

# **A Picture of the Age: 1849-1999**

*Written by Graham Citrine to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Christ Church*

## **Chapter Three: 1899-1924**

1899 and Christ Church was 50 years old, her longest serving vicar, Rev. (later Canon) W.H.F. Robson, was fully in charge of the largest church in the area. Birkenhead was enjoying a period of great prosperity, with a booming ship-building industry. By now, the lovely pink sandstone with which the church was built was stained black with soot. Each year more than 8 tons of soot fell on the town from the innumerable coal-burning fires, leading to despair among housewives trying to keep clothes clean, and causing those brownish yellow fogs which persisted all day in the winter, but which are seldom seen now. Not for nothing was bronchitis known as the 'British disease'.

The period we are covering is one of the most dramatic in world history and I beg forgiveness if important topics are only mentioned briefly - no matter how fascinating they would take far too much space to describe them fully. In 1899, Britain and her Empire were at war with the Boers of South Africa. The causes need not concern us here, but in 1899 the Boers declared war on Britain, expecting to be helped by others, particularly Germany. This was not to be: the Royal Navy ensured that while Britain's armies could move swiftly in strength to Africa, nobody else dared intervene. It was thought that the war would be over quickly: indeed, when the last of the major Boer armies was defeated and Mafeking was relieved in May 1900, there was an outburst of celebrations unprecedented in our history.

But the war continued for another two years; the Boers formed small armed groups or 'commandos' which raided British supply lines then disappeared into the country, living off the farms in the area. Only by clearing the countryside of all people and destroying the farms was Sir Herbert Kitchener able to force their eventual surrender. The displaced people were put into hastily established 'concentration camps', where poor water supplies and sanitation led to the deaths of thousands of old people and children, blackening Britain's name throughout the world. It is to the credit of Britain that when the facts became known she tried to make amends in the peace treaty - the Boers were given full self-government within the Empire and Britain paid compensation for the damage to their farms caused by the war - the first time that victors had given the defeated all they desired, and paid them for their losses. The result was that the Boer leaders, Botha and Smuts, both became loyal servants of the Empire, giving staunch support to Britain in two world wars.

Another effect of the war was that the campaigns were carried out chiefly by the cavalry, so that cavalry officers won promotion - Generals French, Haig, Allenby and others were to be Britain's leaders in the Great War, which was entirely an artillery and infantry war. Another aspect of the war was that Germany felt humiliated by her inability to help and began the building of a High Seas Fleet as a direct challenge to the Royal Navy. Britain realised that not only did she have few friends in the world, but also that some were undoubted enemies. For the first time in her history she began to seek friends and allies in peacetime.

There was little danger from the German Kaiser so long as his Grandmother, Queen Victoria, reigned. For more than 60 years the 'Grandmother of Europe' had controlled her numerous relations, ensuring that no matter what their quarrels they would live in peace. The Kaiser genuinely adored his grandmother and respected her; for her part, she

understood him and knew how to control his mercurial character. By 1900, though, she was an old lady. In the Spring she visited Ireland and insisted on driving without escort through Dublin, cheered by loyal crowds. It is one of the tragedies of Ireland that had Home Rule been granted the very real love and loyalty of the Irish would surely have been preserved. By forcing them to fight for their freedom the stage was set for the tragedies with which we are all too familiar. To underline their loyalty, Victoria created a new Guards' Regiment, the 4th or Irish Guards, drawing a major part of their numbers from the South, and I know from personal experience that most of that Regiment was from the Catholic South rather than the Protestant North, and they are among the most loyal to the British Crown.

In the Summer of 1900, Victoria heard that her eldest daughter, the Dowager Empress of Germany, was dying of cancer, as was her son, Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, and she seemed to lose the will to live. She continued to do her duty, but her ministers could see her decline. On January 13th 1901 she made her last entry in her diary: 'Had a fair night but was a little wakeful. Rested, signed some papers, dictated some letters.' There were no more entries. Her children were summoned to Osborne and the Kaiser hurried over from Germany. The great Queen was dying. Telegrams came from every world leader, including her enemy, Boer leader Paul Kruger. On Sunday, 22nd January, at 6.30 in the evening, Victoria died in the arms of her grandson, the Emperor of Germany.

The longest reign in British history had ended: she had seen power pass from the great landowners to the votes of the people, her country was the richest and most powerful in the world, her Empire was the greatest in history and its like will never be seen again. The adjective 'Victorian' is used in every country to imply genteel, perhaps somewhat 'stuffy', gentility, but on which many look back with some nostalgia for being a more dignified and peaceful time. At the end, Victoria was revered by her people, her birthday, 24th May, being remembered as 'Empire Day' - a holiday to be celebrated and enjoyed by children up until 1939. (Do any of my older readers ever remember rain on Empire Day?)

The new King, Edward VII, ('Teddy' to his subjects), was popular with the people, but not with his Imperial nephew. Britain's attempts to reach an understanding with Germany to control the Navy Race which was developing, failed. Bismarck, had he lived, would have welcomed any agreement with Britain. He did not fear her army ('If it lands in Europe, I shall send a policeman to arrest it.'), but he did fear her navy, her Empire, and the fact that she had the same language, customs and democratic government as the USA, and therefore the two were potential allies. He also saw that to antagonise Britain must bring her closer to Germany's enemy, France. In 1904, his warnings ignored, his fears were realised when Britain signed an 'Entente Cordiale' - a 'Friendly Understanding' with her former enemy, France. It was not an alliance, but over the years, owing to the Kaiser's clumsy diplomacy, the friendship strengthened to become an unspoken alliance. In 1907, a similar agreement was made with Germany's other enemy, Russia, once Britain's greatest enemy. The Kaiser blamed his Uncle Edward for this, claiming that Britain was surrounding Germany with naval and military alliances, and this caused him to exert even greater efforts to out-build Britain's fleet.

The 'Navy Race' which developed cost both countries millions - it certainly brought prosperity to the workers in shipyards and steelworks, but it also meant less spent on social reform, which was the great aim of Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill in the Liberal Government of the day. In 1906, Britain launched a new battleship, the 'Dreadnought', faster, heavier and more heavily armed than any other warship in the world. On its own, it could out-shoot and out-run all of the German navy; Germany was forced to accept that every ship she had built over the past seven years was out-of-date. But so too was the mighty Royal Navy. Both countries were now starting again! It led, in 1909, to the great naval scare that Germany might out-build Britain and would dominate at sea as she

did on land. As Churchill later described it, "The Admiralty asked for six ships, the Government offered four, so they compromised on eight." By now, Britain was building twice as many ships each year as Germany, and by now, too, the 'Super-Dreadnought' was being built - ships with massive armament, which would still be in formidable use in the Korean War in the 1950s. Germany had effectively lost the Navy Race, but in competing, the two countries became bitter enemies.

This enmity was exacerbated by the Northcliffe press: Harmsworth (now Lord Northcliffe) owned the Daily Mail, The Sketch, the newly launched Daily Mirror, The Times, and The Observer. He was the Rupert Murdoch of his day, stirring up anti-German feeling among his readers. His warning was that there were thousands of trained German soldiers in Britain, with hidden arms, ready to act when the German army, guarded by its fleet, fell on British shores. This secret army, he declared, was employed as waiters, tailors, etc, in every town and city. "Refuse to be served by a German waiter!" he thundered, "and if he claims to be Swiss, demand to see his passport." The prospect of demanding to see a waiter's passport is ludicrous in the extreme, but the insidious message was put across - there would be a war and Germany would be the enemy. Patriotism, which is love for one's own country, was being replaced by Nationalism, which is hatred of other countries. National pride showed itself in other areas, particularly in the new Atlantic liners. The ship which crossed the Atlantic in the shortest time would hold the coveted 'Blue Riband'. Both Britain and Germany were in competition. Companies aimed to have two or three great ships doing weekly crossings, following a regular timetable. The Germans built the 'Kaiser Wilhelm II' to wrest the Blue Riband from Cunard, which had held it for many years. With its sister ship, 'Kronprinz Wilhelm', they had two floating palaces, unrivalled for luxury until Cunard replied with the 'Mauritania' and its sister the 'Lusitania'. 'Mauritania' won back the record and was to hold it until the 1920s, when the race began again. It is possible that the great White Star liners 'Titanic' and 'Olympic' might have won the race, but the tragedy of the 'Titanic' in 1912, when the suspicion is that she was trying to break the record, put an end to their challenge.

So often, in history books or social histories of these times, the Edwardian Age is shown as a time of peace, harmony and glorious summers. This is far from the truth, there was tension in the air and as always this was reflected by artists, poets and composers – these people seemed to connect with the underlying fears and worries of the age. Paintings showed scenes of chaos, Picasso and Braque were overturning the 'chocolate-box' image favoured by so many artists; listen to Holst's 'Planet' Suite and hear the sheer menace in 'Mars - Bringer of War'; in 1913, Diaghilev's Ballet Russe premiered a ballet by a young Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky, 'The Rite of Spring' – where the beauty and hope of Spring is sacrificed, in the guise of a beautiful virgin, to the old. This was not the classical ballet of 'Swan Lake' or 'Sleeping Beauty' with their wonderful melodies; here, there were discordant rhythms, full of violence and dissonance, this was not ballet, it was revolution. The audience erupted in howls of derision, patrons were ejected but the performance carried on – the death of one young maiden seemed to foretell the death of youth and beauty, and many did not want to face such a prospect. The painter, Ludwig Meidner in Germany painted a Berlin being destroyed by huge guns fired by German soldiers, the people seemingly helpless before their inevitable fate. For young people, too, there was a new music – from America came 'Ragtime' with its syncopated rhythms – very different from the traditional music of Europe.

This fever was most apparent in Germany, the country which was now the leading Industrial power in Europe – Germany led the world in steel production, in chemistry, in engineering, but all the great wealth was given to an almost feudal state where all power was concentrated in the hands of one man – the erratic and unstable Kaiser – the people who created the wealth had no say in how it was to be spent. In 1912, the largest and

most revolutionary Social and Democratic Party in Europe won the greatest number of seats in the Reichstag, the German parliament but it had no power to assert its authority; at the same time, the Kaiser's birthday was celebrated with a massive parade of the most powerful and reactionary military caste in the world. Such an unstable mixture was certain to produce an explosion, and when Germany, at the heart of Europe, is unstable, then all of Europe begins to feel uneasy.

In the years before 1914, there were many crises, each one of which could have led to war. In 1905, Germany challenged France over Morocco, but Britain supported France; in 1911, another quarrel over Morocco saw a strong warning to Germany from Britain and once again Germany was forced to retreat. In 1909, troubles in the Balkans saw Germany, Austria and Russia at odds. Bismarck had always seen this area as the chief cause of trouble - a weakened Turkey was losing control of her Balkan empire, and the Slavs of the area took advantage to take their freedom. The problem was that though they hated the Turks they hated each other more - the Catholic Croats were at odds with their Orthodox Serb neighbours and with Moslems from Bosnia; equally, Serbia, the most warlike of the countries, had ambitions to unite all the Slavs of the area under her rule and to reach the sea via Bosnia or through Albania, and form the state of Yugoslavia, the 'Southern Slavs'! This would mean that she would include the hated and despised Moslems in her country. Russia supported Serbia's ambitions, Austria wanted to keep Serbia under control, and as Turkey retreated Austria had ambitions to advance into her territories. Germany was the close ally of Austria, France was the close ally of Russia - each was bound to help its ally in the event of war. Because of the Navy Race, Britain was reluctantly being drawn in to the system. In 1909, in 1912, and again in 1913, Balkan problems led Europe to the brink. Each time, war was avoided as diplomats worked out a face-saving agreement, and it was confidently expected that this would always be the case. Nevertheless, when 1914 came there seemed greater harmony among the powers than at any time in the past five years.

What of life in Britain at this time? Cars were beginning to appear in greater numbers. By 1910, more than 100,000 licences were issued (cost £1 from any post office, no driving test needed). The Rolls-Royce 'Silver Ghost' had appeared in 1908, setting a new standard of engineering excellence, but the market was dominated by Henry Ford's Model T - a quarter of all cars built in Britain by his company. The only British challenge to his cheap car came from William Morris, whose 'bull-nosed' Morris Oxford was coming into production as war broke out. Most British cars were for the richer market - Armstrong-Siddely, Daimler, Vauxhall, Napier - famous names, many now long gone.

It is interesting to learn that in these years it was possible to buy an aeroplane (in DIY kit form) at a cheaper price than a car. When the Wright Brothers flew for the first time in 1903, enthusiasts world-wide experimented with their own aeroplane designs. The 'Daily Mail' encouraged this by offering cash prizes for pioneer flights. In 1909, the prize of £1,000 for the first crossing of the Channel was won by Louis Bleriot of France. The 'Daily Graphic' of the time noted with foreboding: 'A machine which can fly from Calais to Dover is not a toy but an instrument of warfare of which soldiers and statesmen must take account.' Britain's Navy was no longer the guaranteed defence against attack. The writer H.G. Wells wrote a novel which told of a 'plane dropping what he called an 'Atom Bomb', where the potential energy of the atom was released to destroy a city from the air and against which there was no defence. The book was not one of his best sellers! The early fliers were true pioneers: an account from 1914 tells of a young man sitting on the wing of a bi-plane with a rolled-up parachute on his lap. His theory was that it would open and he would drift down to earth in safety, but the only way to test it was to leap into space - which he duly did and proved his theory to be correct.

Other events during these pre-war years: in 1910 came the arrest, trial and execution of Dr. Crippen. It is remarkable inasmuch that had it occurred a few years earlier he would

probably have escaped. He was caught because of the new invention of wireless telegraphy. The Captain of the 'Montrose' on which Crippen and his lover, Ethel Le Neve, were travelling was able to receive messages and send them, confirming that the wanted pair were aboard his ship, hoping to reach USA under assumed names. Once there, they could have disappeared on the continent of America. Instead, they were arrested before they landed and were returned to Britain. Ethel Le Neve was found not guilty and lived the rest of her life quietly in London, dying in 1967. Radio was also a factor in the loss of the 'Titanic' when, for the first time, the new international distress call of SOS was used; but help came too late for most on board. In 1912, also, came the failure of Scott's expedition to be the first to reach the South Pole. Lauded as a hero, in fact he foolishly ignored advice to use dogs to pull his sledges, preferring horses which needed considerable amounts of food and were in no way suitable for Antarctic travel. It seemed that Britain was becoming the home of glorious failures.

The theatre flourished, though most people preferred the light comedies of Barrie and others to the more serious plays. Nevertheless, plays by Shaw, Galsworthy and Conrad drew the crowds - Shaw's 'Pygmalion' causing outrage and scandal by the use of the word 'bloody'. Thousands flocked to enjoy being scandalised by that one word! More popular still was the Music Hall and Birkenhead's Argyle Theatre was one of the most influential. Its owner, Tom Clarke, recognised the talent of a young Scottish singer and contracted him to appear each year during Grand National week for £5 a week. The singer was Harry Lauder and within two years he was commanding fees of more than £200 a week. Clarke kept him to his contract despite Lauder's attempts to escape. My father, a teenager at this time, told of a good night out for 6d (2.5p) - 2d for a cheap seat in the 'gods', 1d for four oranges (no ice creams in those days), 1d for five 'Woodbines', and on the way home 1d for chips and 1d for fish. The cinema was increasingly becoming the new entertainment - early films were simple one or two reels of madcap comedy - Chaplin and Stan Laurel had already taken their genius to the U.S.A., but films such as 'The Great Train Robbery' and 'Birth of a Nation' showed that more serious stories of high drama could be attempted. Birkenhead's first cinema was a converted music hall, 'The Claughton', later the 'Astor', at the corner of Exmouth Street and Claughton Road. For young people, particularly boys, in 1908 appeared an anti-hero who came to dominate the magazine he appeared in - Frank Richard's 'Magnet' and the stories of Greyfriars School. The heroes, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent and others paled before the lazy, greedy, stupid William George Bunter. Billy Bunter, with his 'Crikey', 'I say you fellows, I'm expecting a postal order', etc., passed into English literature.

In 1908, the Olympic Games were held at the White City in London, and in those truly amateur days Britain could more than hold her own - she won 56 Gold medals, plus a great many silver and bronze; the U.S.A. came second with a mere 22! The Games were noteworthy for the marathon, which was extended from 26 miles to 26 miles 385 yards, so that the finish would be at the Royal Box - the distance has remained unchanged. Britain no longer seemed to produce heavyweight champions of the world. Our last home-grown world heavy-weight champion was Bob Fitzsimmons, a Cornishman who also held the world Middle-weight and light-heavyweight titles - he had taken the championship from 'Gentleman Jim' Corbet at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The British champion in 1914 was a handsome but rather muscle-bound boxer, Bombardier Billy Wells, better known to many, perhaps, as the muscular athlete beating the gong for so many J. Arthur Rank films in the 1940's and 50's - his hobby was knitting! In 1905, there was a sensation when a footballer was transferred from Middlesborough to Sunderland for £1,000 - football was now the most popular spectator sport in the country, drawing crowds of thousands.

Perhaps the most outstanding phenomenon before the Great War was the beginning of the militant Suffragettes. Women were increasingly employed in industry, teaching, offices,

and even in medicine. They were still seen, though, as totally dependent on men; no woman was allowed to continue working once she was married - her task then was to manage the home and raise the children. But they were now increasingly becoming taxpayers and therefore demanded the vote. Peaceful petitions were simply ignored, so Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Sylvia and Christabel formed the Women's Social and Political Union - the WSPU, with its colours of purple, green and grey. In 1908 they began a period of militant action, demanding the right to be heard and respected. Many people were outraged at their behaviour, for these were mainly educated upper-middle class ladies, seen always as law-abiding and submissive. Pillar boxes were burnt, windows smashed in Downing Street (leading to the posting of a policeman permanently on guard outside No.10 - still in operation today), and protests in Parliament, causing the fixing of a grille over the Ladies' Gallery in the Lords. It culminated in the death of Emily Davidson, who threw herself under the King's horse at the 1913 Derby. Imprisoned, the suffragettes endured hunger-strikes, forcible feeding, and the cruelty of the 'Cat and Mouse Act', where they were freed from custody to rebuild their strength, then re-arrested to complete their sentence. All failed to break the women's spirit and their courage won the admiration of the people, helping to lead to the growing unpopularity of the Liberal Government before the war. The outbreak of war caused Mrs Pankhurst to call off the campaign, urging women to devote their energy to the country. In 1918, their reward came when women of 30 plus were given the vote: this was extended in 1928 to all women over the age of 21.

In 1906, the Liberals, under Henry Campbell-Bannerman, took office and began a period of reform which established the foundations of the welfare state. With the help of Asquith, Lloyd George, and Churchill, a series of Acts designed to help the less fortunate was passed: free or cheap school meals, medical examination, and free hospital and dental treatment for all school children (though we remember with horror the ministrations of the school dentist, preferring instead to 'go private'); peaceful strikes and picketing were made legal, a Workmen's Compensation Act for injury or ill-health caused by work; an eight hour working day in coal mines; the 1908 Children's Act to protect children from ill-treatment, drink, smoking, overwork, etc.; Labour Exchanges to provide guidance for finding work; the National Insurance Act to provide unemployment pay and health care for workers; a Minimum Wages Act; and perhaps most important of all, the Old Age Pensions Act offering 5/-d (25p) a week at the age of 70, later rising to 10/- a week at 65. In addition, of course, the Government had to find the money to pay for the increased Navy and to modernise the Army. This led to a dispute with the House of Lords and in the Elections which followed the Liberals lost heavily, becoming dependent on support from the growing Labour Party and the Irish Home Rule Party. The Liberals were never again to hold a majority in the House of Commons.

In the Summer of 1914, the Government was struggling with the Irish problem - Home Rule had been promised to the Catholic population, but this was unacceptable to the Protestant North. Their leader, Sir Edward Carson, proclaimed, "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right". Civil War seemed certain, when news came of the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne at Sarajevo in Bosnia. Austria demanded assurances from Serbia for future conduct, and events now moved swiftly. It has been said that the Great Powers in 1914 were like climbers roped together - if one fell, all the others would be pulled down. Within one week in July and the beginning of August, Austria declared war on Serbia, Russia mobilised her army, whereupon Germany declared war on Russia to defend her Austrian ally. Germany then declared war on France, Russia's ally, and attacked France via Belgium. Britain had no treaty to help France, but was pledged to defend Belgium. On August 4th 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. With their respective empires, this European war was now a World War. As war was declared, Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign

Secretary, who had worked ceaselessly to bring peace, said, "The lights are going out all over Europe; we will not see them lit again in our lifetime." Winston Churchill at the Admiralty ordered the Navy to begin its blockade of Germany's trade routes - as the Germans rose on 5th August they could see the faint smoke from the blockading ships - these would stay until the German defeat more than four years later.

There is no space here to describe the horrors of the Great War in detail, therefore only the basic facts can be given:

1914: All believed it would be a short war - no country could afford the losses and expense of a modern war; remembering the success of Prussia in 1870, therefore, all had plans to finish it quickly. Germany was unworried by General French's 'Contemptible British Army' (hence, the 'Old Contemptibles'), nor was she worried by the blockade; it would 'all be over by Christmas'. However, this time, all had their armies in the 'right place at the right time' and within weeks, the elaborate war plans had all collapsed. By November, the Russian 'steam roller' had ground to a halt, the French were defeated and back in their great frontier fortresses, the Germans had not destroyed the professional British Army or the French, and both sides had dug great defensive trenches stretching from the Channel to Switzerland, guarded by barbed wire and machine guns. This presented an obstacle never met with before and was outside the experience of any General from either side.

1915: Britain began recruiting a huge volunteer army - Kitchener's accusing finger demanded action from thousands of posters. The Germans used gas to try to break through the lines at Ypres, but failed. British attacks equally failed to break through despite the loss of thousands of lives. The execution of Nurse Edith Cavell and the torpedoing of the liner 'Lusitania' showed that the Germans might be clever but they were not very intelligent, for these acts turned the U.S.A. against Germany and American supplies now began to flow into Britain - the Germans began to realise that the blockade was leading them to starvation

Bitterness against Germany had risen to such a degree, often because of attacks in the Northcliffe Press and by an MP, Horatio Bottomley (later imprisoned for fraud in mismanaging a saving scheme involving millions), the Royal family was forced to abandon its German family name of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and adopt instead the more British name of Windsor, Prince Louis of Battenberg, the First Sea Lord, had to anglicize his name to Mountbatten..

1916: The year of the great battles: Verdun, when the Germans tried to destroy the French - more than one million casualties to gain a mere five miles; The Somme, when for the first time Britain fielded a continental-sized army and suffered continental-sized casualties - 20,000 dead on the first day - the same losses had been recorded at Waterloo, but that had been a single battle ending in complete victory: the Somme produced slim gains for more than half-a-million casualties; Jutland, when the German High Seas Fleet tried to break the blockade. After two days of confused fighting, Britain had lost 14 great ships to Germany's 11, but the German Fleet returned to port, the Royal Navy remained at sea, the blockade continued, and Germany starved.

1917: In an effort to defeat Britain, Germany began unrestricted submarine warfare - the sinking of all ships (including American) approaching Britain. Britain was brought to the brink of defeat, but was saved by introducing rationing of food, ensuring that all received a basic allowance, and by the convoy system whereby the Navy guarded ships travelling together; some were sunk, but most got through. Russia collapsed under the strains of war and the Tsar abdicated. It is an interesting sidelight on the character of the last Tsar, Nicholas II - on the day of his removal from the throne he recorded in his diary the single word 'Rien' - 'nothing', his removal from the throne was of no importance to him. The French army, slaughtered in yet another bloodbath, mutinied and refused temporarily to

fight. The British Army, under Haig, alone, was able to continue the battle . In July, the third Battle of Ypres began - usually known as 'Paschendaele'. Described as 'the most terrible battle ever fought by the British Army', Paschendaele was fought in a sea of mud over ground churned up by years of shelling. When it ended in November, there were 400,000 casualties - to gain a tiny village, Paschendaele, which had been the object of the first day of battle. My father who had served since 1914 had been slightly wounded on the Somme and was more seriously wounded at Paschendaele – in a bayonet charge his left arm was ripped open from wrist to armpit and he was shot in the leg: he used to tell me that he could not remember any pain until the attack was halted. His leg wound became so infected by the mud that it never healed satisfactorily, and it was possible to see the bullet hole there until the day he died. As a child I would sit on his knee and 'walk' my fingers up the long white scar up his arm. Two of my uncles were gassed in this battle, one of them becoming temporarily blind; I am sure that many of my readers will remember George Williams - a more kindly Christian gentleman it would be hard to imagine, yet he served throughout the war and was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry; again, one cannot imagine him demanding counselling for any trauma. One can only guess at the mental anguish these men had to suffer and still remain kindly civilised men. A Staff Officer viewing the battlefield burst into tears as he realised what the men had suffered. There has been much criticism of the Generals, particularly Haig, but no critic has ever suggested what should or could have been done instead. In 1917, though, the U.S.A. declared war because of the losses of her ships, and the introduction of the tank showed that the trench could be beaten.

In 1918, the German believed they had the chance to win the war -the Americans had not yet arrived and the Russians were out of the war. The Germans brought their army from the Eastern to the Western Front. In March and April they attacked and drove the Allies back, almost to Paris itself, but failed to break through. By May they were exhausted; in August, Haig struck, using tanks, and pushed the German army back; by November the Germans knew they could not face another winter of the blockade - the people were starving, Spanish 'flu had come to Europe and was to kill more in six months than had died in four years of war. The starving people of Germany were particularly vulnerable , the navy mutinied and revolution broke out in the cities. Finally, at 11 a.m. on 11th November, the Germans agreed to an Armistice - the Great War was over. The German Fleet, ordered to surrender, passed between two lines of British battleships and cruisers more than 40 miles in length, including one French and one U.S. ship: the Royal Navy was proclaiming itself the master of the seas! Possibly for the last time in history.

The War had ended, or should we say that the fighting had ended, the war and its memories would continue for ever, for many life would never be the same again - too many had died, old beliefs and certainties were gone forever. The young were disillusioned with their elders, they no longer saw them as the natural founts of wisdom and experience. The idealism of Rupert Brooke in 1914, who could write:

"Now God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,  
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping"

as he welcomed the coming of war, was replaced by Wilfred Owen (who was a regular member of our congregation here at our church) with

"What passing bells for these who die as cattle ?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns,  
Only the stuttering rifles rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons."

It had been the war which had turned Owen into a poet – at school, where I was fortunate to be a pupil in the 1940's, I was told by those masters who had taught him that he had

been a quiet unassuming boy showing no signs of the genius within him: the war had awakened that anger.

The War had broken down old barriers - young people were freer in their morals, ladies smoked openly in company, drinking became more widespread. It was reflected also in the dress - shorter skirts, short hair, tiny hats - all the opposite of what had been the fashion before the war. Music too had been transformed, the world was entering the 'Jazz Age', with strange harmonies and rhythms, scandalous to the older people, but welcomed by the young. Young girls who would once have been servants in a large house for a few pounds a year now sought work in the factories where they worked shorter hours to earn as much in a month as they had previously earned in a year. Greater freedom and independence plus increased income gave women a confidence they had never had before. Also, of course, the heavy loss of life among young men meant that there was a surplus of girls who would possibly never marry: these would seek to establish their own careers and care for themselves - no longer would women see themselves as dependent on men.

At the end of the war, because so many people had earned recognition for their services to the country, a new Order of Chivalry was created - the Order of the British Empire with its grades of awards - MBE, OBE, CBE. and KBE.

In the world, three great empires had been destroyed - Russia, Austria and Germany had lost their Emperors.

The Kaiser, as he went into exile in Holland, was heard to say, "Now for a nice cup of English tea!" He was probably relieved that the burden of government was lifted at last from his shoulders and he could relax to become a kindly country gentleman, happy in his garden. His country, in 1919, was forced to sign a hard treaty, effectively destroying its ability to fight - France was determined that never again would Germany be a threat to her; the German army was cut to 100,000 and she lost her air force and her navy. Germany was forced to repay reparations of more than £6 billion, causing bankruptcy and hyperinflation - the mark, which had been worth 20 to the £ in 1914, slumped to 16,000,000,000,000 in 1923, ruining the savings of the middle classes and those on fixed incomes, making them open to promises of restitution from the new National Socialist Party which had appeared under the leadership of an ex-corporal - Adolf Hitler. Some have criticized this treaty as being hard on the Germans but one should remember that in 1870, Germany had treated France even more harshly and had treated Russia in a similar fashion in 1917.

The Austrian Empire had divided into a number of landlocked states - Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia; the new country of Yugoslavia took in the Catholics of Croatia, the Moslems of Bosnia and Kosovo, joining them to the Orthodox Christians of Serbia, all hating each other, and looking for help to escape from their forced union. Where there had been a great empire, there was now a group of weak states with huge neighbours, Germany and Russia, on their borders.

The Russian empire was torn by communist revolution, leading to untold misery and famine among its people.

The 1919 Treaty was described as 'The war to end all wars has resulted in a peace to end all peace.' The great hope was that the League of Nations, proposed by the President of America, would act as a world council for peace. Unfortunately the U.S.A. refused to join, handing responsibility once again to Britain and France, both of whom were exhausted by war. Britain, after spending more than £5 million every day on the war for herself and her allies, was virtually bankrupt and heavily in debt to the U.S.A., which insisted on full repayment. By 1924, the farcical situation had arisen where the U.S.A. made loans to Germany to restore her to some sort of prosperity, Germany paid much of this money to

Britain and France in war reparations, and Britain paid it to the U.S.A. as war debt. Money was moving about, but no country was any richer as a result: if US loans halted, then the whole edifice would collapse.

But this was in the future: for the moment, Britain was trying to return to peace and it was not easy. The 1918 Election, won by Lloyd George with Conservative help, thus splitting the Liberal Party irrevocably (they would never hold office again), had promised 'homes fit for heroes to live in'. This was a dream, not a reality. The end of the war saw unemployment in the heavy industries of steel and ship-building as war demand ceased and return to peace was not yet settled. Also, the large number of women employed in factories meant that returning 'heroes' often found their old jobs were no longer available. For a few years there was wide-spread unemployment, until things began to settle down by 1923. All over the country, war memorials in towns and cities, schools and churches, were appearing. It was confidently believed that there would be no more war, therefore this war would be remembered as no other war had been. Our own memorial at Christ Church was dedicated in November 1920, the same year that the unknown soldier was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey.

The war had produced profound changes - the motor car, a rich man's toy in 1914, was now mass-produced; the 'Baby Austin', selling for less than £100, appeared at this time. Aeroplanes, which in 1914 had been flimsy constructions of wood and canvas, used only for observation, had by 1918 become a major weapon of war, carrying guns and bombs which were used not only against the frontline soldier but also against civilian targets many miles away - never again would war be just a battle between armies, now it would be 'total' war involving everybody, the helpless civilian being a softer target than the armies which could fight back. In 1919, a British plane flew the Atlantic to win the 'Daily Mail' £10,000 prize, and winning knighthoods for Alcock and Brown. In the same year, an air mail service between London and Paris began, and was swiftly extended world wide. Communication was now faster and this was seen also in the spread of radio - in 1922 the British Broadcasting Company (later Corporation) began transmitting from Savoy Hill and John Logie Baird began experimenting with television.

In 1924 Wembley Stadium became the centre for the Empire Exhibition and was used also for the Cup Tie in 1923. That Cup Final was noteworthy in that more than 200,000 people turned up. This was the first time that Wembley had been used. The previous year only 55,000 had turned up at Stamford Bridge, so the organisers, looking at Wembley's capacity of 127,000, decided it was not necessary to make it an all-ticket affair. The crowds poured in, climbing over walls, turnstiles, anything to enter. The crowds spilled onto the pitch and only the presence of mounted police riding around the actual touchline to keep the spectators off the playing area allowed the game to take place. It is agreed that many a time the ball was kept in play by a spectator's boot. Despite the huge crush there was no hooliganism, the crowd cheered the King and sang the National Anthem lustily and with due respect. The game between Bolton and West Ham was won by Bolton 2-0, but both sides agreed that they had not been able to play freely because of the solid wall of people standing on the touchline, so that corners and throw-ins were almost impossible.

By 1924 there began a period of relative prosperity, a short-lived Labour government under Ramsay Macdonald had given way to a Conservative administration under Baldwin - the great 'unflappable' Prime Minister who, it was thought, often dozed off during Cabinet meetings. American loans had stabilised Germany, and the countries of Europe had agreed not to go to war 'except in self-defence'. The League of Nations was the great hope for future settlement of problems: there did seem hope for the future - and every 11th November, 'Armistice Day', the country came to a standstill for two minutes to remember the price which might have to be paid if war came again. There was a truly optimistic dream that perhaps, at last, mankind had learned to live in peace. But in Italy, the Fascist

leader, Mussolini, had taken power, and in the Far East, Japan was beginning to seek out an empire to supply her needs of materials and a market for her goods. With America, the richest and most powerful country hiding herself in 'splendid isolation', the dream was to be short-lived. But we can leave 1924 in a spirit of optimism.