Report on the October meeting of Sandbach History Society

The October meeting of the Sandbach History Society was held at Sandbach Library on Tuesday 6th October. John Higgins, a member of the society, gave an interesting talk entitled "Men and Memorials".

Mr Higgins said that in 2018 he had carried out extensive research into the men listed on the war memorial at St John's Church, Sandbach Heath. He was motivated to do so because his father is listed on the war memorial at St John's Roman Catholic Church in Kidsgrove, and said that every name on a memorial represents a person. His father was killed in December 1944 during a German V-2 rocket attack on the Rex cinema in Antwerp which killed 567 people, including 296 Allied service personnel.

He said that over the last twelve months he had been carrying out further research in order to update details and images on the Imperial War Museum's War Memorials Register which aims to record the details of all war memorials in the country.

Mr Higgins first gave the example of Ernest Cooper, who is named on the war memorial at St John's Church, Sandbach Heath. His family lived in Arclid, and he worked as a county roadman. Ernest Cooper married in 1914 and moved with his wife to Bolton where, in 1915, he enlisted with the Kings Own (Royal Lancaster) Regiment. However, there was a problem: he was only 4 foot 11 inches tall, and army regulations stated that soldiers should be at least 5 foot 3 inches. In order not to lose men like him the Army created 'Bantam' battalions for those under the standard regulation height. These battalions soon developed a reputation for fierce fighting and bravery. The 11th Battalion of the regiment was sent to France in June 1916 and took part in trench warfare. In August 1916, Ernest was killed at the age of thirty.

Mr Higgins said his earlier research had revealed that that a brass memorial had been installed in Arclid Primitive Methodist Church in 1924 in memory of Ernest Cooper, which also listed the other men from Arclid who had fought in the war. When the church became a private dwelling, some years later, the memorial was passed to a Mrs Peake of Sandbach Heath for safe keeping. Despite a number of enquiries, Mr Higgins had not been able to locate this lady until a chance conversation with someone at St John's Church earlier in the year revealed that person to be Mrs Peake's son. Mr Higgins suggested to the Parochial Church Council that it would be appropriate to relocate the memorial to St John's Church, and this was later agreed. It can now be found in the south porch.

Image of the memorial from Arclid Primitive Methodist Church (see above)

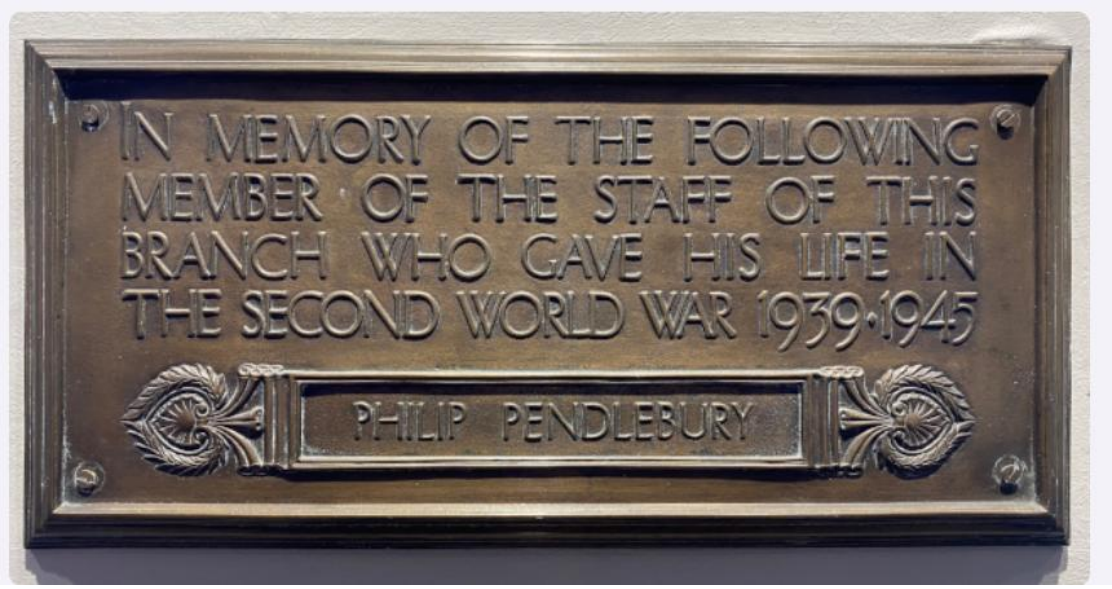
He pointed out that there were no fixed rules as to who should, or should not, be listed on local war memorials. While it is assumed that every person listed was local, Mr Higgins gave examples of men who did not live in Sandbach but were included on a

memorial because their family lived in the area. For instance, Harry Street is listed on the Sandbach Heath memorial; although he never lived in Sandbach, his father did, as did his brother, Fred, who was also killed. Similarly, Quinton Wyatt lived mainly in Gloucestershire, and he is buried in Somerset, but his name is listed on the Sandbach war memorial, presumably because his parents moved to Sandbach.

Mr Higgins has also made enquiries about memorials in buildings that have been closed or redeveloped. He discovered that the Roll of Honour and First World War memorial from the former Sandbach Heath Methodist Church is now at Unity Methodist Church, pending a decision on its future location. He also found that the ornate brass memorial formerly displayed at the NatWest Bank building in Sandbach was relocated to the Crewe branch when Sandbach closed. He said it is displayed there alongside another memorial that came from the recently closed Nantwich branch.

The Sandbach memorial commemorates Philip Pendlebury, and the Nantwich memorial is dedicated to Frank Cooke. Short biographies of both men are given on the website "NatWest Remembers". Because these biographies were quite brief, Mr Higgins decided to research them further and both have subsequently been updated as a result of his work.

Mr Higgins found out that Philip Pendlebury joined the Westminster Bank in Sandbach in 1938. In August 1940, he left to go on war service and became a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. As a trainee pilot, he was tragically killed in April 1941 at the age of twenty, when his aircraft crashed on his first solo night-training flight.



Memorial to Philip Pendlebury in the Crewe branch of the Nat West Bank

(source Nat West Remembers https://www.natwestgroupremembers.com/)

Frank Cooke, who worked at the Nantwich branch, was following in the footsteps of his father, who became manager of the Sandbach branch of the bank. In the summer of 1939, Frank Cooke joined the Territorial Army and was called up for service in France. He was evacuated from Dunkirk and, in March 1941, like Philip Pendlebury, transferred to the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Frank Cooke gained his pilot's wings in October 1941 but died in June 1942 when his plane crashed immediately after take-off. He was twenty-five years old and is buried in Sandbach cemetery.



Memorial to Frank Cooke in the Crewe branch of the Nat West Bank

(source Nat West Remembers https://www.natwestgroupremembers.com/)

Mr Higgins concluded the talk by reminding everyone that it is important to realise that behind every name on a war memorial is a real person. He certainly brought several of them back to life in his talk.

The next meeting of Sandbach History Society will be in Sandbach Library on Tuesday 3rd November at 8pm when Pauline and Stephen Minshull will give a talk entitled "Bygone Sandbach". Visitors are very welcome; please contact Aileen Thompson on 01270 760810 or by e-mail at aileen.thompson@btinternet.com

Richard Vickery

13/10/26