



The war to end war

On 4 August 1914 the German Army crossed into Belgium and Europe was at war. By the time of the Armistice at 11am on 11 November 1918 it had cost over 12 million lives, approximately 950,000 from the British Empire, 750,000 of those from Britain itself. The war changed the map of Europe and the world and saw the end of Imperial Germany, the collapse of both the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires and revolution in Russia. Although most people in Britain think of the war in terms of the trench warfare of the Western Front, it was truly a world war. Sea battles were fought off the Falkland Islands and in the Indian Ocean and land campaigns were waged in Palestine, Gallipoli and Africa as well as on the Eastern and Western Fronts, and of course, as recorded here, the effects were also felt at home.

Riot in North Finchley when WWI broke out

By John Dearing

On Friday 7 August 1914, three days after WWI was declared, North Finchley was the scene of "wild scenes", as the Barnet Press of 15 August put it. It started about 8:30 pm when Harry Flach, a Russian Jew, newsagent, tobacconist and confectioner of 12 Park Parade was said to have "taken the anti-British side of the question" whilst arguing "with all comers". In all probability, the "all comers" were accusing him of being German, but this was not how it was reported in those times.

Jingoistic

Over the next two hours a large crowd, estimated at 800, gathered around his shop. They worked themselves up into a frenzy and proceeded to bombard the shop with bricks from a building site opposite, breaking the window and smashing most of the contents, as well as breaking the windows of the adjacent shops.

The police who eventually arrived on a tram from Barnet at around 11.45pm were able to contain the crowd, but unable to identify the ringleaders. A couple of men were arrested

for continuing to pitch bricks into the remains of the shop. The shop was boarded up and a police guard posted. The next day, one of the arrested men, a soldier, was discharged and the other remanded.

The following evening, another large crowd gathered in North Finchley High Road. Some of the larger shops had closed temporarily during that week in order to cope with large panic orders placed by wealthy residents, a fact which many ordinary people understandably resented. A few bricks were thrown and a few arrests

made for "refusing to move on", but overall it did not come to much.

Attacks condemned

The following Wednesday at Highgate Petty Sessions, James William Butcher, a milk carrier, was charged with "unlawfully and maliciously committing damage" to the shop window, to the tune of £7. But his 'Not Guilty' plea, on the grounds that the window was already broken, was accepted by the Bench. They did, however, condemn attacks on the businesses of foreign nationals, not that that made such folk in the district feel any more secure.

In East Finchley at the outbreak of WWI

By John Dearing

Residents of East Finchley first knew that war was declared on the afternoon of Tuesday 4 August 1914 from the display board outside Bryson's newsagents, near Chapel Street on the High Road. Of course reports of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand and the escalating tensions in continental Europe had occupied the newspapers for several weeks, but news of the British Government's ultimatum to Germany to withdraw from Belgium by midnight still came as a shock.

Army on the move

Throughout that night the sounds of horse-drawn artillery rumbling and rattling down the High Road disturbed the sleeping populace. At dawn this was joined by the tramp of marching feet as regiments newly mobilised made their way to the railway station. British army agents visited all the stables in the district and commandeered all the horses fit for army use.

High Road wreckers

Quickly, all German nationals were interned "for the duration", including East Finchley residents Herr and Frau von

Meinas. Over the next few evenings a mob would assemble in the High Road around certain businesses with foreign-sounding names on their fascia boards. Despite the efforts of the police, bricks were thrown through plate-glass windows, followed by a lighted newspaper for good measure. Near Beresford Road was a gentlemen's hairdresser by the name of Scrautzma ("Scratchme's" to the local lads). Despite a poster in the window declaring himself to be a Polish Jew, his shop was wrecked and boarded up by the following day.

No more treats

Within a few weeks, gold sovereigns (and their smaller brothers, the half sovereigns) were replaced by paper promissory notes, familiarly known by the name of the signatory as "Bradburys" (and "half Bradburys").

Perhaps the event most pernicious to the ordinary citizen was the *Defence Of The Realm* act (DORA). Off-sales of spirits were prohibited, and this included the passing of the so-called 'No Treating Rule', which made it illegal to buy another person a drink!

Wartime in the West End

By Florence Chamberlain

I could never forget the day the war ended. It was my birthday – 11 November – and we were sent home early from school. People were cheering and waving flags, but when I turned into my street my mother was in tears. My father had been killed at Passchendaele the year before.

It was over two months before she got the news in a telegram, and one day she went up to the War Office, to see if his name was listed among the casualties there. On the way she was stopped by a soldier on leave. He had no money for his fare back to Scotland, and he was so filthy from the trenches she could see lice moving over him. She never forgot him.

Living in the West End – just off Tottenham Court Road – we had many German friends, and we were upset when Mr Graf, our local baker who made us delicious white bread, was interned in Alexandra Palace.

Waltz time

What upset my baby sister was the sound of the air-raids (though they were nothing

like the Second World War). She cried so loudly that we were asked to leave the shelter, but my mother didn't worry. She bought a gramophone, and played the Gold and Silver Waltz next time the bombers came over.

Almost everybody had lost someone

The other thing I remember was being taken to a patriotic variety show, where a lovely brown horse was brought on stage to kneel to the flag.

Life wasn't too bad for civilians in the First World War, but it was terrible for the men at the Front. As I grew up, I met many girls – and boys – like me, who had lost their fathers or other relatives. Almost everybody had lost someone.

Memories live on

By Daphne Chamberlain

"Think how fascinating it would be to listen to 20 people who served alongside Nelson at Trafalgar!" Peter Hart's digital recorder couldn't preserve those memories, but when it comes to 20th and 21st century conflicts, he says, "We are laying down an archive of what life was like, how people reacted to their wartime experiences, and the real nature of those experiences"

Twenty-three years ago, when Peter moved to East Finchley, he started working for the Sound Archive at the Imperial War Museum. He is the oral historian, with a brief to cover the country as required. Travelling expenses not being bottomless, he himself works a lot in London and the Home Counties, though the Department does get sponsorship for projects further afield. Peter is the only staff interviewer, with six freelancers paid on a piecework basis for each interview they record.

Interviews last a couple of hours or have even stretched to 30 hours (in two-hour sessions!). People's memories vary, with some who think they remember little, proving "pretty fantastic".

All conflicts covered

Peter started off interviewing World War I veterans, and World War II is still top of the priority list, because that too has become a race against time. But all the more recent conflicts, right up to the recent Iraq war, are also being covered.

"We do anything that

catches our eye or fills a gap", he says. A notable gap is the role played by men in heavy industry like shipbuilding, coalmining or heavy engineering, in the two World Wars. He tries to play an even hand in recording military and civilians, male and female, as they were all affected by conflict.

27,000 recorded

memories

There are over 27,000 recorded memories in the Archive, plus media and authors' recordings. The collection includes photos, while diaries, letters and written accounts are kept in the Department of Documents.

The Archive is mainly used by historians and the media, and, through the Education Department, by schools. However, anyone can access the IWM websites on the Internet – "lots of interesting and good stuff for free".

If you would like to swell the ranks of East Finchley interviewees, please contact Peter Hart, Sound Archive, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, SE1 6HZ.