

Press release: Nation's bells to ring out together to mark Armistice Centenary

On 11 November 2018, 100 years since Armistice, bells will ring out in unison from churches and cathedrals in villages, towns and cities across the country. Big Ben will also strike at 11am to mark the centenary.

To mark the final year of the First World War centenary commemorations, 1,400 new bell ringers will be recruited in honour of the 1,400 that lost their lives during the First World War.

Church bells across the UK remained restricted throughout the course of the war and only rang freely once Armistice was declared on 11 November 1918.

The campaign to recruit bell ringers, Ringing Remembers, will keep this traditional British art alive in memory of the 1,400 who lost their lives – linking together past, present and future.

The campaign is being run by the Department of Communities and Local Government in collaboration with Big Ideas Community Interest Company and the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The Ringing Remembers campaign will be a fitting end to our projects, events and activities that have marked the end of the First World War and a tribute to the heroic men and women who sacrificed so much for the freedoms we enjoy today.

As the centenary commemorations draw to a close, our priority is to make sure we continue to keep the history of the First World War alive for generations to come, even as it falls out of living memory.

Karen Bradley, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said:

Today we begin the final year of commemorations, leading to the 100th anniversary of Armistice. We will look at how we went from the German offensive in spring 1918 to peace, and I have no doubt the public will once again help us tell this important story and share their own connections to the First World War.

On 11 November 1918 the ringing of church bells erupted spontaneously across the country, as an outpouring of relief that 4

years of war had come to an end. I am pleased that to honour that moment and the 1,400 bell ringers who died in the war, we will be recruiting 1,400 new bell ringers to take part in the commemorations next year.

Bell ringers in the First World War

Many bell ringers joined the war effort, and many lost their lives. Just after the war, the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers wrote to all bell towers to compile the Roll of Honour. At the time 1,100 men were reported as lost.

During the First World War Centenary the Central Council of Bell Ringers has been reviewing this list and has discovered a further 400 bell ringers who died in service. Two bell towers – Edington in Wiltshire and Bamburgh in Northumberland – lost 6 ringers each during the war. In total 1,400 bell ringers lost their lives.

Programme for Armistice Day 2018

On 11 November 2018, the day will begin at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission St Symphorien Cemetery near Mons, Belgium where the war began in 1914, where the war's first and last casualties lie and where the government began the commemorations in 2014. It offers a fitting place to reflect on the cost of the war.

The 14-18 Now cultural programme will return for a compelling final season, culminating on 11 November 2018 in a UK-wide event to draw the nation together in a shared moment of remembrance. The full programme will be announced in January.

In the evening, the national commemorations will end with a ceremony at Westminster Abbey. The service will reflect on the Centenary, recognise the impact of the war after the Armistice, and give thanks to all those who were affected over the course of the conflict.

Further information

Become a bell ringer today by emailing RingingRemembers@bigideascompany.org

Case study: The Edington Six

After the First World War the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers wrote to every tower to ask for the names of the fallen for their Great War Memorial book. The beautifully produced volume contains 1,100 names inscribed with their bell towers.

A letter was sent to Edington Priory Church but no reply appears to have been received and so none of Edington's ringers were listed in that first book.

Tucked between the chalk downs and close to Westbury's famous White Horse, the sleepy Wiltshire town of Edington (once known as Tinhead) is dwarfed by the massive 14th century church, Edington Priory Church which, in 1914, had 6 bells.

The Edington ringers were at the heart of the working community. While one was a carer in a local hospital, others were farmers and the wheelwright. Four of the 6 played in the local football team. Along with tens of the village men, 6 ringers went to war.

A hundred years later Alan Regin, one of the world's leading Ringers and Steward of the Rolls of Honour, Central Council of Church Bell Ringers started to look into the names collected immediately following the war. He soon discovered that dozens were missing. Research to date has revealed 300 additional names, enough to warrant the creation of a second volume of the Great War Memorial book.

Perhaps no one reply came from Edington Priory because there was no one to write back. By the end of the war The Edington Six had died. Only one other Bell Tower in Britain – in Bamburgh Northumberland – lost as many ringers. The impact on the village would have been devastating.

Five are buried along the Western Front in Cambrai, Abbeville, Hermies Hill, Arras and Heverlee, but one, Private Leonard Drewett, the hospital worker, served in the Labour Corps and suffered increasingly with epilepsy. He died during hospital treatment in Colchester, and was brought home to Edington for burial. He is buried with a Commonwealth War Grave headstone near family graves in the peaceful Wiltshire churchyard.

More information on the Six bell ringers

The Edington Six, Wiltshire (Four also played for the local football team, Drewett, Lawes, Rogers and Wheeler).

Private John Frederick Pike Lawes, Edington, Salisbury Diocesan. Died 18 August 1916 age 25. Wiltshire Regiment 2nd Bn. Service No. 10520. Commemorated at Abbeville Communal Cemetery, France, Grave III. A. 11. Born in 1891. Son of Herbert and Elizabeth Lawes, of Tinhead, Westbury. Husband of Sarah Daisy Lawes, of The Lamb Inn, Tinhead, Westbury, Wilts. He worked as a Wheelwright. Born: Edington, Wilts Enlisted: Devizes, Wilts Resided: At 1911 Census at Elen Cottage, Tinhead, Westbury, Wilts.

Private Reginald Cecil Wordley, Edington, Salisbury Diocesan. Died 01 December 1917 age 21. Grenadier Guards 1st Bn. Service No. 28566. Commemorated at Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, France, Panel 2. Born 3rd quarter 1896. One of 7 children. Son of Decimus Wordley and Mary Wordley (née Nash) of Edington, Westbury, Wilts. He worked on a farm before enlisting. Born: Bishops Cannings, Wilts Enlisted: Trowbridge Resided (1911 Census): Tinhead, Wiltshire.

Gunner Reginald Charles Rogers, Edington, Salisbury Diocesan. Died 28 December 1917 age 27. Royal Field Artillery "B" Bty. 93rd Bde. Service No.

176310. Commemorated at Hermies Hill British Cemetery, France, Grave I. F. 42. Son of Frank Rogers and Clara Helen Rogers of Hagg Hill Farm, Hinton, nr. Trowbridge. Born: West Ashton, Wilts. Enlisted: Trowbridge. Resided: Hinton, nr. Trowbridge. He enlisted in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry (T.A.) 7 th March 1910 for a period of 4 years. In 1911 census he was working on his father's farm.

Private Leonard Drewett, Edington, Salisbury Diocesan. Died 12 March 1918 age 32. Devonshire Regiment 12th Bn. Service No. 24392. Commemorated at Edington Priory Church (Ss. Mary And Katherine And All Saints) Churchyard, England. Son of Stephen and Ellen Drewett, of Kington Langley, Chippenham. Born at Edington. Born: Bedwyn, Wilts Enlisted: Devizes, Wilts. Worked in a local hospital. Served in the Labour Corps. Became unwell due to epilepsy and died of illness in Colchester Hospital while a serving soldier. Buried a CWGC war grave.

Lance Corporal William John Wheeler, Edington, Salisbury Diocesan. Died 23 March 1918 age Unknown. Wiltshire Regiment 6th (Wiltshire Yeomanry) Bn. Service No. 203199. Commemorated at Arras Memorial, France, Bay 7. No family details recorded. Born: Edington, Wilts. Enlisted: Trowbridge. Resided: Edington, Wilts.

Rifleman Thomas James Blagden, Edington, Salisbury Diocesan. Died 19 January 1919 age 20. South Lancashire Regiment 1st/5th Bn. Service No. 54030. Commemorated at Heverlee War Cemetery, Belgium, Grave XI. B. 8. Son of Thomas and Selina Blagden, of Edington, Wilts. Born: Unknown Enlisted: Unknown. Resided: Unknown.