

The League of Nations. International Peace Movement of the 20's and 30's.

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 not allowed to become a member 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 world peace. League of Nations Unions were founded in other countries also.

In 1934-35 a national questionnaire canvassed this country's views on the 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.

The result was not conclusive: it indicated ambivalent attitudes from those who took part, as expressed above by A J P Taylor. It did however show a strong desire to remain a member of the League.

Political instability and social upheaval throughout Europe fed fears of another conflict. Memories of the losses of WW 1 were very much alive particularly in small villages like Lakenheath which had suffered a noticeable loss of its adult male population.

The Peace Movement in Lakenheath.

There were at least two 'mass meetings' in the Peace (Village) Hall: one in 1927 and the other in 1932.

Summary of the newspaper report of the 1927 Meeting.

Taken from the Bury Free Post, Sat. 19th Nov. 1927

"There was a 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 Ald. Robt. Bilsland and Dr. A J Pickworth. The Chairman hoped the large attendance meant that they would have a large enrolment meeting".

"Ald. Lusher gave a stirring address in furtherance of the aims of the League and the Union. He was delighted to see such a large number of young people present".

".....perhaps the most notable feature of that observance (of recent anniversaries of Armistice Day) was that there was 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".

'MAD RACE FOR ARMAMENTS'.

"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".
"As a younger man it used to be drilled into me that if we wanted peace we must prepare for war. There was never a greater fallacy than that statement".

‘THE WORK OF THE LEAGUE’.

“It had been the means of preventing war, setting damaged countries back on their feetcaring 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”.

“We are told that you cannot change human nature. Then my reply is, ‘You might as well close the churches tomorrow’. But it is not true”.

‘HUMAN NATURE IS CHANGING’

“Every day” (Hear, Hear). Examples were given as: making duelling illegal and the abolition of slavery.

Alderman Lusher 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 League of Nations Union. The posters today 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’.

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

The meeting ended with a further meeting at which the formation of the Lakenheath Branch was discussed.

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

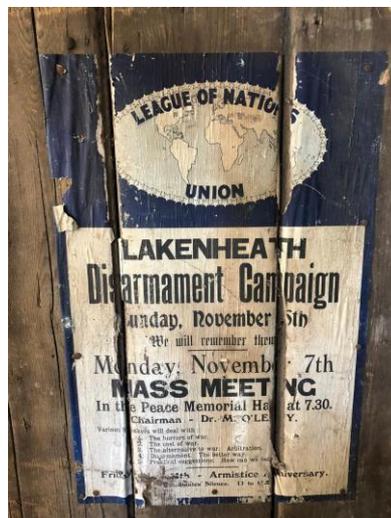
*Rev. Isaac Morris.

The 1932 Meeting.

By this time the Lakenheath Branch appears to have been quite active, with posters advertising the event.

This poster was discovered in the village in 2020

(Pity the year wasn't included on the poster. Its omission caused us a few problems)!



“LAKENHEATH.

“DISARMAMENT CAMPAIGN. - Under the auspices of the local branch of the League of Nations Union, whose energetic secretary is Miss M. E. 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 to-day, 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 12th 1932.

**Note: During research for the Henry Flatt Story we were loaned two original documents by Mr. and Mrs. Mike Chambers. Extracts of both are included in the Henry Flatt Story in this part of the Timeline 5. One shows his hastily scribbled experiences of Ypres and the other is his preparation for a ‘talk about war’ but there is no indication as to where or when this talk was to take place. We know now; the 7th November 1932.

One reason for our major shortening of his memoirs of Ypres is the shear horror which his account so graphically conveys.

He must have made quite an impact on the meeting if his notes are anything to go by.

The Peace Hall was not built until 1922 so the first date is ruled out. 1938 is possible but seems unlikely unless it’s regarded as part of a last attempt to influence future developments. November 1938 was only nine months away from the declaration of war and Great Britain was desperately re-arming in response to Italian aggression and Hitler’s annexation of Austria and there was still considerable opposition to war due to the brutal Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. Importantly the loss of so many village men in WW1 was still very deeply felt in the village.

The clue to the date of the meeting in the poster is probably the name of the Chairman, Dr. M O’Leary who we assume was Dr. Pickworth’s successor.

Dr. Pickworth had retired in 1926 but he continued to live in the village until his death in 1943. We assume that Dr. O’Leary was Dr.Pickworth’s successor because he was certainly a GP here in 1931 and he was represented by a Dr. Chatelier at the opening of the village nurse’s cottage by Sir Charlton Briscoe in 1937.

The 1927 Meeting.

The 1927 meeting, reported in the Bury Free Press, Tuesday, November the 19th, ended with a discussion about appointing an 'official' in the formation of a local branch. But it's not possible to be certain that this is the correct date because Dr. O'Leary is not mentioned in the report of the meeting and the report says that the meeting took place 'on Tuesday evening '. The report of this meeting ended:

“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”.

The Bury Free Press. Saturday 19th November 1927.

Is this when D. O'Leary was chosen? Had he recently become the village GP?

Note: The Vicar did not necessarily chair the actual Peace meeting. The Vicar was the Rev. Issac Morris.

Summary of the meeting of Saturday 7th November 1927. *The Bury Free Press Sat.19th Nov. 1927.*

“There was a 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,(Rev. Isaac Morris presided, supported by Ald. Lusher, *County Ald. Robt. Bilsland and Dr. A J Pickworth. The Chairman hoped the large attendance meant that they would have a large enrolment meeting”.

*The son of Robert and Jenny Bilsland was killed in WW1

“Ald. Lusher gave a stirring address in furtherance of the aims of the League and the Union. He was delighted to see such a large number of young people present. It was to the young people that they must look for the best fulfilment of their aspirations”.

“.....,perhaps the most notable feature of that observance(of the recent anniversary of Armistice Day on 14th. Nov.) was that there was little or nothing was 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, and people were asking one another whether we were striving with all our might to pay the debt we owed to those who laid down their lives in that great struggle by doing all we could to make another war impossible”.

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“We are told that you cannot change human nature. Then my reply is, ‘You might as well close the churches tomorrow’. But it is not true”

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Every day. (Hear, Hear.)” Examples of human nature changing were given as making duelling illegal and the abolition of slavery.

Alderman Lusher concluded:

“Your King and country needs 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 League of Nations Union. The posters today 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 citizens of my Empire’.

That is a Royal command which must be obeyed”. (Applause).

There seems to have been a large turn-out. I wonder how many joined?