

Oxfordshire



November 2015

Limited Edition

incorporating
Intuition

The men of Grandpont

An innovative project
commemorating the fallen
of the First World War

A walk in Utopia

On the trail of
William Morris

Battle for the bridge

Why the Port Meadow
Bailey bridge should
be saved

Mapping the parish

The story behind
an extraordinary
community project

The editor writes

November is traditionally the month of remembrance and we pick up the theme in this issue with a story about an innovative project commemorating the fallen of the First World War from one Oxford suburb.

Last year, inspired by the anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War, a small team of volunteer researchers decided to learn more about the 66 men who are named on the war memorial at St Matthew's Church in Marlborough Road, south Oxford.

Their research uncovered some surprises and captured the imaginations of people far beyond the local area.

Historian, researcher and writer Liz Woolley tells the story of the project which set out to tell the tales of those men who went off to war from Grandpont and did not return. The project really brings home the impact this must have had on this small community - an impact which was replicated across the country.

Continuing the First World War theme, Malcolm Graham examines the work of the Oxford Tribunals - set up to hear appeals for exemption from conscription which began in 1916. Men sought exception on the grounds of indispensable work, serious hardship, ill-health or infirmity, and conscientious objection.

The Oxford Times turns up in records of the tribunal's work. A gent called Claude Rippon, from *The Oxford Times*, secured exemption for three employees in April 1916, emphasising that 21 men had already enlisted, and that they 'were trying out a lady in the reporters' room.'

The Grandpont project brought the local community together, as did the Ashbury Parish Textile Map, unveiled earlier



Pte. E. J. LITTLE, Marlborough Road, 2nd Grenadier Guards - Wounded.

Ernest Little, one of the 66 Men of Grandpont (see page 91)

this year. Some 97 people in the village helped create the map, which comprises 136 individual illustrations that have been stitched, knitted, appliquéd, embroidered, painted, or adapted from photographs, by volunteer contributors. Anne Roberts talks to the people behind this wonderful creation and discovers why they got involved.

Elsewhere in this magazine we discover why Woodstock-based artist Rod Craig is celebrating trees in his latest exhibition and find out how the fortunes of an Oxford street were revived by a street market. We also meet the director of the Old Fire Station Arts Centre, Jeremy Spafford, and find out why the neglected Bailey bridge on Port Meadow should be preserved.

If you are looking forward to Christmas then our *Intuition* supplement has all the answers for your festive dilemmas. Denise Barkley offers suggestions for fashion and accessories for those seasonal parties, and there is a chance to win a fabulous Christopher Ward watch worth £399.

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Oxfordshire Limited Edition

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The Men of Grandpont 1914-18

Liz Woolley reflects on an innovative project commemorating the fallen of the First World War from just one Oxford suburb

Sixty-six men are named on the First World War memorial at St Matthew's Church in Marlborough Road in south Oxford, an ordinary Victorian church in an ordinary Victorian suburb.

Last autumn a small team decided to learn more about these men and the neighbourhood they left behind. The result is an innovative community history project which has uncovered some surprises and captured the imaginations of people far beyond the local area.

Our research has taken many forms

and we have become dogged in tracking down details of our 66 men's lives. We have discovered two more, Arthur Cross and Walter Tyrrell, who should be on the memorial but are not. We have found one, Reginald Robinson, who doesn't belong there, because he died of Spanish flu in America, having never fought in the War; and another, PC Ash, who went to fight, but survived and did not die until 1966.

Grandpont was a relatively new suburb in 1914 - the first houses had been built here just over 30 years earlier. However, development was rapid and the streets between Folly Bridge and Hinksey Park were largely complete by the eve of the First World War.

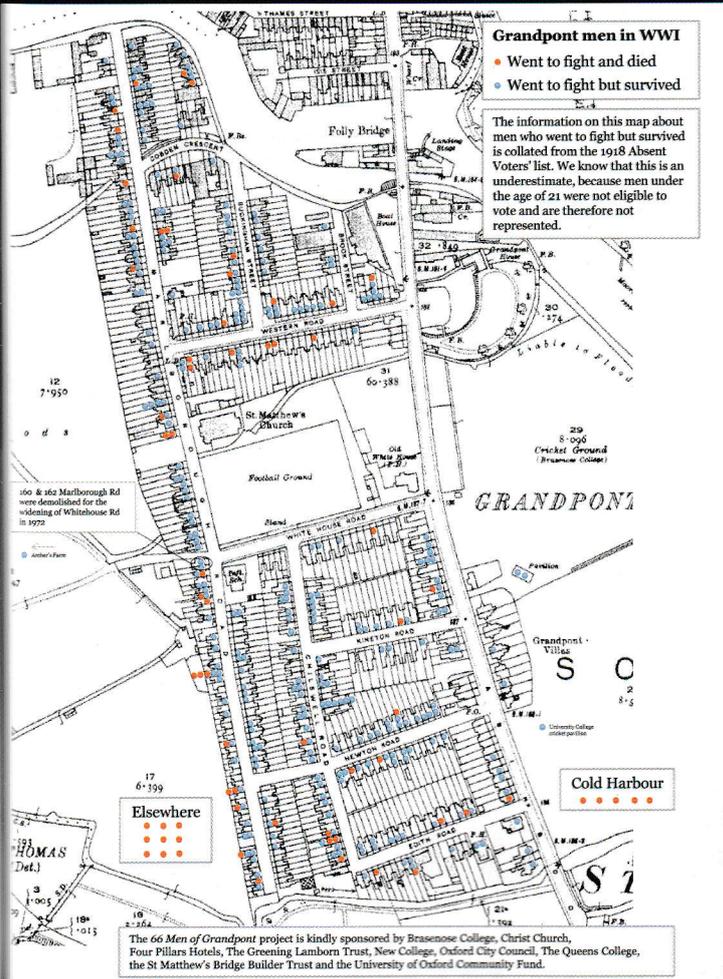
In 1914 there were some 650 houses and the population was around 2,500. About 370 were men of fighting age, 94 per cent of whom enlisted. Approximately 12 per cent of those (about the national average) were killed.

This map really brings home the effect this must have had on this one small community - an effect which was replicated across the country. The streets and houses were empty of young men. More than half of households in Grandpont had someone away fighting and we can perhaps imagine the impact on the women left behind, on children and on elderly parents.

Many Grandpont men enlisted soon after war was declared and some joined the local regiment, the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, or the Oxford and Bucks as it is known. Others were already in the Army when War broke out. Horace Scragg [Image 3] lived with his widowed mother and younger brother in Marlborough Road. He became a college servant at All Souls in 1904 when he was 15, on 15s a week. He enlisted in 1909 and according to his Army records he was five foot seven inches tall (about average height for men at the time) and in good health.

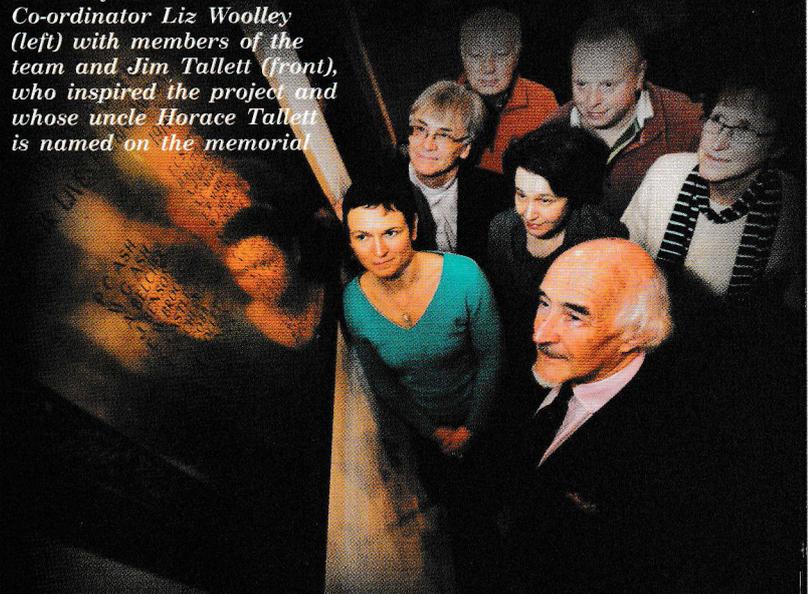
Horace joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and on the outbreak of War was initially posted to Gallipoli, where he served in mobile front line medical units.

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The St Matthew's war memorial and Project

Co-ordinator Liz Woolley (left) with members of the team and Jim Tallett (front), who inspired the project and whose uncle Horace Tallett is named on the memorial



Map of Grandpont showing houses from which men went to fight
Courtesy of the 66 Men of Grandpont team

Ernest Brooks (right) of 7 Whitehouse Road in a trench
By kind permission of Clive Organ

From page 91

He was killed in October 1917, aged 28, during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). He was posthumously awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field, one of two Grandpont men – the other was Ronald Stevens – to receive such a medal.

Life in the trenches was

a mixture of terror and boredom. Arthur Dolley, a clerk at the St Ebbe's gasworks who lived on the Abingdon Road, was in the 1/4 Battalion of the Oxford and Bucks regiment, one of the first British units to arrive at the Somme. In the harsh winter of 1916 conditions in the trenches were often appalling.

Arthur wrote to his 10-year-old sister Freda on November 30:

"Just outside the door of our dugout, it is up to our knees in soft sticky mud, and inside it is all wet and the sides are falling in. How would you like to be in a house like this? We cannot stand up so we have to sit down all the time, as it is too wet to lie down and my bottom is very sore through sitting on it for so long, and I've got to sit on it all night and all day tomorrow and the next night."

Four days later Arthur was killed in a trench collapse; he was 24. Freda kept this letter and her brother's photograph together for the rest of her life.

Ernest Brooks, a teacher at the Boys Central School in Gloucester Green before the war, sent a photograph of himself in the trenches back to his sister Dorothy in Whitehouse Road. He was killed in action in Flanders, in September 1917, leading his company to the attack. Though wounded in the shoulder, he rallied his troops, but was again wounded, this time fatally.

A senior officer later wrote that Ernest's men were devoted to him; another said that he had died a true soldier's death and that just beforehand he was "quite calm, cheerful and in no pain".

Like Ernest Brooks, many men were killed in action at the front, but others died of injuries, disease or illness, some after they had returned to Britain.

Albert Pitcher of Marlborough Road, an upholsterer and father of six sons, died in Oxford 10 months after the armistice. He was buried at Botley Cemetery, the burial place for soldiers treated at the Third Southern General Military Hospital which occupied the town hall, the Examination Schools and several Oxford colleges.

Another Grandpont man buried at Botley is Ernest Little and the circumstances of his death are in some ways the saddest of all. He was the eldest of five brothers who went to fight, three of whom – Ernest, Frederick and Hubert – died and are named on our war memorial.

On leaving school Ernest worked as an errand boy for Boots the chemist in Queen Street but by 1911 he had enlisted with the Grenadier Guards. He was wounded at the Battle of Loos in autumn 1915 and returned to England for hospital treatment. On March 11, 1916 he was travelling home and stopped at Didcot to change trains. While waiting for the 8.10 to Oxford he fell onto the tracks in the dark and was killed; his family had been expecting him back for the first time since war broke out.

WRIGHT.—In loving memory of my dear boys, Ernest John Wright, who died in Mesopotamia, November 22, 1918, and Arthur Wright, who lost his life in the sinking of H.M.S. Natal, December 30, 1915.—From their Mother, Father and Sisters, 49, Marlborough-road, Oxford.
Hard though it is, we try to say, "Father, Thy will be done."

The local papers were full of In Memoriam notices, throughout the War and for years afterwards. This one was placed in The Oxford Times on 21 November 1919 by the family of brothers Ernest and Arthur Wright, to mark the first anniversary of Ernest's death

Continued on page 95



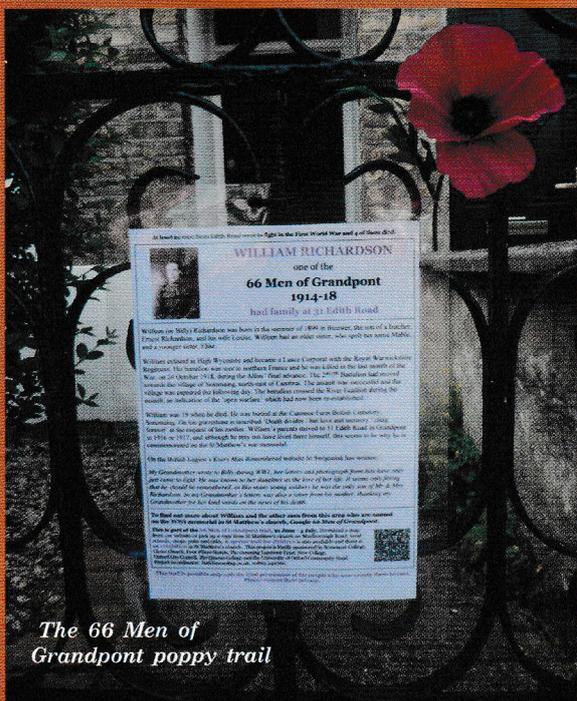
Pte. E. J. LITTLE, Marlborough-road, 2nd Grenadier Guards.—Wounded.

Ernest Little of 198 Marlborough Road

Image from the Oxford Journal Illustrated, 3 November 1915



Ernest Little's headstone amongst the 740 Commonwealth War Graves at Botley Cemetery
By kind permission of Emma Hill



The 66 Men of Grandpont poppy trail

From page 93

Many of our men are named on other local memorials – in other churches, in former schools and at their workplaces.

Ernest Jago and Albert Margetts worked at Oxford University Press before the War and so are among the 45 employees named on the OUP war memorial. John Benson worked for Alden's the butchers, who were based at Eastwyck Farm on the Abingdon Road, now the site of the Four Pillars Hotel. He was one of 18 employees who went to fight (three died), all of whom are named on the company's roll of honour.

These 66 Grandpont men were commemorated in several ways, and we are still remembering them now with the research that's been done for this project, often with the help of descendants who have contacted us.

We wanted to take this history out on to the streets so we set up a trail, with a poppy on the front gate of every Grandpont house from which a man went to fight and never returned, accompanied by a laminated sheet with a photograph and a short biography.

The reaction from locals and visitors has been overwhelmingly positive, and many found this unusual way of commemorating the First World War very moving and engaging. One resident commented: "So many names... and you have restored them into people again with lives and families and homes." A visitor to the area said: "...a great idea, nicely executed – congratulations on such a personal and dignified act of commemoration."

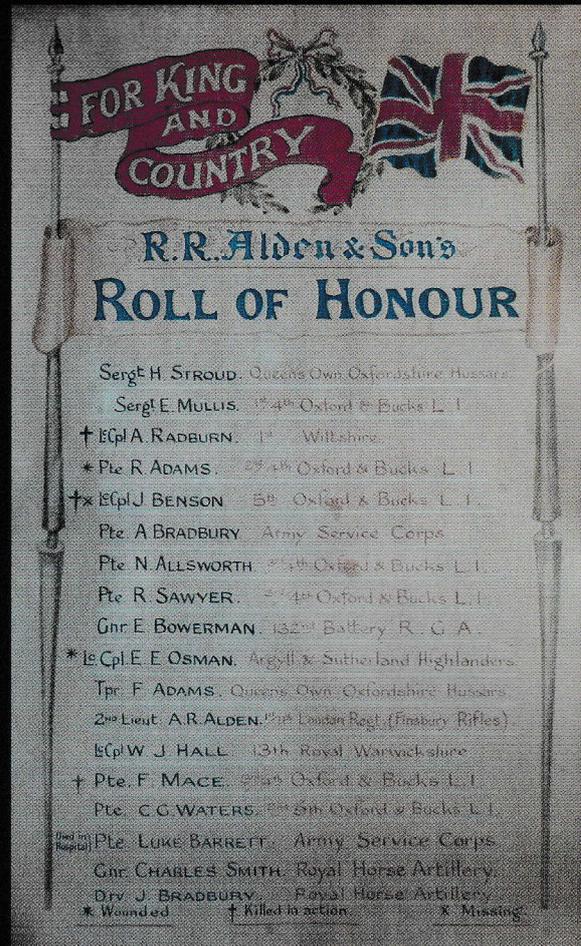
The trail sheets are currently on display outside Black's former shop on St Aldates and our touring exhibition is at Oxford's Westgate Library until 14 November. We're also making a documentary film which will be launched in spring 2016.

The stories of Grandpont's 66 men give a fascinating insight into the First World War and how it affected one small suburban community.

The project also provides a model for other groups carrying out similar work, and advice on researching your own war memorial can be downloaded from our constantly-evolving website, www.southoxford.org/local-history-in-south-oxford/66-men-of-grandpont-1914-18.

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• Liz Woolley is an Oxford local historian and an experienced speaker, guide, tutor, researcher and writer. She is keen to help individuals and groups enjoy finding out about the history of their local area. Contact her via www.lizwoolley.co.uk



The WWI Roll of Honour of RR Alden & Son, which is held at Aldens' head office on Osney Mead
By kind permission of Matthew Alden

Horace Scragg of 24 Marlborough Road
Image from the Oxford Journal Illustrated, 24 October 1917



Staff-Sergeant Horace Scragg, R.A.M.C., of 24, Western-road, Grandpont, has gained the Military Medal for distinguished service in the field, and has been congratulated by the General commanding his division. He served at Suvla Bay and in France. Before the war he was employed at All Souls' College and the Gridiron Club.

Arthur Dolley of 73 Abingdon Road
By kind permission of Annabel Panting