

Memories of Marlow

Michael Eagleton and Paul Burden jointly presented a very effective and interesting remembrance of the First World War, using voices and pictures from the past, on the evening of Tuesday 17 February. Their 'Memories of Marlow – the First World War' was extremely well received and the Assembly Room in Marlow was brought to life as almost 70 people streamed through the doors. There was standing room only in the end.

The event which had been organised and promoted jointly by the Marlow Society's Local History Group and Marlow Remembers World War One, was introduced by Martin Blunkell, chairman of the Marlow Society. Martin explained that the evening would be split into two parts, starting with Paul replaying and talking about some of the audio interviews he had held 25 years ago with members of the older generation. Paul had wanted to preserve the experiences of an older generation which would otherwise be lost. Then, Martin explained, Michael Eagleton would present photographs from the war period, finishing with photographs of the Assembly Rooms in a former era.

Paul introduced the audio part of the evening with a recording of a local man, Percival Plumridge, who was born in 1909 and whose earliest memory was leaning from his bedroom window and 'hearing a newspaper boy running down the street shouting 'War declared'.' Paul picked out a number of themes from the war years, and played recordings to illustrate and illuminate the messages. He focused on the well defined class structure of the period, for example and contrasted the voice of Annie Rockell, living in a household of 11, with that of Evelyn Light, whose father was a vicar and who went to garden parties and croquet parties. Then there were the memories of the men going off to war and the soldiers training locally and being billeted in Marlow. Food and fuel were rationed but people living on farms had better access to fresh produce – Dick Kimber was recorded saying his family killed two pigs a year which kept them in 'fat bacon'. Many men, of course, did not return and Evelyn Light remembered that all her boyfriends were killed in the war; she never married as a result. And another woman, Elizabeth Harman recounted the story of asking General Higginson for money so that she could visit her injured husband in hospital. He refused, telling her that she 'ought to save'.

After a short break, Michael Eagleton took the lead, starting by sharing his memory of an indomitable Evelyn Light, who was friends with his mother. He then showed a number of photographs from the war period, talking us through them and bringing the era to life. There were photographs of a training camp at Bovingdon Green from before the war and of soldiers building a bridge across the river. Then there were Territorials congregating in Marlow around John Langley, the Chairman of the Urban District Council, before they left for war. Michael put up various images of the camp at Bovingdon Green, including one of the Butchers shop, where the men were smoking! Michael finished his photographic account of the war years with images of the decorations in the High Street at the declaration of peace and the opening of the war memorial in 1920.

Michael then talked briefly about the history of the Assembly Rooms, illustrating this with some very interesting photographs. The Crown Hotel used to stand on the site – an image from the 1880's being the earliest photograph available. Then there were photographs from the 1930's, including one of a fox hunt assembling in the square. And Michael finished his round up of the history of the building with a photograph of the current Mayor of Marlow, Suzanne Brown, on top of the building, beside the clock tower.

The evening was a resounding success, as, through the power of Paul's reminiscences on the audio tapes and Michael's photographs the audience was taken back in time a century.

