



The Armistice and how it was celebrated locally

Hostilities on all fronts finally ceased at 11am on 11th November 1918. However, many places on the Western Front carried on fighting and many casualties occurred even as people celebrated the end of the fighting.

On Saturday 16th November 1918 Lingfield celebrated the end of the war with a torchlight procession.

Starting outside the Lingfield Hotel, the procession was led by the Fire Brigade and a banner bearing the inscription "God Save the King", this was followed by the Boy Scouts and Lingfield Band, which the local paper reported "played various patriotic airs". After marching through the town they returned back to the Hotel Field where a decorated wagon served as an impromptu platform for Mr Edward de Clermont to make a fervent patriotic speech at the end of which the crowd gave loud cheers for Lloyd George.

Mr de Clermont ask everyone to remember the debt that was owed to the women who "had come forward in a splendid way and helped us in every kind of work and that work done, many times when their hearts were breaking at the thoughts of parting but they had carried a cheerful face." The crowd then gave three cheers for the King before proceeding to burn the effigy of "that Blighter Kaiser Bill".

However, it was to be almost another year before many local men returned home.

On 5th June 1919 Dormansland organised a re-union in the form of a dinner and concert for "Our Defenders" which was held at the Plough. Invitations were sent to officers and men who were known to have served in any branch of the forces and had now returned home.

The men formed up outside the Post Office and marched through the village headed by the band. Many of the houses in the village were decorated with flags About 90 guests sat

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down to an excellent dinner, the catering being carried out by Miss Glover assisted by Miss Salter. During the evening the loyal toast was proposed by the Chairman and heartily drunk... Toasts were drunk to the troops, the Navy, Air Force, the Territorials, and the Mercantile Marine. (43 men did not return home) Toasts were received with cheers and the singing of "For They Are Jolly Good Fellows". More toasts were then drunk to the Chairman, the Artistes and Pianist and the Committee.

It had been hoped that Winston Churchill, who was the Secretary of State for War, would be present – Winston Churchill was at this time living at Lullenden – but Mr Churchill had written apologising for his absence:

"Dear Mr Turner - I am very sorry that the pressure of work prevents me from joining in the welcome of the men of Dormansland on their return to the country for which they fought so well. Many of their comrades have fallen. Their numbers are one more proof of the gallantry and devotion with which the fighting men of this small community have borne themselves in the great struggle for right and freedom. Their memory will be with you all tonight and pride and sorrow will be mingled in your hearts.

But this is a time above all for hope and for resolution that the future shall be better than the past. It is in this spirit that you will honour your brave men tonight.

Pray give my greetings and good wishes to them all"

Yours very faithfully

(signed) WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

The final day of peace came on 28th June 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was signed.

On July 6th a special Peace Thanksgiving Service was held at Lingfield Church. This was attended by a large congregation, supported by the Lingfield Band, the Fire Brigade and Special Constables.

Saturday July 19th 1919 was nominated as a national celebration of victory and peace.

Local villages all held their own celebrations. A cautionary note was reported in the local paper by a letter urging mothers whose children had been recovering from mumps not to allow them to join any public gatherings.

1919 Peace Celebrations

In Dormansland, a programme of sports was held in a field by the Institute, during which the Dormansland Brass Band played a selection of tunes. The Surrey Mirror reported that a "sumptuous" tea was provided for ex-service and service men and their wives and children and all old people of 60 years of age, followed later in the evening an excellent firework display.

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Lingfield's celebrations took the form of a public meal for soldiers, sailors and their friends who gathered under the old oak in the centre of village at 1.30, where Dr. S.C. Austin made a short speech. Then, led by the local brass band all marched to the Council Schools and sat down to another "sumptuous repast." After the tea there were sports in Star meadow for both children and adults, with a 5 o'clock tea for children.

During the evening prizes of 10 shillings and 5 shillings were awarded for the best fancy dress. After supper it was back to the Star meadow where a large bonfire was lit. The proceedings ended with the playing of "God Save the King."

However many returning soldiers were apprehensive and disillusioned, asking themselves "what was it all for?" and "was it all worth it?" Despite politicians' promises of a 'land fit for heroes' there would be little help for them in terms of housing, pensions and welfare.

Postscript

Although the guns finally fell silent in 1918 the killing has carried on to present day. It is estimated that the opposing armies fired 1.45 billion shells. Many of these fell on ground already churned up so they did not explode. Some were high explosive but others contained chemicals such as white phosphorous, mustard gas and phosgene.

In 2012 the Belgian military collected 105 tons of munitions and the French, working from their base in Arras, 80 tons. Modern tractors have become more powerful and plough much deeper revealing more unexploded ordnance.

In the Ypres area alone since the end of the war 358 people have been killed and 535 injured. It is estimated that it will take at least another 50 years to complete the clearance.

Sue Quelch
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Sources:

The Surrey Mirror
The East Grinstead Observer
The Daily Telegraph
Edenbridge Museum

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