctive horseshoe-shaped doorway, home to Samuel Sanders, his wife, daughter and three sons. Samuel was the third generation of his family to work here.

2 CROWN & SANDYS
The Crown & Sandys Hotel was originally built by Lord Sandys as somewhere for his guests to stay when visiting. During the war the hotel was managed by John William Stanton, aged 63, and his wife Elizabeth Rose, aged 27. The couple had married in 1908 and had a daughter in 1910. The hotel had 17 rooms and employed 2 resident servants in 1911. Arthur Turner's mother worked for a while in service at the hotel.

3 KINGS ARMS
The landlord of the King's Arms in 1914 was James Millard who ran the pub with his wife, Mary. Their son, Harold enlisted in the Army Service Corps aged 19 in 1914 and served in France, Salonica and Egypt before returning in 1919. After the war he suffered from epilepsy, but struggled to receive an army pension for it. He died at Highbury Hospital for Disabled Servicemen, Birmingham, in 1925. His wife Effie probably did not qualify for a war widow's pension. At some time between 1917 and 1921 the King's Arms was taken on by Edward John Franklin.



4 VENTURE IN
Originally a C16th house, it has been a shop, a tailor's (who used to sit crossed legged in the bow window, sewing) and is now mentioned in the Michelin Guide. It is believed to have its own resident ghost!

5 HILL TOP HOUSE
Opened in 1828 as the Parish Workhouse. It was considered but rejected as a replacement for the school. During the beginning of the war a retired Captain Maling and his wife lived here.

6 THE STORKS
Storks was part of the Sandys estate and in 1913, it was rented to Thomas Alfred Browning, a farmer who had previously been the landlord of The Wharf Hotel at Holt. Browning was succeeded at The Wharf by James Arnold, whose grandson William now works Bennetts Farm. Browning was originally from Stepney, and his wife Alice from Herefordshire. They remained at Storks until at least 1924, and donated £5 5s to the Memorial Hall Fund (equivalent to £155). Frederick George Lough rented about an acre of land behind Storks in 1914 and ran it as a market garden. Originally from Hackney, Frederick had moved into Ivy Cottage, Holt Fleet Road by April 1911 and married Kate Nicholas of Pershore in July 1911. The couple had a daughter, Joan, in 1912. Frederick appears to have served in the Army Service Corps during World War One.



7 LEIGH HOUSE
James Whiley Taylor lived here and was the District Relieving Officer. He had to assess all applications for poor relief and make recommendations to the Board of Guardians. He was also district Registrar of Births and Deaths and the local School Attendance Officer.

8 RED MARLEY
This house was built in 1823. It was rented out during WW1 to a retired silversmith from Birmingham, Mr William Henry Lucas and his wife Harriet.

9 THE VICARAGE
The Vicarage was the home of the parish vicar, Rev John Webster, his wife Edith, daughter Kathleen and two female servants. Rev Webster came to Ombersley in 1898. With his wife, he would have assisted with fund-raising activities, hosted community events and provided secular and spiritual support during the war. On 29 May 1917, he would have read out the King's Proclamation emphasising the importance of food to the nation's war effort.



The Webster's son, Aubrey, a school master, enlisted in the Northamptonshire Regiment and was killed in France on 25 April 1916. There is a memorial plaque to him in the church chancel.

10 OMBERSLEY ENDOWED SCHOOL
During the Great War Ombersley School had around 190 pupils, taught by the Head, four teachers and two mistresses. William George Page was Head until his retirement in February 1918; Thomas Styles took over until he was conscripted in July 1918 and succeeded by temporary Head, Elsie Muriel Gray. There were concerns over educational standards and discipline, medical inspections and childhood illnesses including measles, chickenpox, scarlet fever, whooping cough, jaundice, influenza and 'breakings out' (sores). All endured several very cold winters, made worse by wartime shortages of coal for the open fires.



The Declaration of War was not recorded in the School Log; the first reference to the War is twelve shirts sewn by the girls for soldiers in August 1914. Attendance suffered significantly when a route march of up to 1600 soldiers and their band marched through Ombersley. Three impacts of War stand out: the intermittent absence of older boys released for agricultural work which had a disruptive effect on teaching; food shortages from 1917 leading to exhortations to avoid waste, poor quality bread and blackberry picking excursions in autumn 1918; and, of course, the ever-growing roll of old boys serving in the Forces and of those who were killed.

11 NORTHWOOD HOUSE
Northwood House was built in 1914 on the site of two thatched cottages by Ben Rea (of Cresswells). It was used as a post office and home for Orinthia Castledine and her brother, Arthur.