

Remembrance Day 14. 11. 21

It is said that we die twice. Once when our spirit leaves our body and again when our name is no longer said by those that are still on this Earth. That is why it is so important that at this service we say the names of those from our village who have died the first time. They should not be allowed to die a second time, because they believed they died for others, their families, their friends and us, the future generations of their village. The survivors of that terrible war truly thought that it was the war to end all wars, yet in a matter of 21 years it had ceased to be the Great War and become the First World War.

This year, Lynn has been investigating the Cobbold family, three of whose sons are on our memorial – William, Arthur and Frederick. They were sons of William and Sarah who lived next to Broom Hall on Freewood Street so possibly in Dick and Judy Hampshire's cottage which is the next old house to the Hall. But these three are not the first sons that William and Sarah lost. To see the memorial to the other son you only have to go to Bury where you will find the name Charles Cobbold inscribed on the Boer War memorial at the centre of Cornhill. Charles was born in 1872, a year after William and Sarah married, so when he died of enteric or typhoid fever on the 6th February 1900 at the Modder River he was only 18. He is a reminder that many young men lied about their age in order to fight for King and Country in the Boer War and the First World War.

So what of the three sons listed on our memorial here in the church? William was the next in age. Born in 1878, he had a remarkable military career. He joined the First Suffolk regiment and was with Lord Kitchener at Khartoum in 1898. He then served in Greece briefly before travelling to South Africa and was at the siege of Ladysmith in the Boer War between 1899 and 1900. 1911 finds him back in Bradfield St George as a farm labourer. He was now 35 years old and married to Alberta Phyllis and with a daughter, Dorothy who was 1. He must have thought his military life was over, but, 4 years later, having rejoined the Suffolks, he was recorded as 'presumed dead' somewhere in France. There was no major battle in May 1915, so William was probably one of many who died while facing the daily dangers of life in the trenches.

Frederick or Freddy was also a farm labourer in 1911. He was 30 years old and married to Rosina who was 26. They had one daughter, Lily Violet aged 5 and lived at Kingshall Green, Rougham. When the war started he joined the East

Surrey Regiment and was killed in action in France on the 15th April 1915 a few weeks before his older brother, William.

That left Arthur Cobbold who enlisted in 1907 in the Rifle Brigade of the 1st Bedfordshire Regiment for 12 years. We know that he was in Egypt from January 1909 to February 1913 whereupon he was sent to India. He was promoted to corporal in March 1913 and then 6 months later to colour sergeant. He became the company quartermaster, a very responsible job. On the 14th May 1915 he was transferred to the front and on the 17th November he set sail from Marseilles for Salonika in Greece. He disembarked on the 25th of that month but within the year on the 19th of August 1916 he drowned. We know no other details. He was 24 years old and appears to have been single as his back pay went to his father, William.

So there it is. A brief history of one family in our village who lost three sons in less than 2 years, having already lost one son some years before. Two widows and two daughters who will not know their fathers as they grow up. Only one son of William and Sarah survived – Alfred – along with 4 daughters. Sydney Cobbold on the memorial appears to be unrelated.

Every year when we say the names on the memorial we keep them alive in our hearts. Hopefully knowing something about them brings them to life a little bit more. Perhaps those who had children and grandchildren will be alive in their family history passed on down the generations. When my grandfather and father spoke of the wars they spoke mainly of the people they fought alongside, the trenches they shared, the ships they were on. The broad sweep of history that we learn in school is distilled to the mate you shared a fag with who got a bullet in the head an hour later or the fellow officer who brought you a mug of cocoa when you were on watch and freezing . Their lives, like ours are about the people we know and what we did together.

We see that reflected in our reading from John this morning. Here is Jesus talking with his friends, his disciples and he is keen to stress that they are his friends, not his servants. He has the right to command them as he is the Son of God and has in turn obeyed his Father. But his commandment is simple and about friendship - 'Love one another'.

War is the antithesis of loving one another. War is about hate, about reaching a point when you are prepared to kill others because what they stand for threatens you and those whom you love. I remember asking my father why he

joined the navy to fight in the Second World War and his answer was unequivocal, 'Hitler had to be stopped'. At that time he knew nothing of the concentration camps, but was aware that here was someone threatening the way of life of his family and his friends and simply had to be stopped. I wonder if similar thoughts went through the minds of the Cobbold brothers when they joined up. Did they sense a threat from Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary to their way of life. They probably did, fuelled by propaganda put out by the British government to 'enlist today' and 'do your bit'. For these men love and hate ran alongside each other. Hatred of the enemy and love of their country and their family and friends that they wanted to protect.

Jesus says "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" in our passage today and He will shortly demonstrate that by going willing to the cross. The authorities encourage the crowds to demand his death, 'and crucify is all their breath' and yet He shows so much love in the face of such hate. He knows us, he understands our fickleness, he loves us and so he dies. Out of hatred comes such love.

Love is about knowing, of that I am sure. My mother spent five years under German occupation in Jersey, my father spent two years dodging German torpedoes as he escorted convoys to Russia. When I brought home a German friend to meet them in the 1960s it was my father who found it difficult, not my mother. She knew that Germans were just like us. She had met them, my father hadn't. She knew there were as many bad Germans as there were bad Britishers, and as many good.

Today we do not seem to have learned that lesson and governments and the media do their best to prevent us from learning it. We are encouraged to dislike those who are not like us – the Moslem, the French, the woke, the protester. As Christians we are called not just to like, but to love everyone, including our enemies. That doesn't mean that we surrender in the face of evil. There was no appeasing Hitler, but perhaps if we had loved the German nation more in its defeat, if we hadn't sought revenge at Versailles, then the ground wouldn't have been so fertile for the rise of the Nazi party?

Perhaps if there had been more love between nations in 1914 or earlier, those young men whose names David read out today would not have had to die. Perhaps, William and Frederick and Arthur would not have had to leave this beautiful place to die in some foreign field. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves how we can ensure that love does conquer all and that hate shall not have

dominion over our lives and those of our young men and women. We are facing an existential threat which is already killing people across the globe. I'm not sure that love and understanding was at the centre of the recent discussions in Glasgow to try to end it. However, we must be in no doubt the conflicts that will arise, that are arising, if we don't end it will be every bit as frightening and terrible as that in which William, Frederick and Arthur fought. Let us keep them alive in our hearts and let us pray that we will act on Christ's commandment and be the people of love and peace that I feel sure they would want us to be.