

## **The League of Nations: The International Peace Movement in Lakenheath.**

### **Background.**

In 1920 following the devastation of WW1, the League of Nations was founded by a covenant signed as part of the Versailles treaty by Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. Many other countries followed later. Although the original idea had come from President Woodrow Wilson, the USA did not join the League and Germany was excluded until 1926. Nazi Germany left the League in 1933.

In Great Britain the determination that WW1 should be the 'war to end all wars' led to the formation of the League of Nations Union with the object of promoting 'peace amongst all Nations'.

In 1934 a national questionnaire canvassed this country's views on the international League of Nations and the idea of 'collective security': 11.5 million votes were cast. The result has been interpreted as being a vote *"in favour of collective security by all means short of war, along with a hesitant support for war."*

*A J P Taylor. English History. 1914-1945.pub. 1965.*

There was however a strong desire that the country should remain a member of the League. Political instability and social upheaval in parts of Europe fed fears of another conflict. Memories of the losses of WW1 were very much alive, particularly in small villages like Lakenheath, which had suffered significant loss of their adult male population.

### **The Peace movement in Lakenheath.**

There were two Peace meetings here in the 20's and 30's. The first was called to hear about the League of Nations.

The Bury Free Post. Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1927 reported:

**"There was large attendance at the Peace Memorial Hall, Lakenheath on Tuesday evening under the aegis of the Norfolk and Suffolk League of Nations Union."**

**".....The vicar, (then the Rev. Isaac Morris) presided, supported by Ald. Lusher, County Alderman Robt. Bilsland and Dr A J Pickworth. The Chairman hoped the large attendance meant that they would have a large enrolment meeting."**

In what was described as a 'stirring address' Alderman Lusher said,

**"He was delighted to see such a large number of young people present."**

**".....perhaps the most notable feature of that recent observance (referring to the recent anniversaries of Armistice Day) was that little or nothing heard of the rejoicing and exaltation which marked the advent of the Armistice in 1918..... It was true that there was a solemn thanksgiving, but there was as well a deep note of seriousness ..... people were asking whether we were paying our debt to those who laid down their lives in that great struggle by doing all we could to make another war impossible."**

**"Nations were still competing with one another in the mad race for armaments and huge expenditure on armaments went recklessly on. If we do not end war, war will end us."**

**"The work of the League had been the means of preventing war, setting damaged countries back on their feet..... caring for women, sick persons and young children, controlling opium and other dangerous drugs, ..... Setting up an international labour organisation .....to raise the levels of labour conditions all over the world."**

Ald. Lusher then concluded:

**“Your King and country need you. The way of war had failed, but the way of peace was still open” (Hear, Hear). “Your King and Country need you still and for that reason I ask you all in Lakenheath to join the Legue of Nations Union. The posters are silent but His Majesty the King still calls in these words.”**

**“Nothing is more essential than a strong and enduring League of Nations and I commend the cause to all the citizens of my Empire.”**

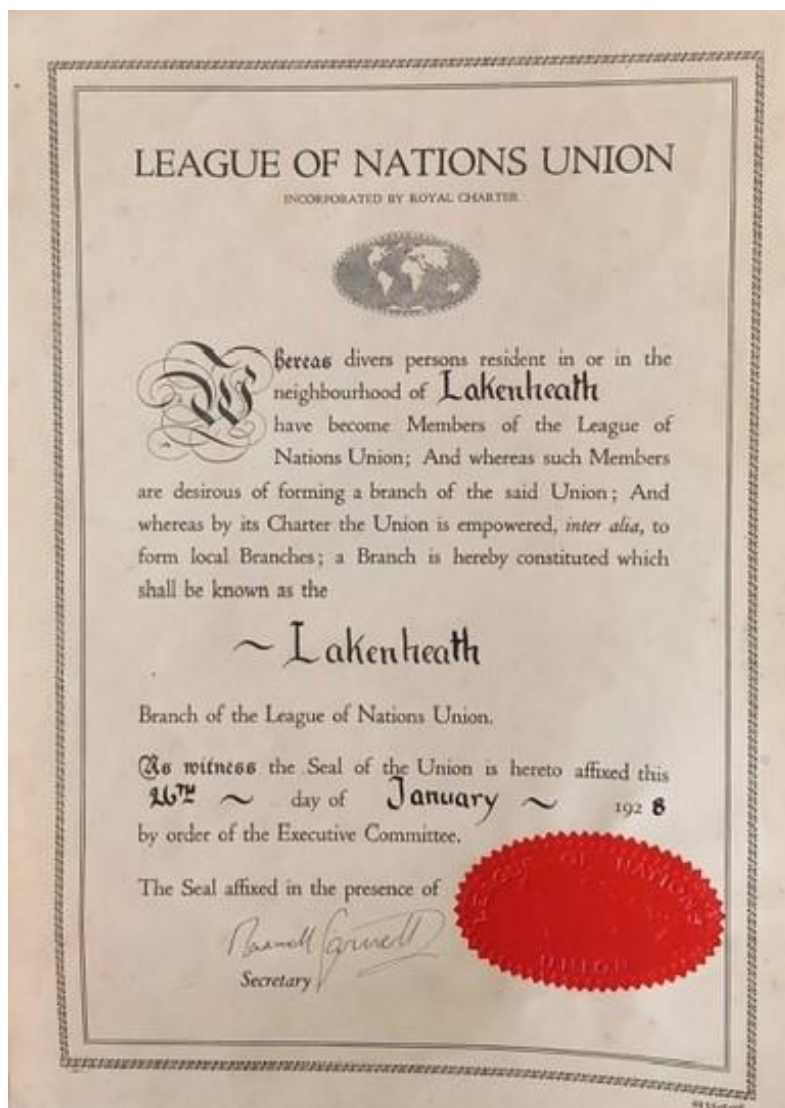
Ald. Lusher added:

**“This is a command which must be obeyed.” (Applause)**

The Formation of the Lakenheath Branch of the League of Nations Union was discussed at the end of the meeting and by the following year (1928) the branch was active.

**“A gratifying number of members came forward at the conclusion of the meeting, and, under the chairmanship of the Vicar, who evinced great keenness, discussed the appointment of an official in forming a branch of the Union for Lakenheath.”**

*Bury Free Press. Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 1927.*



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By 1932 the Branch seems to have been well organised and supported. Another meeting, again well reported by the Bury Free Post, Saturday November 12<sup>th</sup> 1932, took place.



This poster, a rare survivor from the 1930's, was discovered in the village in 2020. Note that the year of the meeting is not shown. The year was eventually determined to be 1932 and the date was further confirmed by the following newspaper report.

## ‘LAKENHEATH.’

**“DISARMAMENT CAMPAIGN. – Under the auspices of the local branch of the League of Nations Union, whose energetic secretary is Miss E M Moore, a mass meeting was held in the Peace Memorial Hall on Monday. An admirable chairman was Dr M O’Leary, and the secretary had secured speakers for 15 minutes each on: (1) The Horrors of War. (2) The Cost of War. (3) The Alternative to War. (4) Disarmament.**

**Mr. H Flatt undertook the first and gave a descriptive account of experiences he encountered whilst with the Air Force Transport, and an account of the experience of an observer telephonist in the Ypres Salient. Dr Pickworth dealt with the cost of war, in money, and millions of precious lives, in distress of mind, the maimed, the shattering of faith, and the world unrest of today, all the cost of war. The Rev. John Lewis urged that arbitration must be pursued as a means of settling international disputes. The very fabric of our social life was built up by arbitration, he said. The Rev. I Morris dealt most admirably with disarmament.**

**He maintained that our purpose in this world was Christ's Kingdom and said that God's ideal for the world was that they should live in peace. He pleaded for limitations of those great engines of war and said that the Christian reason was the best reason. He appealed to the audience to do everything in their power to further the cause of disarmament. The Chairman ably cited Russia as a real blow to civilisation, a disastrous legacy of war. Patriotism was high and great, but Christianity applied was higher, and the line taken by Britain would be a big factor in the disarmament problem. (Applause). Thanks to speakers were voiced by Mr. W Flack and Mr. J Neal."**

*From the Bury Free Post, Saturday November 12<sup>th</sup> 1932.*

#### **Notable participants in the Peace Movement in the village:**

**Mr. Henry Flatt:** Prominent personality in the village between 1904 and his death in 1977 aged 97. Proprietor of Flatts shop and bicycle hire, poultry farmer, and the first taxi in the village. His story "[Henry Flatt and his family](#)" is at 1912 in this part of the Timeline.

During research for the Flatt 'story' we were loaned two original documents by Mr. and Mrs. Mike Chambers. These are Henry's hastily scribbled notes, they record his experiences at the time of the Battle of Ypres and the horrors he witnessed, parts of which we have included in the story above; also, the later notes he made for a talk he was to give. No date for the talk was mentioned on the poster: but we know it now; the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1932.

**Dr Pickworth:** Much loved and greatly respected village doctor from 1884 to 1926. He died here in 1943. Methodist preacher, Mildenhall Union (the Workhouse) medical officer, Parish and County Councillor, County Alderman. Justice of the Peace, Maker of fireworks for village celebrations. He probably owned the first car in the village. His memorial is in the Methodist Church.

**Rev John Lewis:** Probably minister of one of the non-conformist churches in the village.

**Rev Isaac Morris:** Vicar of St. Mary's Church, Lakenheath.

**Dr M O'Leary:** Village doctor after Dr Pickworth. Chair of Lakenheath branch of the Peace Union.

**Miss E M Moore:** Teacher at Lakenheath School and influential member of the congregation of St. Mary's church. She lived on the High Street not far from Anchor Lane and was a common sight riding her old-fashioned upright bicycle with a wicker basket on the front full of books. Secretary of Lakenheath branch of the Peace Union.

**Alderman Robert Bilsland:** One time tenant of Sir William Dunn (Churchgate Farm). Briefly owner of The Retreat (Lakenheath Hall). Chairman of Lakenheath Parish Council and County Councillor. Justice of the Peace. His son was killed in WW1.

#### **And after: Noble Failure?**

As tension gradually increased in Europe in the 1930's and fascism took grip in Italy and Germany, there were calls by some for rearmament in Great Britain and France. Germany had begun to rearm and left the League of Nations in 1933. When, in 1936, Germany re-occupied the Rhineland which had been demilitarised by the Treaty of Versailles after WW1, calls for rearmament became stronger and anti-war voices gradually became muted. Italy's invasion Abyssinia (1935-36) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), in which the German air-force was involved, probably sounded the effective end of the National League of Nations Union in Lakenheath. Great Britain, gradually at first, then with increasing rapidity, began to prepare for another war. The failure of the International League to prevent rearmament, and thus the second world war, was the major cause of its collapse in 1946.