

# Swadlincote Memorial Walk Echoes of Heroes



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# Echoes of Heroes

## Swadlincote Memorial Walk

A walk around Swadlincote and Church Gresley to commemorate those who worked on the Home Front and those who fought and died in The Great War.

Starting at The Delph, Swadlincote's Market Place DE11 9DA the route is graded as easy and should take a couple of hours to complete. It is 2½ miles long with some ascents and descents always on town pavements. There are no stiles.

Comfortable walking shoes are best. Please keep your dog on a lead at all times.

Take advantage of Sharpe's Pottery Museum & Heritage Centre which opened in January 2003 before beginning the walk. The complex was founded in 1821 by Thomas Sharpe. His son, Edmund, patented the first flushing water closet rim in 1855. Household pots and utensils were manufactured and sold throughout the British Empire, Russia, Germany and Holland. The works eventually closed in 1967. After the Great War, the company recognised those employees who had served by making a clay roll of honour. Sadly this was either broken or misplaced but we have a photograph of it.



### The Delph

A number of photographs and newspaper articles refer to the Delph as a hub and meeting place during the War.

In March 1915 the Town Crier appealed for 500 recruits – the call of King and country.

As food became scarce as a result of attacks on convoys from USA and Canada, food economy was essential. The District Cookery Mistress conducted cookery demonstrations in the Town Hall. This was recorded in May 1917.

On another occasion a captured German 18 pounder whizz bang cannon was displayed on its carriage. The gun weighed between 2 to 3 tons. Sandbags were used to barricade it and it was hoped to raise £100,000 for the war effort. Notice its camouflaged wheels.



### THE GUN is coming to SWADLINCOTE on Monday

BE ready to give it a rousing welcome! Join the cheering crowds of your own neighbours and friends who will pour forth to see one of the splendid Guns—the Guns that are winning the war.

It is to THE GUNS that our advancing armies look, to blast the way to Victory. And it is to YOU that your country looks for that financial support which can alone maintain the overwhelming power of the British Batteries. Lend your money to the nation. Buy the biggest Bond you can, or put the biggest sum you can into War Savings Certificates.

#### Millions of pounds are needed to shatter the Hun defences

Help to provide our Batteries with Guns; our Guns with Shells. Invest your savings, your earnings, your profits, your dividends—the ash in your pockets, the balance at your bank. It will all count in the total for Gun Week—that huge total by which you and your fellow-citizens will make your patriotism and your determination felt on the battlefield itself.

Big cheques and little fifteen-and-fifteen—they all count. A £5,000 cheque will pay for four of our splendid Field Guns. A £5 Bond will provide two rounds of 18-pounder Shrapnel. A 15/6 War Savings Certificate will purchase 14lbs. of High Explosives.

**Buy NATIONAL WAR BONDS or War Savings Certificates and HELP to FEED the GUNS**  
Burton Chronicle

Soldiers used the top deck of one of the Midland Light Railway trams on returning from war to be hailed heroes.



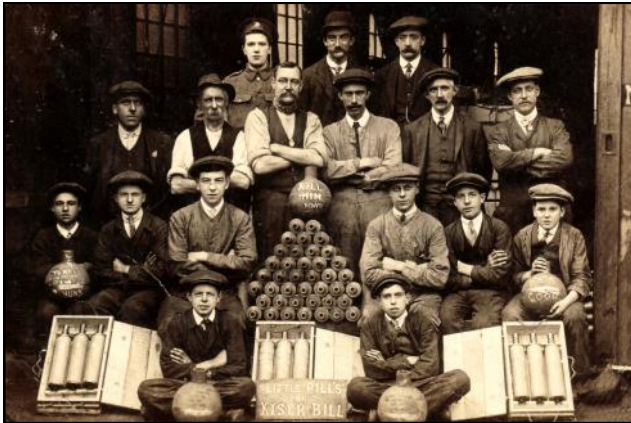
After the war a Peace Celebration tea was held in the Town Hall. Plenty of sandwiches, cake, meat, tea and beer was flowing free. £21 was spent on fireworks.

Make do and mend was not an idea of the Second World War as an advert in Burton Mail dated February 1918 shows – Repaired army boots 6sh 11d a pair.

Pass in front of the Town Hall and turn left into Midland Road.

Sabine's factory where shell cases were made was located behind the shops on the right.

Walk down to the junction with Civic Way and



use the pelican crossing in front of the fire station. Reach the road below the blue engineering brick wall by passing through a gap and stop at the corner of the Fire Station property. Look left along the jitty. You should be able to see the remains of the platform of Swadlincote Railway Station.

### The railway station

Imagine the day when the cannon arrived by train to be displayed on The Delph. What a challenge to haul the gun on its carriage up to the front of the Town Hall for all to see. The East Staffordshire band played and a military guard accompanied the parade one Monday morning in October 1918. Some lads would have left to go to war from the station but most of those called up would have marched down to Castle Gresley Station from the Drill Hall (dated 1913) in Castle Gresley. This is now Richfield's business premises.

Continue ahead and stop at the end of the brick wall when Midland Road is reached.

### Midland Road

Across the road stood Shoddy Pit. It had two shafts, now capped off and protected by metal railings. Moses Cartwright's colliery was known locally as Shoddy Pit because of the poor working practices and the nature of the coal seams that were badly faulted. It finally closed in the early 1900s.

Midland Road, beyond the pit, was home to a number of men who served in the Great War. On 24<sup>th</sup> June 1915 The Burton Chronicle announced



the death of Private James Holden who served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of Grenadier Guards. He had died of wounds. Alfred Holden, his brother, was serving with the local Territorials at the front. Their nephew P. W. Parker was serving in the Inniskillin Fusiliers. Mrs Holden must have found life hard to bear at the time. Her brother was serving with the 5<sup>th</sup> Sherwood Foresters and he was in hospital in France. The Holden's lived on the left hand side of Midland Road next door to the shop in the distance.

Private Percy Read also of Midland Road was 23 when he died. He had served his apprenticeship at the engineering firm Warren, Stacey & Co which was next to Shoddy Pit. (The buildings on the photograph behind the colliery chimney).

More information about other soldiers can be gathered from the Magic Attic's "Forty Fighting Men" exhibition.

Cross the road to the entrance of Eureka Park to view the Memorial Gates.

### The Great War Memorial Gates

The recently restored gates were designed by a Mr Brewhill and completed in 1926. They were not dedicated until 1933. Two sons of the Wragg family, sanitary pipe manufacturers, are listed on the plaque along with others from Swadlincote. A proposal for War Memorial gardens appeared in an article in Burton Observer in June 1923 but was not developed.

### Major Fred Wragg

In 1916 Fred Wragg went to France in command of the Swadlincote Company of the Sherwood Foresters regiment. He had recently been promoted to Major when the family heard the sad news of his death on 4<sup>th</sup> July. Along with Captain Kerr of Melbourne Hall he had worked for the formation of the Melbourne & Swadlincote Company of the Sherwood Foresters. Fred was believed wounded following an attack at the German front line. Captain Kerr 'went over and along with two other officers were the only ones



to get back safely'. Fred was hit and knocked out as he rested in a shell hole according to an eye witness. It had taken 4 days for the news to be relayed from the front. The Brigadier General had these words to say in his letter to Mr Wragg – 'It will be, I am sure. Some small comfort to you to know that he fell gallantly leading his men even after he had been wounded. He is a great loss to the battalion, and will, I know, be much missed by his men.' The letter appeared in the Burton Mail on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1916.

**Lieutenant Norman John Wragg** served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. He died of wounds aged 26 on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1916. He is buried in St. Sever Cemetery near Rouen. The Wragg family had lost 2 sons in 14 days.

Enter the park and walk straight ahead and stop at the crossing of paths.

### **Eureka Park site in the Great War**

In 1917, the government took over 2.5 million acres of land for farming. By the end of the war Britain had an extra three million acres of farming land. Those who would have usually worked the land - young men - had been called up, so the work was done by the Womens' Land Army. About 16,000 mostly young women joined up. Allotments were encouraged in urban areas to grow vegetables and fruit. The land that Eureka Park stands on was farm land in 1914 but then used for allotments. Those who worked in the munitions factories did not have enough food while anyone with money could get more than enough food on the black market. Any area that could grow food was converted to do so - gardens were turned into allotments and chickens etc. were kept in back gardens.

**Clocks go forward.** British Summer Time began in May 1916 to maximise working hours in the day, particularly in agriculture.

Continue ahead then take the gravel path right between the second avenue of trees to leave the park by The Railway Inn. Turn right and walk towards Emmanuel Parish Church. Stop at the top of Stanley Street.

**Bill Betteridge and his wife Lill** were residents of Stanley Street. He served in the war and was wounded twice and returned to the front and survived to tell some wonderful tales. One classic comment, when asked by young lads in the street about what he did in the war, he pointed out that while he was in France, his wife made munitions (mills bombs) and he said, 'Lill used to mek 'em and I used to chuck 'em'.

Continue to the church. If open, please enter Emmanuel Church to view the memorial windows to Fred and Norman Wragg and their parents.

Memorial plaques listing the fallen are in the south chapel. Return to the road and continue along Church Street making use of the pelican crossing to reach Hill Street and High Street junction with Coppiceside.

### **Hill Street and Coppiceside**

Private George Albert Kirkham of Hill Street joined the Sherwood Foresters regiment. He was killed in action aged 25 in Italy on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1918. In civilian life he had been employed as a sanitary presser. George joined up in March 1915 and served in France being wounded twice before finally dying in action in Italy.

The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) was used to ensure that food shortages never happened. However, people went around panic buying food and hoarding it at home at the start of the war. Some shops sold out of food in days in August 1914. After the initial panic buying, people settled down into a routine and food was not a problem until 1916. In April Britain only had six weeks of wheat left and bread was a staple part of most diets. Fines were issued for making white flour instead of wholewheat and for allowing rats to invade wheat stores. It was a bleak year for families - with the news from the Battle of the Somme and with food in short supply, suddenly the war was brought home to most families. Food prices rose. It was not easy to encourage poor families to eat less bread. The rich could afford the higher food prices but ordinary workers couldn't. They could buy food on the black market too. Food rationing began in 1918.

In January 1918, sugar was rationed and by the end of April meat, butter, cheese and margarine were added to the list of rationed food. This allowed each person:

15 oz (425g) of meat per week  
5 oz (142g) of bacon per week  
4 oz (113g) of butter or margarine per week.

Ration cards were issued and everyone had to register with a butcher and grocer. This began in the south east and then spread to other areas. Rationing was a clear indication to the British public that all was not well, but it did work. The malnutrition identified in poorer communities disappeared and as in World War Two, no one actually starved in Britain during the war. In March 1918 The Food Control Committee announced an increase in meat allowance for physical workers. They had to apply for the higher ration by stating the nature of the work they did and the name of their employer. People were allowed 1 oz of tea per head in Swadlincote but 1½ oz in Burton. Don't forget the local pheasant, other game and rabbit population provided regular fresh meat.

Continue walking up Coppiceside. Imagine the Gresley Home guard as they route marched up to a meeting on Gresley Common in 1918. Stop just beyond the roundabout at the entrance to The Pipeworks retail park formerly Wraggs and Woodward's pipeyard.

### Zeppelin raid

The blackout was enforced following a Zeppelin raid on the District. On January 31st 1916 a Zeppelin was following a train on the Leicester line en route to Burton. It lost the train when it entered Gresley Tunnel and turned east and 3 bombs exploded across the Swadlincote district. There are excellent descriptions of the night in Burton Mail extracts held at the Magic Attic. A report in the Burton Mail in August 1916 refers to an industrial incident concerning a Benjamin Pittam. He was summonsed for failing to shield a lamp in Woodward's pipeyard even though he couldn't see to do his work. He was fined £1 or 7 days in prison.

Private William Dyer of 111 Coppiceside was in the Machine Gun Corps and died on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1918 not long before the end of the war. In civilian life he had worked as a miner at Nadin's Pit. He had spent a year in the 'thick of the fighting'. Mrs Dyer's husband died when her son was serving in France.

Walk uphill and stop at the junction of York Road and Coppiceside.

Early in the war - September 1914 - a recruiting meeting was held on Gresley Common - a Saturday afternoon when men marched from different parts of the district to listen to rallying speeches. 'So zealous was one of the lads in beating his kettledrum that he burst the skin, and the corps subscribed among themselves for the necessary repairs.' according to the Burton Chronicle.

Cross York Road to reach the gates into Maurice Lea Park. Turn round to look across the wooded part of the Common towards the site of Green's Pottery in front of the chimney in the distance.

### Green's Pottery

Below is a copy of the invitation to the Peace Celebration tea and concert organised by the factory on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1919. 11 workers had died serving their King and country.

### Factory Work

The war would be decided in factories as much as on the battlefields. The ability to produce guns, bullets, artillery pieces and shells would be vital to the war effort. In the early stages of the war, industry experienced some hard times. Britain's second biggest trading partner in 1914 was Germany, consequently when war started a lot of firms suddenly lost their markets. It was also expensive and difficult to get raw materials,

so many workers found themselves out of a job. This did not last long. As hundreds of thousands of men joined up for the Army, their jobs became vacant. More importantly, as the war went on the government began to order enormous quantities of munitions, uniforms, vehicles, medical supplies

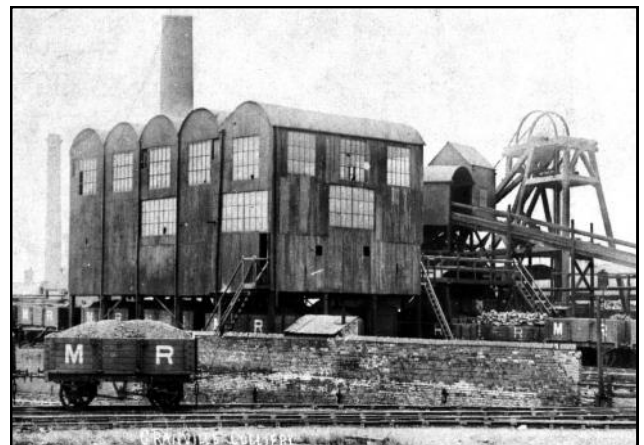


etc. Before long there were more jobs than there were workers. With workers in demand, employers had to pay higher wages. Employers also had to compete to get the materials they needed to make their goods. The downside was that wages went up, but prices went up even faster. Eventually the government had to take control of industries like coal (1917) and munitions. By October 1916, coal was in such short supply that it was rationed by the number of rooms a family had in its house. In Swadlincote coal picking would solve the problem.

The shortage of workers in the labour market was filled by recruiting an extra 1 million women workers, doing traditionally men's jobs'. About 950,000 went to work in munitions, and about 200,000 worked in other areas of engineering. They also drove buses and taxis .

### The Mills Bomb

'There were many types of grenade designed and produced during the war - well over 50 - but one that is remembered - the Mills bomb, designed by William Mills in 1915. It became the most important grenade for the remainder of the war. Weighing 1.25 lb, the Mills bomb's exterior was serrated so that when it detonated it broke into many fragments. Soldiers were





instructed to lob the Mills bomb using a throwing action similar to bowling in cricket. Transported in boxes of twelve with detonators carried separately, British soldiers found that they could not easily carry multiple Mills bombs because of their closer fitting uniforms. They carried them in green canvas buckets up to 24 at a time for use in an attack. The detonators were supposed to be attached to the actual grenade before the boxes of grenades reached the front line. It was not unknown for a box to be opened for use only to discover that they were without their detonators. It has been estimated that during the course of the war approximately 70 million Mills bombs were thrown by the Allies.' Quoted from the Imperial War Museum web site.

Hill Top Pottery, Church Gresley was used by O'Brian's. During the war they made munitions but at the end the machinery used was up for sale as the contract has ceased. They then set up an ironmongery store on Alexandra Road.

Enter the park, turn left and walk along to poppy plaque 4.

**Maurice Lea** – Nineteen year old, Lieutenant Maurice Lea was killed on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1916 during the Guillemont Advance at The Somme Battlefields. Just after 4pm he was gunned down by skilled German defenders equipped with machine guns. His sergeant witnessed his death and noted the location where he fell but his body was never recovered due to subsequent shelling of the area between the village of Guillemont and Trones Wood. His name is etched on the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval designed by



Somme Valley. On July 30<sup>th</sup> they travelled by train and London bus to their camp a few miles from the front. The war diaries record days of warm weather and swimming in the Somme Canal interspersed with rigorous training.

A sad letter in the 'Officer's Papers' dated 9<sup>th</sup> September was sent by Winifred Maie, an actress working at the Empire Theatre, Dublin at the time to the Ministry of Defence. She was requesting if the 'third hand' information she had received two weeks earlier concerning Maurice's death was true. 'I should be glad if you can kindly let me have an early reply as I am very anxious' quoted from her letter. She received a reply three days later saying that he was killed in action. The park is his memorial.

Continue around the perimeter path to poppy plaque 5.

#### Effects of the war on local people –

Behind where you are standing lived **William Clark**, to this day the house is still occupied by one of his grandchildren. William's family had a bakery on Church Street. His elder brother stayed at home to run the shop whilst William went off to fight. He was 35 when he died of wounds on 1st May 1918 in Flanders. He is buried in the Military Cemetery at Boulogne. **Len Clark**, another brother was very musical and following the death of family and friends in the war he composed an alternative score, Leamington, for the hymn – 'When I survey the wondrous cross.' Information about Maurice Lea and Bill Wright can be read in the Maurice Lea poppy trail walk available on line or from Sharpe's Pottery Tourist Information Centre.

When you reach Regent Street Gates walk through to read the plaque on the stone work. Then return to the park. Walk straight ahead along the avenue to the Herbert Lea Memorial.

**Herbert Lea**, father of Maurice Lea, was a local



Lutyns in France. This memorial carries the names of 73,412 others who disappeared in the area and have no known graves.

Maurice was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion/24<sup>th</sup> Division of the Northamptonshire Regiment. This was a service battalion that supported and supplied the front line troops and not directly involved in fighting. As a student at Cambridge University he had little military training so this posting would be considered appropriate. He had been based in Ypres but an urgent call came to report for action in The

man. He was born in School Street, and worked at Gresley Colliery on the coal screens. He was injured and gave up mining to become a butcher. He eventually established the London Central Meat Company. Even though he made his fortune in the south east he never forgot Church Gresley where he had grown up. He helped to finance the development of the park in memory of his son, Maurice, after the Council approached him for funding to enable a larger area of the common to be enclosed and transformed. The park was officially opened on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1930.

Turn left to reach the perimeter path, then right, to walk along the railings parallel to Market Street.

Continue along the path until you reach York Road gates on the corner with Market Street. Cross the road with care to poppy 11 on the seat by the war memorial.



### **War Memorial**

The cost of the memorial was defrayed by public subscription and its design has not altered. Now names of those who lost their lives serving the country cover almost a century. As well as Maurice Lea, William Dyer and William Clark, please spend a moment to think about the thousands of others who lost their lives not only in the Great War, but in the wars since. At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them. The war shattered lives, changed society and altered how we think about conflict.

When you are ready to leave the war memorial garden turn left and cross York Road. Walk along New Street to the junction of Church Avenue. Use the crossing and turn left to walk downhill to return to the Delph.

**Walk created by Dorothy Morson, Overseal Volunteer Footpath Group  
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Netherseal St Peter's CE Primary School**

**Leaflet layout: SDDC/ Alan Bates**

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Download this and the other WW1 Commemorative walks here:  
[www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/firstworldwar](http://www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/firstworldwar)

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Swadlincote Townscape

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