

Chapter 6 Aftermath

1919-1921

'Let us forget as much as we can about the war'

With the war over, the pace of demobilisation increased.

'During the past fortnight a considerable number of local soldiers have been demobilised and have resumed work in the collieries in the district. At West Mains Colliery nearly all the men have returned and this has considerably increased the output.'

'Mr John Potter, Clyde Street, West Calder, who had been in France since the opening days of the war, and who passed through nearly four and a half years of warfare, is amongst the recently demobilised. He is none the worse for his long and trying experience and is at work at West Mains. At Loganlea and Foulshiels Collieries a number of the former employees have returned to civilian life, and this should help ease the coal problem locally.'

Friends, relations and workmates gladly welcomed back those who had 'done their bit'.

'Workmen from West Mains Colliery held a social and dance at the Polytechnic Hall to welcome home those of their number who had fought in the war and were now returned to civil life.'

By April sufficient men had returned for the Discharged Soldiers and Sailors Federation to plan a procession through the streets of the village. The march, led by the West Calder Musical Union band and the West Calder and District Pipe Band started off small, but had attracted up to fifty ex-servicemen by its end.

Reading between the lines, there appears to have been little enthusiasm for such an event. Those who returned had more pressing needs to attend to. If they escaped the clutches of the influenza that was once again ravaging the district early in the year, they would find their search for employment a frustrating one.

'During the past fortnight a large number of demobilised soldiers have returned to the district. In some cases they are having difficulty in finding work. In some areas the mines are fuller than they were in pre-war days. Management is doing its best to find employment.'

The preparation for peace celebrations would have helped to lift some of this gloom.

In April a committee was established to organise the Peace celebrations. It recommended holding a Children's Day, with a procession through the village,

with the provision of food bags for the youngsters and a sports programme to keep them occupied, followed by a firework display.

Door to door collections took place for the event.

In June 'the welcome news that Germany had decided to sign the Peace Treaty was received on Monday evening about 9.30 pm and gave rise to a feeling of lively satisfaction. The ringing of the church bells announced the good news to the villagers and cheers were heartily given. The children improvised bands, and paraded the streets. In the northern districts bonfires could be seen on several points of vantage. On Tuesday business proceeded as usual and the celebrations of the event were delayed until the Treaty was signed.'

In July 'the long delayed signing of the Peace Treaty by the German delegates took place on Saturday afternoon at Versailles. When the news reached Edinburgh the castle guns boomed forth and announced the welcome news that peace had come at last. The sound of the guns was heard at West Calder, and was the first indication that the Treaty had been signed.'

'Flags were run up at a number of dwelling houses, and the church bells were rung. In the evening a large bonfire was lighted on the shale refuse bin in front of Mossend. An effigy of the Kaiser was placed at the top of the bonfire, and the children were beside themselves with joy when they saw the flame reach and rapidly demolish the figure'.

The planned Peace celebrations went ahead, with over 2000 children parading down Main Street.

In September many of those same children no doubt visited the library to view one of the 'spoils of war'.

'The German field gun, which was promised to the parish as a war trophy, arrived on Monday, and was placed in front of the public library. The gun and carriage were closely inspected by a number of people this week, and gave rise to considerable interest.'

It was the dead however who began to consume the attention of the village as the months wore on.

At the end of 1918, on the last Sunday of the old year, the Rev Swan gave the following address at a Memorial Service held in Limefield UP Church.

"The end of the war means a time of rejoicing, but the rejoicing is not what it would be if we were to think only of those who return sound in health and whole in limb. Though we are glad and thankful that the fighting is over, we cannot realise how much greater would be our rejoicings if it were only with these lads we were concerned. They have fought a good fight. They have endured hardships for us, and have gained the victory. Now through their brave endurance we are safe from the foe. After all their hardships they now

enjoy the blessings of peace...The joy at the news of the cessation of hostilities was mingled with sadness. So many have been broken in the war, and so many will never return... Death has snatched away the well deserved rewards of victory after a strenuous fight.”

The pages of the Advertiser carry what must have been agonising requests for information on the fate of a loved one.

‘Private James Irvine, No 25289, C Coy, 11th Platoon, KOSB, was reported missing on 3rd May, 1917 and has never been heard of since. Any information regarding him from returned prisoners of war will be gratefully received by his mother, Mrs Irvine, 66 Main Street, West Calder.’

The provision of a lasting memorial to the fallen caused some bitter disagreement and argument within the village.

In March of 1919 there was a proposal ‘that a cast bronze tablet be placed in the entrance to the parish church, recording the names of those who had given their lives. The cost would be £200.’ It was also agreed that a commemorative volume be prepared, giving the essential facts of each man. ‘It is felt that such a volume will be valued in years to come as a record of the response and service of the parish in the ever memorable years 1914-1918.’

Some villagers felt that this memorial and the fund raising for it would detract from the much larger parish memorial that was being proposed.

At the initial meetings of the committee that was established to raise a memorial, the form that this memorial should take was hotly debated. Should it be in the form of a granite memorial, carrying the names of the dead, or would the funds be better put to use erecting a Memorial Hall or Park?

In the event, the granite memorial, to be placed in the grounds of the library (and not in the centre of the cemetery as the parish council wanted) was agreed upon and by August sufficient funds had been raised, through subscriptions and street collections, for the work on the memorial to proceed.

‘It is agreed that the war memorial will be an obelisk, eighteen feet high, with the names of the theatres of war in which our men fought carved on the sides. There will be brass tablets carrying the names of the fallen and it will be placed in the grounds of the library.’

The memorial was completed by the end of 1921 and a service of Remembrance was organised for Sunday, December 11th, at 2.30pm.

‘Sunday, 11th December 1921, will be a historic day in the history of the parish. To many it opened afresh the grief that the hand of time seeks to temper, but mingled with the sorrow was the feeling of pride that the family name was inscribed in letters of bronze, and the memory of those dear and near to them was being honoured by their fellow citizens.’

'The loss had been great, but it had purchased freedom for generations yet unborn, and with bowed heads and tear-stained faces, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, took up their cross and carried it bravely.'

'The war memorial committee have had a big task from the inception of the movement to the completion of the scheme, but it was crowned with success on Sunday. Nature also favoured them. The dripping skies of Saturday had given place to a beautiful winter day, and the solemn scene was bathed in sunshine as the people gathered around the memorial for the unveiling ceremony.'

'Within the enclosure there were present at the ceremony Mr James Maxwell, who presided; General Sir Francis F Davies, KCB, KCMG, of the Scottish Command, who was to perform the unveiling ceremony; the Rev Thomas Crichton, MA, Harwood UF Church; Rev John Swan MA Limefield UF Church; Rev W L Jamie MA Addiewell Parish Church; Rev Dr Anderson West Calder Parish Church; Rev G B Goldie Addiewell and Stoneyburn UF Church; and the Rev Hugh Young Cobbinshaw UF Church.'

'The parents and widows of the fallen and relatives with wreaths were accommodated with seats around the memorial. The Public Band occupied the bandstand, and the West Calder and District Pipe band, and a military trumpeter, were behind the parents. The ex-Service men, under the command of Major John Mungle, and wearing their medals, and ribbons, were behind the Pipe band. The members of the Parish Council were on the right, and the combined church choirs on the left of the platform.'

'As the chairman, accompanied by General Sir Francis Davies and the clergymen took up their positions in the centre, the ex-Service men stood to attention. A great crowd gathered in the Main Street, Station Road, and Harburn Road and every point of vantage was occupied.'

'The solemn service opened with the company singing, the praise being led by the public band. The Rev Thomas Crichton then offered up a prayer.'

'He said God had been our refuge in the time of storm; our strength and confidence when our heart was overwhelmed and in perplexity. They turned to Him that day as they stood on holy ground. He had gathered them round the memorial stone which made luminous the meaning and the spirit of sacrifice, which spoke to them of the vindication of righteousness and the condemnation of sin, of the awakening of the conscience of the Nation and Empire in the dark and trying days of the war.'

'The Rev Mr Jamie read the 180 names of the men from the parish who gave their lives in the war.'

'The memorial which was draped with a large Union Jack was unveiled by General Sir Francis Davies drawing a cord and permitting the Union Jack to fall to the ground. A trumpeter then sounded the 'Last Post' and it was followed by the 'Flowers of the Forest' by the Pipe Band. Many a tear started

as the wail of the pipes were borne out on the quiet of the Sabbath afternoon. It brought vividly home to all, as it had done on many a former occasion in Scottish history, the toll which war takes of the flower of our young manhood.'

'In the course of a short address General Sir Francis Davies said: - I beg of you that when you go away from here today that you don't say to yourselves that we have put up this memorial to these men and have done our duty by them, and now let us think of other things. I do ask you to look on what you are doing here today as just the beginning of a long act of reverence and respect to the memory of those men. Let us forget as much as we can about the war, but never let the memory of these men die in this parish.'

The General finished by reminding those present that 'these memorials are put up more for the generations to come than for us ... show the memorial to your children for they may have to do the same one day!'

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