

# REPORTS

## Commemorative Exhibition organised by the Sarratt Local History Society to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of WW1.

*"Where have all the young men gone? Long time passing. Where have all the young men gone? Long time ago."*

On Saturday 8 November, in our shiny modern Village Hall, we remembered the young men of Sarratt who left their tranquil, agricultural village to fight for their Country all that long time ago. But was it so long ago that it is now History? This week, by sheer chance, two separate, unconnected deaths were announced in The Times on the same day. Both men were 104 years old! They were already walking and talking when that so called 'Great War' started.

Our Commemorative Exhibition showed the peaceful, rural setting from which the Sarratt boys left. They *were* mere boys. Boys who had learned to read and write at our Village School, who had gone to Sunday School at Holy Cross or the Baptist Chapel or the Dawes Lane Mission Hall. Boys who had learned to plough with horses, tend cattle and sheep, make hay, drive carts and early motor tractors and to practise the skills needed to maintain the livestock and equipment that went with that way of life.

This handful of 'innocent lads' who went from their relatively tiny village, not only fought in remote places like Salonika, of which I doubt they had ever heard, but between them managed to win three Military Medals, then one of the highest awards for bravery that could be awarded to 'other ranks'.

A few came back, some wounded physically, some mentally. Those that did not are recorded on two memorial plaques. One is in Holy Cross. The other was discarded by developers when the Baptist Chapel on the Green was deconsecrated. The Local History Society rescued it and it now awaits a permanent home. ('Lest we forget!')

It poured with rain on the afternoon of the Exhibition. But the people of Sarratt, young and old, poured into the Hall and stayed, enthralled by the photographs, stories, medals and memorabilia of 'their' village..... They drank tea, surrounded by old WW1 posters and slogans, at tables scattered with symbolic, fallen poppy petals, and talked about their own family memories.

One or two, not least our President, Dawn, still bear the family names of the men who left to fight. Ray Adams startled us with his resemblance to his grandfather, whose photo as a young man, was on the wall.

The Local History Society put together this exhibition to commemorate, on one afternoon, those Sarratt families that sacrificed so much.

But surely it is now our turn and our responsibility to them, not simply to 'remember' but actively to insure that *our* Village, *their* Village, remains a place

that cares for its inhabitants, safeguards its familiar buildings and beautiful setting and somehow maintains the unique identity that amazingly Sarratt still has, surrounded on all sides as it is, by the ever increasing demands of an urban-centred population.

We would like to thank all those who lent us their precious photos, medals and artefacts. Those who wish to buy a copy of the DVD of Hertfordshire at War, should apply to Dawn Pitts.

Angela Colman

