

Wellington's War and what came next



**A heritage walking trail exploring
the legacy of the First World War
in an east Shropshire market town**

Welcome to Wellington: 1919

On June 28th 1919, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles between the Allies and Germany officially brought the First World War to an end. Nearly nine million people had served in the British armed forces during the conflict but they represented less than a fifth of the population. In the aftermath, the wartime experiences of those on the home front would prove equally influential in winning the peace and this is the story of what happened next in the market town of Wellington, Shropshire.

Fables of the Reconstruction

Just as they had at the start of the conflict in August 1914, and again as news of the Armistice broke in November 1918, the townsfolk of Wellington gathered in Market Square to hear about the signing of the Peace Treaty. While the scenes were not nearly as rapturous, the flags of the Allies floated from churches and schools and the National Anthem was sung in the Square in the evening. A few weeks later, however, the picture was very different.

On Saturday 19th July, the town came to a complete standstill as Wellingtonians shared in the national peace celebrations. The bells of All Saints parish church (which had been renovated especially for the occasion) pealed all morning before a procession of ex-servicemen marched to nearby Apley Park for an afternoon of sports and entertainment that included the intriguingly titled 'Lloyd George Banger's Burlesque Circus'!

After returning to a 'meat tea' for over a thousand guests at the Market Hall a huge crowd ascended The Wrekin for an evening bonfire, followed by a torchlight procession

back into a town bedecked with decoration. At its centre, in Market Square, was a simple white sheet with crossed flags and a laurel wreath inscribed 'for the memory of our heroic dead'.



For the Children: *Wellington Market (top) was a focal point for the town's peace celebrations. On Tuesday 29th July 1919 it welcomed 1500 local schoolchildren to tea (pictured above)*



And the Band Played On: Wellington Volunteer Band provided the accompaniment to the town's peace celebrations. Formed in 1876, it was originally attached to the KSLI but was renamed the Comrades of the Great War band in February 1920

Current Topics

Just as it was for the townsfolk back then, our window into the local events of 1919 is provided by the Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News. The once-weekly newspaper, whose former offices still stand on the corner of Church Street and Queen Street, was the main source of information for Shropshire and the Borders. Its pre-eminence reflected Wellington's own importance as a regional centre for the east of the county. At the end of the war, the town's population was just under 8000 but its status was of a much larger settlement. It was the commercial centre for a district with muck and brass at its heart, with both heavy industry and a thriving rural economy right on its doorstep. With busy general and livestock markets the town catered for both, while an extensive system of railways took people and products to and from all parts of the country and far beyond, overseas.

The First World War had been the first 'total war' in history, involving all levels of society and every part of the economy in its waging, both at home and on the frontline. However, what the pages of the Wellington Journal show us is that the cessation of hostilities

did not necessarily mean an end to wartime conditions. A national coal shortage, rationing and food control all continued in 1919 to a backdrop of rising prices and acute labour and housing shortages. On the same day it reported Wellington's festivities, the paper also brought news of Luton's peace celebrations, where the town hall was burnt to the ground. While nothing so dramatic unfolded in east Shropshire those tensions were nevertheless present, making 1919 a year of both hope for and fear of the future.



The former Wellington Journal Offices, Church Street: lists of the latest casualties from the front were posted outside the building. They would have been the first source of information for many families and friends

Tracing Wellington's War

Wellington is among Shropshire's oldest towns with a Medieval street grid from the mid-1200s and a history dating back at least 1400 years. Its inner hub remains largely unchanged since the Great War and many buildings and places connected to the conflict are as familiar today as they were a century ago. This booklet will take you to the key locations in the story of the town's post-war reconstruction. Turn to the centre page map to follow the trail and, for more information about the local legacy of the conflict, visit: www.wellingtonswar.co.uk

Returning Home

By November 1919, the British Army had shrunk to 900 000 men — a year earlier that figure had been 3.8 million! Returning so many people back to civilian life in so short a time was a major headache for a Government wary of unrest in a post-war world very different from that which existed before 1914.

Demobilisation

By the end of 1919, nearly all those who had joined up at the beginning of the war or been conscripted during its course (a compulsory process that began in 1916 to enlist some of the five million men not yet in military service) were back home. In Wellington, the process began soon after the Armistice, with former Prisoners of War among the first to arrive. On returning to Britain, those 'leaving the colours' were sent to Disposal Centres as a prelude to their period of 'final leave' that began when they dispersed.

In January, the Journal confidently reported that demobilisation from Shropshire's main camps (at Prees Heath and Park Hall, Oswestry) was 'being carried out as expeditiously as possible'. The process itself followed a standard format, whereby each man was given a protection certificate entitling him to free medical treatment



Wellington Railway Station: *its platforms were well accustomed to scenes from military life, both before and after World War One.*

THE BIG CHANGE

**Why your New Freedom means
NEW RESPONSIBILITIES.**

BACK to Civil Life! It means much more than just taking off your khaki and putting on tweed or serge. It is bound to mean a complete change in many of the habits and ways of thinking to which you have grown accustomed in the Army.

As a Soldier, you have become used to having all sorts of things arranged for you by your Officers and N.C.O's. It was for them to decide where you should sleep, what you should wear, what you should have for dinner and how you should spend most of the twenty-four hours.

As a Civilian, you will have to be your own O.C.—relying on your own judgment, and acting on your own initiative. You will be free to shape your own career—and freedom means responsibility. It is you who are responsible now. It depends mainly on yourself whether you make a success or a failure of your future as a civilian.

Aim at Success!

START your new life with the determination to make a success of it—to better yourself—to get on in the world. It is to help you in doing this that your Country is giving you a sum of money with your discharge.

A good deal depends on the use each man makes of that money. There are men to waste it. You may hear a man say that he "means to take things easy and enjoy himself for a bit." Well—there are plenty of people ready and willing to help him to do this.

No. 554.

The Big Change: *ex-soldiers were largely expected to fend for themselves after demobilisation but prevailing economic conditions soon forced the Government to revise its attitude.*

during leave and a railway warrant providing free travel to his home station.

On arrival at Wellington returning soldiers would have alighted in full uniform, although legally it could only be worn for a further 28 days. The option of purchasing a full suit or a clothing allowance worth 52s 6d was also provided, along with a voucher for the return of one greatcoat — for which £1 (worth, with inflation, just over £50 in 2019) was added to each man's gratuity payment when handed in at the station during that final leave period.



Edgbaston House, Walker Street: *the offices of Wellington's Board of Poor Law Guardians were based here in 1919.*

Comrades in Arms

Among the measures aimed at easing ex-servicemen back into civilian life were a fortnight's ration book and an out-of-work donation policy, which provided 26 weeks insurance against unavoidable unemployment in the year following demobilisation. Beyond that, they were largely expected to fend for themselves. The response of many former soldiers around the country was to gather together so their concerns could be more effectively heard. Wellington was no exception and in January 1919 the Journal reported from a lively meeting at the Wrekin Hall where the local branch of the National Association of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors was protesting against the decision of the town's Board of Poor Law Guardians not to appoint a wounded man as its new rate collector — despite having promised to do so. By May of that year, the Comrades of the Great War were also active, with a local membership that grew from 14 to over 400 between 1918 and 1920. Like many other like-minded individuals in post-war Wellington, those who had served their country were discovering the benefits of speaking with a united voice.

Legacy Buildings: The Wrekin Hall

Reading the pages of the Journal or gathering en masse in public spaces to hear the latest telegram wasn't the only way to stay abreast of the news in 1919-era Wellington. On an almost nightly basis, people gathered (often in their hundreds) in large halls and rooms around the town to discuss the issues of the day and hear lectures about popular topics. Of all the venues where this occurred, the busiest was the Wrekin Hall. Practically every major issue of the year was charted within its walls during 1919, from the moral panic created by the virulent spread of VD, to the rise of local Trade Unions and the activities of the Young Mens Christian Association (the YMCA), which played a prominent part in caring for returned Prisoners of War and demobilised men.



The Wrekin Hall: *situated on the top floor of the Wrekin Buildings in Walker Street.*

Fit For Heroes?

“The work is not over yet — the work of the nation, the work of the people, the work of those who have sacrificed. Let us work together first. What is our task? To make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in”

David Lloyd George

Representing the People

The General Election of December 1918 saw David Lloyd George sweep to power on a tide of post-war reconstruction promises. The war had required the Government to intervene in the running of the country to an unprecedented extent and its control of social and economic affairs would now be used to win the peace: establishing better housing, healthcare and wages for a wide section of society — many of whom had voted for the first time. In Wellington, the task of realising his vision fell to the town’s urban district council but as 1919 unfolded it was increasingly subject to the same pressures facing the national government.

Lloyd George’s landslide victory was achieved by maintaining the wartime Liberal-Conservative coalition, a union at least partially motivated by a desire to check the rise of Labour (which, even so, now occupied the opposition benches for the first time). Party politics played little part in electing Wellington’s councillors in 1919 but they, too, were being scrutinised as never before. At its January meeting, the local Trades Council urged its members to watch local elections for men ‘who would be likely to redeem their wartime promises’ and it was increasingly active in encouraging council workmen to apply for wage increases (despite the council initially refusing to recognise the union).



The Winner is: crowds gather in Market Square to hear the result of the 1918 General Election — the first contested in the new Wrekin Parliamentary seat. The poll was won by the ‘coupon’ Liberal candidate Sir Charles Henry.

At the end of August, a mass rally marched on the Buck’s Head field, and just over a month later the army were back on the streets guarding key points on the network during the national railway strike. Although unconnected, the week-long lay off coincided with the only major incidence of civil disobedience of the year in Wellington, when the arrest of a drunken demobilised soldier led to a near riot outside the Police Station in Church Street, where a large mob stoned the windows and attempted to seize the prisoner. These were heady times!



Wellington Police Station and Magistrates Court, Church Street: the scene of a near riot in September 1919. It had been busy throughout the war years, dealing with military tribunals and local deserters

Planning for the Future

Among the key demands of the local Trades and Labour Council in 1919 was the need for better workmen’s housing. This was an era



Cottage Living: *after Ludlow, Wellington was the most densely populated town in Shropshire, and at its most crowded around High Street and New Street.*

when the vast majority of townfolk rented their homes and house building was widely regarded as a private enterprise. Wellington Urban District Council had been among the first in the country to build its own properties but the War had brought practically all spending to a grinding halt. When it ended, the cost of materials and labour had risen to such an extent that launching any kind of building programme would have been impossible without state aid. It duly arrived in the form of the Housing and Town Planning Act 1919, heavily subsidising building costs for local councils and compelling them to take action.

Addressing that need could not come soon enough for Dr White, Wellington's Medical Officer of Health, who wrote in his annual report 'the present housing scheme of the Government is an opportunity not only to ameliorate the bad housing conditions but to abolish them and with them much of the appalling load of ill-health that is the result of them'. The 'one up, one down' cottages crammed into the numerous courts of New Street and High Street were particularly notorious. Here, residents typically shared a large yard with a communal tap and a row of earth privies the council emptied at midnight.

To make matters worse, the water supply in Wellington was so poor in late 1919 that it had to be turned off between 7pm and 6am! Tackling the problem, however, would prove more difficult than identifying it. In line with the new Act, the council drew up a survey of the town's 1773 houses: 1310 were 'working class' dwellings, half of which had a rentable value of under three shillings per week — the calculated economic rent for building the 134 properties needed to replace unfit housing was 21 shillings. The council intended to charge tenants just seven but the epic scale of the problem was writ large!

A Man for All Seasons

If any person defined post-war reconstruction era Wellington, then it was surely long serving town councillor John Wesley Clift. From healthcare and child welfare to the YMCA and the local League of Nations citizens committee, he was a leading figure in practically every major movement of the age.



Wesley Clift

In 1916, Clift described as 'a disgrace to civilisation' the houses in which some local soldiers and their families lived. After the war, he turned his forensic mind (for he was a 'gold medallist' inventor) to developing an expert knowledge of the new Housing Act, rallying local support for new council homes. While it would be the better paid workmen who moved into them, he believed poorer tenants could take on the houses they vacated, allowing the worst slums to be removed. That plan, as we shall see later, began in earnest during October 1919...

Changing Places

In November 1918 over four million women were employed in industry and commerce in Britain. A month later, many voted for the first time in the General Election but, as 1919 dawned, was there really a brave new World in places like Wellington?

Front to the Back Again

A Wellington branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage, with 43 members, was established by 1911. Common Cause, the organisation's magazine, noted that a 'great deal of praise' was due as it 'was not at all an easy town to convert to women's suffrage'. By the time war broke out there was little indication of forward momentum but groups promoting women's issues were active in the area. The Women's Bureaux, a social offshoot of the National Union of Teachers, was one such organisation. Dubbed by one writer as 'more concerned with decorous tea parties than bread and butter issues', it nevertheless existed to raise awareness of the work of women teachers and to promote equal pay. A few months into the conflict its members were invited by the local council to run a hostel for Belgian refugees at 1 Park Street, which survived until the last families returned home in April 1919. Women from 'reputable' backgrounds were expected to play a part in organising charitable events and community activities but as the fighting wore on, and the



Double Life: the Wellington College Auxiliary Military Hospital was based on the corner of Sutherland Avenue and Sutherland Road in two buildings: College House (top, pictured in its wartime role) and Newlands (above).

casualties mounted, their roles became more involved. In 1915, Miss Hetty Moore formed a local brigade of the St John's Ambulance, whose 41 members staffed the auxiliary hospital for wounded soldiers at Wellington (now Wrekin) College between June 1916 and January 1918.



The Belgian Hostel, 1 Park Street: the building was lent to the War Committee of Wellington Urban District Council by businessman Harry Shepberd

Discover more about the VAD hospital at: www.wellingtonswar.co.uk/the-heritage

Supporting the League



The Wellington Brigade of the St John's Ambulance: *its members received training from local doctors in Wellington and at Oakley Manor in Shrewsbury*

Turning the Tide

When peace returned, the question for many in the women's movement was of how to maintain the wartime inroads they'd made. In February 1919, the Wrekin Hall was the venue for a talk by the campaigner Cecile Matheson, of the Birmingham Women's Settlement, who argued every town should have a women's committee involved in local government. Her view was certainly not shared by the Wellington Journal. In an article entitled 'post-war outlook', it declared 'It seems quite clear that the proportion of women on war-work has not been so large in east Shropshire as in most of the larger towns. Their absorption into pre-war occupations ought to be fairly rapid and complete'. The writer estimated at least 400,000 women had left domestic service during the conflict but 'a glance at the Journal any week will be sufficient to enable anybody to realise how pressing is the demand for domestics of every description'. Such views were fairly commonplace. In March, a local Trades Union Council meeting passed a motion 'against the preference being given to women labour', and later in the year the Government enshrined an Act returning the economy to pre-war employment conditions.

The Pre-War Trade Practices Act (1919) made it illegal to employ women in any kind of engineering or assembly work. Initially affecting industrial workers, as the year unfolded and more men were demobilised, middle-class civil servants also began to bear the brunt, 70,000 female clerks alone being dismissed by summer. The steady decline in employment opportunities for women from all backgrounds gave impetus to the Women's Industrial League, which had been established at the end of the war in November 1918 as a consequence of the attack on a woman's right to work. The Wellington branch met for the first time in September at the Assembly Rooms in Market Street (part of the now demolished Ercall Hotel). Its rallying call for equal pay and conditions, and female representation on all public bodies proved highly resonant, with 'practically all of the company present joining the League' according to the Journal. The organisation was not based on party lines, so was able to attract some notable local supporters. For the majority of women in Britain, however, the situation the League sought to overturn was already a reality. Even so, their home front experiences would also prove influential.



The Ercall Assembly Rooms: *this now vanished Market Street hotel was the venue for the first local meeting of the Women's Industrial League*

A walk around Wellington 1919



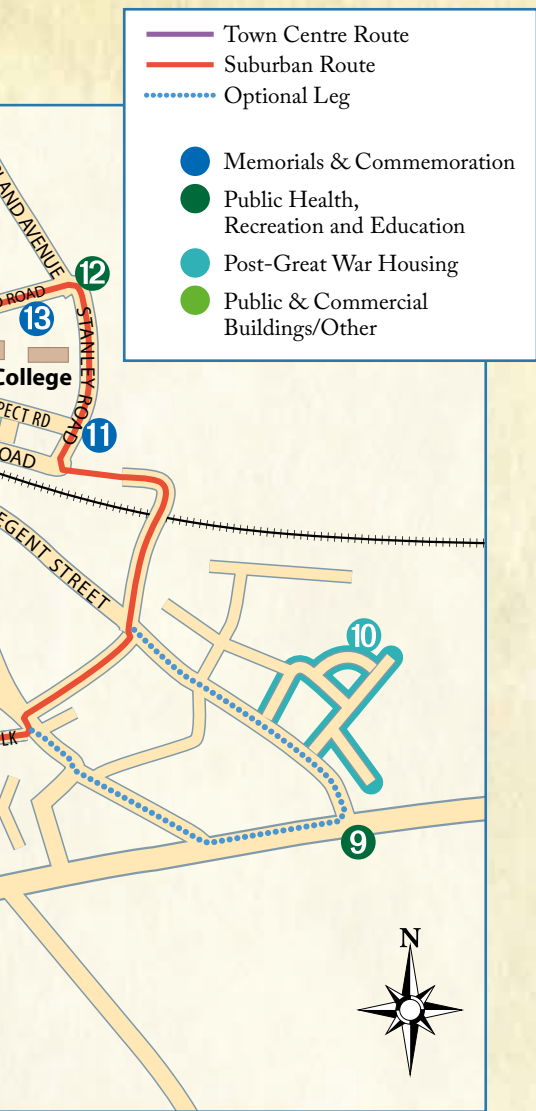
Town Centre Route

- A** Belgian Hostel (1 Park Street)
- B** Police Station and Courtrooms
- C** Wellington Journal Offices
- D** St Patrick's Memorial
- E** All Saints Lych Gate
- F** Town Hall/General Market
- G** Erccall Assembly Rooms (site of)
- H** Urban District Council Offices
- I** Child Welfare Centre
- J** Edgbaston House

- K** Wrekin Buildings (YMCA)
- L** Former Primitive Methodist Church
- M** Wesleyan Church

Longer Route

- 1** Sir John Bayley Club
- 2** Wellington Cottage Hospital
- 3** Bowring Recreation Ground
- 4** Wellington Cemetery
- 5** Erccall Gardens
- 6** Wellington Union Workhouse



- 7 The Wickets Inn
- 8 Christ Church
- 9 Brooklyn House
- 10 Millfields (Urban Gardens)
- 11 Old Hall School (new site)
- 12 Military Auxiliary (VAD) Hospital
- 13 Wrekin College Chapel*
- 14 Bayley Memorial Gates
- 15 Flora Dugdale House
- 16 Hollies Road

* By appointment only



The Great War Memorial at St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, King Street.

Wellington's Memorials

Wellington's earliest Great War memorial appears to have been a tablet unveiled at the Wesleyan Methodist church in New Street during September 1918 in memory of Lance Corporal Jack Evans. However, the first large scale monument, a crucifix outside St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church commemorating ten fallen parishioners, was not completed until August 1920. Many objects, including plaques, stained glass windows, school gates and even a chapel organ, followed over the next decade, although several (such as two endowed beds at the old cottage hospital dedicated to fallen workers from Sankeys and the Sinclair Ironworks, Ketley) are currently missing.

To find out more about them all visit:

www.wellingtonswar.co.uk/the-heritage

Saving the Children

When it came to deciding how to honour Wellington's war dead, the responses of the townsfolk were surprisingly varied. By 1919, the thoughts of many had turned to the widows and children of the fallen and there was a growing belief that any commemoration should help to ensure a better future for them.

A Centre of Child Welfare

In much the same way that the poor physical condition of army recruits had raised national concerns about the quality of Britain's working class housing stock, so the carnage that followed on the battlefields of the Great War demonstrated the underlying value of having a healthy infant population. The Government's own statistics indicated that one of every eight children died before their first birthday and, increasingly, its policies reflected those wider concerns with more and more money being poured into improved maternity services.

In May 1916, a Child Welfare Centre was established in Wellington as part of a county-wide scheme. A health visitor, whose duty it was to visit every notified birth, was appointed and a voluntary association

formed to hold meetings where mothers could come to receive advice and bring their babies to be weighed. The breadth of the centre's activities was expanded in 1918 by the Government's Maternity and Child Welfare Act, which enabled it to provide increased professional support, food and milk in cases of need, and a clothing club that provided demonstrations in 'cutting out and making up clothes for youngsters'.

By 1919 the centre, which was based in the Wrekin Buildings, was attracting over 2600 mothers and children a year. Although the state provided partial funding for the facility it still relied on donations and subscriptions from those using it. As such, it represented a worthy cause very much in tune with the times, which was not lost on the Urban District Council. It set-up a war memorial fund with the specific intention of providing a new suite of rooms for the centre adjoining the library in Walker Street.



Wellington Maternity and Child Welfare Association: *gathering for a 'Baby Show' at the Cottage Hospital. Dr White, the town's Medical Officer of Health, is pictured top right and Dr Hollies, seated, directly below. The street connecting Haygate Road and Wrockwardine Road is named in his honour.*

What Is A Memorial?

In March 1919, the Council's memorial committee received a setback when the firm of architects employed to examine its plans found the library site unsuitable. To some members, such as local doctor George Hollies, no alternative 'so completely represented what a war memorial ought to be — the welfare of their soldiers children was one of the noblest pursuits in which they could engage'. However, with no other suitable sites to be found, the idea had to be abandoned.



Wellington Workhouse Infirmary: *its inmates were sent to Wolverhampton between 1916 and 1919, when nearly 3,000 wounded soldiers were treated there.*

Across Walker Street, at Edgbaston House, Wellington's Poor Law Guardians, who managed the town's workhouse infirmary and administered local 'out-relief' (financial assistance given to those not living in the institution) had more success. For them, 1919 had been tumultuous: in April, the infirmary was released from military control but required £1000 of renovations, while out-relief payments doubled, 'chiefly due' it was said 'to the large number of widows with large families who were in receipt'. Despite this, the Guardians were finally able to purchase the Children's Home at Brooklyn House, which was home to a near capacity fifty residents at the time.



Brooklyn House, Watling Street: *a children's home between 1916 and 1928. Its residents previously lived in a separate wing of the Union Workhouse until the building was taken over by the military.*

Legacy Buildings: the Home for Ailing Babies

To supplement the work of the Child Welfare Centre, Flora Dugdale and her husband Walter established a Home for Ailing Babies at Cranbrook in Wrockwardine Road during July 1918. Both were leading figures in Wellington life during the war, Flora founding a short-lived military hospital at the Wrekin Hall, and Walter a senior officer in the scout movement. At their own expense, the couple (whose son was killed in the conflict) also entertained the children of Brooklyn House at their Meeson Hall home near Cherrington on an annual basis. However, it was their work at the cutting edge of the newly-emerging field of Paediatric medicine that had the most enduring impact. Although it could only accommodate ten babies, the home took cases from across Shropshire in 1919, and at its first annual general meeting the Journal reported on the work of national importance being carried out there. By 1920, the facility had achieved Flora's ambition of becoming the County Institution for Ailing Babies and in 1924 fifty infants were treated on site.



Flora Dugdale House, Wrockwardine Road: *it later served as a children's home and stayed in public use until the 1990s, still bearing its founder's name.*

Bridging the Gap

In the wake of the War, there was a rising desire among Wellingtonians to honour the memory of the fallen by relieving the suffering of the living. The Spanish 'Flu epidemic in late 1918 had demonstrated a shortage of skilled nursing and hospital accommodation, which formed an important part of the townsfolk's vision of the future.

Bread or Stone

When Wellington's Memorial Committee was forced to abandon its plans to make a new Child Welfare Centre the focus of official commemoration, debate arose within the group about what exact form a memorial should take. In the absence of any definitive answers, a public meeting was hastily arranged in March 1919 to sound out the townsfolk about what they considered appropriate. At almost the same time, fledgling plans for a County-wide memorial were taking shape, with widespread support for a giant cross on The Wrekin. To some members of the committee the proposals were very welcome, not least because it absolved them of responsibility for commissioning their own memorial! However, when attention eventually shifted to Shrewsbury, the problem of what to do in Wellington came to the fore again.



Lofty Ambitions: *a County war memorial, in the form of a giant cross, was initially envisaged for the summit of The Wrekin.*



The former Wellington Cottage Hospital, Haygate Road: *opened in 1913 as a memorial to John Crump Bowring, in whose memory the adjacent recreation ground is also dedicated.*

The subject of war memorials dominated the letters page of the Wellington Journal for several months. In April, one correspondent 'JFB' captured an increasingly popular strand of opinion when they wrote of 'houses laid desolate, wives robbed of their husbands, children of their fathers, the breadwinner gone' and asked 'when the children cry for bread, why offer them stone'? So while the principal result of the public meeting was a request for a visible memorial in the centre of Wellington, provision was also made to find an HQ for the Comrades of the Great War and an endowment for the Cottage Hospital. That support was much needed. Four of its six beds had been given over to wounded soldiers during the conflict but once the army vacated the Trustees were left with a serious shortfall in income. In March 1919 they reported a loss of £100 with the gloomy prediction that the institution would have to close without an increase in assistance.

Cottage Care

At its annual meeting Mrs Van Homrigh, a doyen of the cottage hospital, explained how the institution worked: 'anyone can go into hospital upon a recommendation note, which could be secured without any difficulty and a patient paid according to his or her means'. In an era before the National Health Service, for most people this meant paying weekly medical insurance into a local club or friendly society, such as the Workmen's Hospital Committee — which, despite the privations of the era, recorded a record income of £275 in 1919. Of that amount, £21 was distributed to the cottage hospital (along with subscriptions from many similar groups), while donations from the annual carnival and a ball held at the Town Hall helped to swell the coffers further. By November, the efforts of the Wellington public had improved the facility's prospects to the extent that it was able to increase its number of beds to eight (which enabled treatment of over twenty more patients the following year). At the war memorial meeting, attendees also expressed a wish that the management of the hospital be put on a more representative footing, and plans were drawn up to transfer power from trustees to an elected board.



Fundraising at the Cottage: *events such as the one pictured were an essential means of providing funds for an institution that relied on donations to carry on its good work.*



A New Home: *Wellington Maternity and Child Welfare Centre was based next to the library in Walker Street from 1920 until 1936.*

Expanding Horizons

With the help of Shropshire County Council, the Child Welfare Centre moved to new premises in Walker Street in 1920, offering more services (including free dentistry) and foreshadowing the modern day health centre in Chapel Lane, of which it was a direct predecessor. Much like the cottage hospital, the financial aid of the community was again key and its improved situation was largely achieved without official support. While the Memorial Committee had helped highlight the good causes local people wanted to assist, events had outpaced its ability to respond — and it wouldn't be the last time they did so.

Learn more about child welfare at:
[www.wellingtonswar.com.uk/
the-heritage](http://www.wellingtonswar.com.uk/the-heritage)

Honouring the Sacrifice

The long road to remembering Wellington's fallen took many turns in 1919. Yet, as official attempts to provide a permanent memorial stalled, other organisations in the town took it upon themselves not only to honour the dead but to welcome back those who had survived the conflict.

Doing It Yourself

The official peace celebrations may have been Wellington's largest public gathering of 1919 but smaller, private events to welcome back returning servicemen took place throughout the year. Many were organised by the various religious dominations represented in the town. This was an era when most people attended churches, which were equally notable as centres of social activity. Among the most prominent were the Wesleyan Methodists in New Street, who held a private reunion for over 200 people at the Wrekin Hall at the end of May. This was no sombre affair either and the Journal described a joyous atmosphere in a room 'brilliantly festooned with conspicuous organisation'.

However, when it came to welcome home parties it was hard to match the combined efforts of the Baptists and Congregationalists. They met at the King Street Schoolrooms in December where, aside from tea and indoor games, 'a good supply of the fragrant weed was distributed during the evening and a most enjoyable time was spent' the local newspaper reported!

For more about local commemoration visit: www.wellingtonswar.co.uk/themes



The Wickets Roll of Honour: *it records the names of 225 servicemen who received gifts of money orders or cigarettes between 1915 and 1918.*

Permanent Reminders

Just before the war ended, the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists also unveiled memorial tablets to individual servicemen in their respective churches but Wellington's first mass commemorative object was in fact a paper scroll. In April 1919, a large group of demobilised soldiers assembled at The Wickets on Holyhead Road to watch its unveiling. It listed the recipients of a comfort fund established by the landlord that is still mounted in the pub today. Efforts to provide a more substantial monument were proving more problematic. The official memorial committee spent the best part of a year deliberating before launching a disastrous £1500 appeal in April 1920, which would have funded a large statue on The Green.



The Lych Gate, All Saints Parish Church

It raised just under half the amount needed and the entire project was abandoned. This enabled the Reverend Sinclair-Moore of All Saints to step-in. A long-time advocate of a simpler memorial in the parish churchyard, he was then able to present a fully-formed and much cheaper alternative. From it, came the 1922 Lych Gate memorial that is the centrepiece of the town's annual Armistice commemorations nearly a century later.

The Search for a Home

While alternative arrangements were made for a visible monument to commemorate the fallen, and the townsfolk had given generously to support the cottage hospital, what of the memorial committee's original commitment to find accommodation for the Comrades of the Great War? Although the organisation continued to go from strength to strength, increasing its membership, appointing a paid secretary, and playing a major part in the first November Armistice commemorations it was still holed up in a temporary digs at the Armoury next to



The Green: the intended site of Wellington's ill-fated war memorial scheme.

Wellington Market in August 1920.

By then the economy had begun to falter, and, in a letter to the Journal, 'ex-soldier' wrote that within '2 or 3 years' he expected to see 'disabled heroes begging for their daily bread'. His concerns were shared by Sir John Bayley (the founder of Wrekin College) who delivered a rousing end-of-year speech to the Comrades, declaring 'it should not be necessary for them to play an accordion in the streets or beg for the means of existence'. Bayley contributed £250 towards new premises but went one better in 1921, sourcing two former army huts from Rugeley Camp and removing them to Haygate Road. They continue to form the permanent home of an organisation that became known nationally in that year by the name it still bears today: the British Legion.



The Sir John Bayley Club, Haygate Road: it replaced a temporary HQ at the Armoury in Walker Street, outside Wellington market

Starting Again

Despite the huge upheaval caused by the Great War there was evidence of life returning to a form of normality in 1919. Slowly but surely, Wellingtonians were coming to terms with their reshaped world, making decisions that still influence the town 100 years later.

Marking Time

When British Summer Time (yet another innovation of the war) arrived in 1919, Wellingtonians flocked in their hundreds to Bowring Park in the evenings. After four years of being 'tinged with the national gloom' commented the Journal, 'nothing in the urban area at present more delightfully signalises the end of hostilities'. During the Whitsun holidays, The Wrekin was also a focus for the recreation of thousands of visitors from across the Midlands, with many transported in former military vehicles converted for passenger use. By year's end, the volume of enquiries for holiday apartments in the area were such that the council was forced to open a register of lodging houses to cope with demand.

During 1919, many industries moved to a shorter working week and employees suddenly found themselves with leisure time. Addressing the subject, the Journal's



Wellington Cemetery from Bowring Park: a number of local military casualties are interred there.



Up Periscope: In March 1920, a tank was placed on permanent display in Bowring Park in thanks for the town raising nearly £497 000 in war bonds (nearly £25 million today).

'Current Topics' column suggested reading as a good way to gain a 'smattering of a subject which in time may come in very useful'. The pastime was certainly taken up with gusto in Wellington, the Council being forced in October to apply for a rate increase to cover the cost of new books necessitated by the very high rate of lending at the library.

That thirst for knowledge was not limited to just books. After purchasing the Wrekin Buildings in June, the YMCA launched a hugely popular lecture series on an array of subjects that included the *Real Japan*, *Christianity in the Roman Empire* and *Britain's Quaintest Insects!* In its final meeting, the ill-fated local War Memorial Committee alluded to the organisation's valuable work 'among the demobilised young men of the town' and in December extensive renovations to aid that support, including a gymnasium, were unveiled. At the opening ceremony plans were announced to affiliate with the local branch

of the politically neutral Workers Education Authority, which also enjoyed widespread support from the town's great and good. It had been formed that July and enrolled 37 students on three-year university style courses by year's end.

Building for the Future

In October 1919, work began on the era's most enduring contribution to Wellington life: the council's long-awaited workmen's housing scheme. Cutting the first sod at Urban Gardens, Wesley Clift declared all the authority's homes would have a bath and at least three bedrooms to help alleviate the overcrowded conditions characterising much of the area's housing. Despite high material costs, a faltering economy and no little scepticism (one councillor raised a motion that the new estate be called 'Millstone Crescent') the council completed a mixture



Ercall Gardens: opened in 1925, it included 12 homes intended for private sale by the council — it was the first authority in Britain to propose such a scheme

of 95 scullery and more salubrious parlour type houses at Millfields by the end of 1924, when it also began a new development at Ercall Gardens. In the previous year, 200 pits and 300 privies were removed from local houses, an action 'that must result in improved health conditions' concluded Medical Officer Dr White. While residents would have to wait until the 1930s for the worst of Wellington's slums to be removed, the new housing, along with improved health and maternity treatment, were taking effect: in 1924 only five infants aged one or under died, the lowest figure ever recorded — which Dr White attributed directly to the child welfare movement. Wellington people, it seems, were finding many ways to honour the memory of their fallen sons.

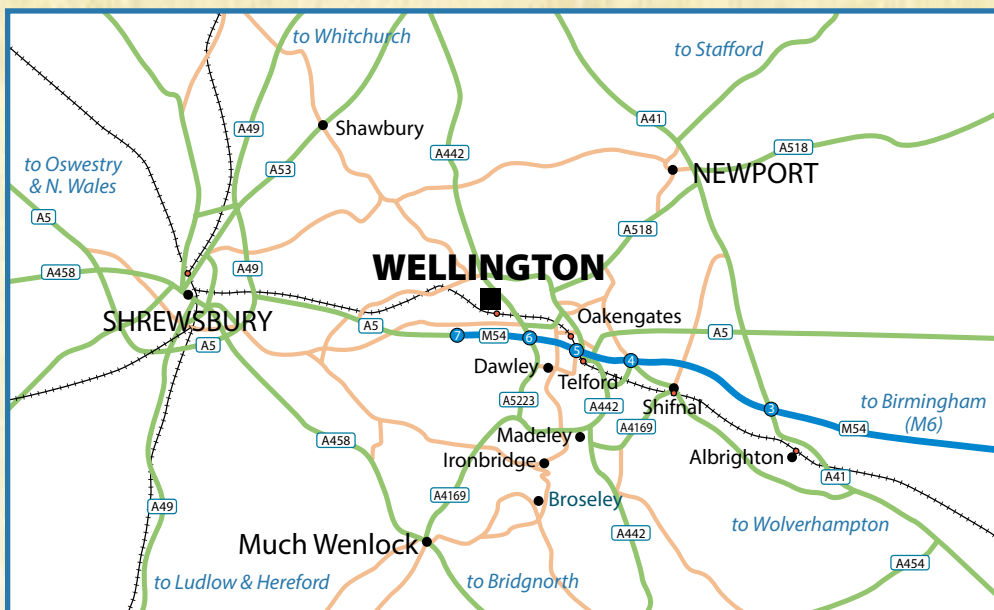


Urban Gardens: tenants were resident at Wellington's first post-war estate by the spring of 1921 when they opened their own tennis court!

Protecting Your Heritage

Wellington LA21 Group is a community organisation that seeks to bring people together to find local solutions to problems affecting all of us. We maintain an active and ongoing commitment to help protect our town's natural and historic heritage.

To find out more about our work and how you can get involved, please visit our website: www.wellingtonla21.org.uk



Visiting Wellington

Wellington, Shropshire's second largest market town, is located near to the centre of the county just over ten miles east of Shrewsbury and one mile north of The Wrekin Hill. If you are visiting for the first time, why not take advantage of its excellent public transport links? Wellington railway station is situated in the centre of town, offering regular services to and from the Midlands and mid-Wales. The long distance National Cycle Network Route 81 also passes through the town and secure parking facilities are available in a number of central locations. The M54 lies directly to the south of Wellington and it can be accessed from Junctions 6 or 7 of the motorway.

Free car parking is available in a number of places around the town centre but tickets must be displayed in short-stay car parks between the hours of 9am and 6pm.

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