

**“Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red”** – whether we’ve seen it for real or through images in the media, the sight of the Tower of London’s famous dry moat filled with 888,246 ceramic poppies will live in our minds for a very long time.

Each poppy depicts a British or Commonwealth military fatality of the First World War. The war which began just over 100 years ago and in which an unimaginable number of mostly young, very young lives were wiped out. As we remember them today we also remember the other 8 million fatalities, not to mention the additional 30 million casualties and missing of that awful conflict, and of every conflict throughout history to this day.

Every workplace, village, town, and congregation throughout the land was affected by World War One, and Christ Church was no different. Our archivist, Helen Williams has uncovered some fascinating material from that time, which helps us to understand a little of what life was like then for the congregation that we are now.

*Only three months into the war and our church magazine of November 1914 lists 56 men of Christ Church already in active military service, and tells something of what that meant for the rest of the congregation.*

*Our daily half-hour of Special Intercession in Christ Church will be continued as hitherto since the war began*

*The weekly Work Party at the Rectory is still doing good work, and we shall be glad to welcome new helpers. Up to the present time we have sent away to 7 organisations:*

*574 pairs socks; 92 shirts; 38 belts, 18 helmets, 12 mufflers; a good supply of pipes; 10 mufflers; 3 chest protectors; 27 pairs mittens, with a pencil in each; as well as new and old clothing for Belgian Refugees, and for Dalmeny Hospital 89 packets, containing paper and envelopes, post cards and pencils, for the wounded soldiers*

*There is a special demand for handkerchiefs and every woman in the congregation is asked to supply one.*

And from the vestry minutes of that same month state:

*“A discussion ensued on the administration of the money collected at the offertories for sufferers from the War and it was agreed that the Rector, Mrs Black and Mrs Coles form a Committee to disburse it to deserving cases of which they had personal knowledge.”*

This war, “that was to be over by Christmas” but went on and on, was a war that mobilised everyone. As the numbers from Christ Church in military service increased, so did the works of the congregation here at home.

*From August 1915, a 'Sphagnum Moss Work Party' was set up to prepare field dressings, and this became part of the official supply chain, delivering dressings to the main depot at the Royal Infirmary*

*From 10 April 1916 until 6 January 1919, the hall under the church was operated as a 'Soldiers' Club and Canteen' for those billeted in Bruntsfield School for training, and although they moved Catterick in September 1917, the Club was kept open and finally closed in January 1919.*

The efforts of Christ Church for others were matched by the cost to its members. The memorials in our side chapel bear witness to this, and there is at least one other we know of whose name is not there.

The Revd and Mrs Black and Mrs Coles we heard of earlier, and who gave so much of themselves to helping others during these years, like so many others did so in the midst of great pain and loss for themselves. If you look at the WW1 memorial in the side chapel you will see among the 25 listed there the names of two of Revd and Mrs Black sons, and the names Mrs Coles only two children. If you did not already know this you may be surprised to find that one of her children named is a woman. The Rector in the midst of his personal grief wrote of this:

*The tragic tidings of our dear Daisy's death has stunned us as none other of our family bereavements at Christ Church has done. To all of us who know the family life of Mother Church, she was one of our beloved children. We saw her grow to fair womanhood. And when the war came she joined the noble sisterhood of nurses.*

Daisy was killed by enemy air-craft fire at the 58<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in France on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1917. Her brother Lionel had been killed in action the previous year.

In the midst of the impossibly large numbers we talk of at times such as this, numbers we cannot grasp or if we do can overwhelm us, we need to remember that those numbers are made of individuals, of human beings just like us.

I don't think we can ever make sense of such things, but one way for us as Christians is to hold such stories – stories of individual and large scale loss - within the other story that is deeply woven into our lives. The story revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Christ which had become so deeply woven into the life of the Apostle Paul that in his letter to the Christians in Rome he was able to write:

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

As remember today those who died for their country in war and in the service of humankind - and for all innocent victims of conflict throughout the ages - we find assurance that death does not have the final word. In Jesus' own words from today's Gospel:

*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6.40)*